

Johnny Palmer's Shop

An Insider's Memories

by
Chris Palmer



In response to a ‘Memory Lane’ feature in Llangwm Village News (Spring/Summer 2020) which covered Mrs Elma Griffiths’s memories of working in Johnny Palmer’s shop, Chris Palmer (Johnny’s son) has written a lively history of his childhood home, which included the shop. This is his account.

Mrs.Elma Griffiths’s memories made me realise that my father’s shop is largely unknown to the younger generation. May I start by wishing "Aunty Elma" (As I knew her as a young child) a very happy 90th birthday. Her time at Cleddau House continued a long history of employment opportunities for local girls dating back to the beginning of the business. I believe Mrs.Rosie Reynolds (again “Aunty Rosie” to those of us who attended her Church Sunday School) was employed by my grandfather

in the 1920s. I certainly have fond memories of those who followed Elma, either helping with child care or in the Shop, such as Gillian

Davies and her sister Audrey. The unforgettable Merle Brock (Martin Inward’s mother) and Mrs. Lil Saise who worked both in the shop and on van

deliveries. Also Gareth Jones's mum Joyce, who later became a much valued family friend. I feel sure that there must be others who do not come readily to mind.

The Palmers’ retail business in fact began in about 1880 next door in Holloway House. This house was originally called Church End House because the Holloway Hill had not been excavated and the only route from the Burton Parish side of the village to the Green was via the bridleway alongside Guildford bridge and past the old

mill and up Mill Street. My grandfather’s eldest brother William G. Palmer established a retail bakery alongside Holloway House and

his mother ran a small shop from the lower front room. My grandfather, Edwin Palmer, took over the business around 1900. At that time he built a two storey bakery attached



to Holloway House. The upper floor was strengthened for flour storage for his wholesale business and the lower floor contained the coal-fired ovens for bread and cake retail sales to the village. This old bakery has now been beautifully converted by Samantha George and her Dad, Dilwyn George, so that it has the appearance of an original Llangwm cottage.

Cleddau House was built around 1910 for Edwin and his wife Clara Anstee, whose father ran the other main retail business and Post Office in the village from what is

now the Cottage Inn. Cleddau House was in fact built as a purpose built retail shop. Three-quarters of the ground floor consisted of the shop and its office. The bulk of the

living space was on the first floor and the second floor consisted of shop storage and a bedroom for a live-in housekeeper. The balcony at the front was added some ten years later to prevent the sun from fading drapery and other goods through the two large plate glass windows. Customers entered by central double doors to a standing area approximately 9ft x 9ft and



there was a continuous three-sided counter behind which those serving worked. To the left was the confectionery and packaged sweets (later housed in a large glass cabinet to discourage petty pilfering - something that many a young Llangwm boy was not exempt from!) Facing customers was an open counter with a cash register, or till in Elma's time. Alongside that was the weighing scales and to the right the bacon slicer. The right hand counter had a glass cabinet to full ceiling height containing drapery, toys, toiletries

etc. The bulk of these items were sold at Christmas time and many of the locals saved 3 old pence a week for their Christmas Club. This was

formalised in the 1960s with the advent of "Green Shield Stamps". At any rate both systems encouraged local people to put a little aside for their Christmas extras. The three walls of the shop to the rear of the counters had shelves from floor to ceiling. The upper shelves were only accessible from steps - rather like the hardware shop in the "Two Ronnies' Four Candles sketch".

Someone recently said to me, "You could buy anything in your father's shop", and it certainly seemed so.

The bakery closed in 1949 and the core business thereafter, until its closure in 1973, was general grocery from the shop itself and via daily delivery to homes throughout the village, Llangwm Ferry, Port Lion, Sardis and beyond - certainly as far as Puddleduck, Freystrop. It is strange to think that exactly this service is now in much demand during the coronavirus crisis.

With regard to some of the memories from the previous article - mine are of course of the large glass jars of sugared pear drops and the like, weighed up and sold in 3 pence and 6 pence paper bags (about 1 1/4 p and 2 1/2 p in modern money!) The cigarette machine that Graham and Gareth remember was a great advance for my parents in preventing the nightly tap on the door for a "packet of fags". I too remember the red bacon slicer but even more its electric successor! My mother was prone to want to use every bit of bacon and often disregarded the safety guard -



around 1966 this resulted in her slicing through one hand, requiring months of treatment and skin graft surgery. Not such happy memories! I also certainly remember the storm that shattered one of the plate glass windows. It was like a bomb going off and in the middle of a night-time power cut my father and Mr. Eddy Morgan who lived in Holloway House manfully worked to erect a large tarpaulin to protect the shop contents.

Finally I was surprised to learn that the shop was originally built on leasehold land. I wonder if locals who walk down Rectory Road realise that the large "jamb" or gate post to the side of Mary's Cottage, below Cleddau House, marked the place of a toll gate. All the land to the north to the river as far as the old vicarage was Glebe land. Such land was not freely accessible to the people of the village and was not available for sale until the mid 1920s.

My abiding regret is that we have no photographs of the interior of the shop... I wonder if any exist?

Chris Palmer
March 2020

(more over..)

Photographs:

Cover: The original bakery before Cleddau House was built. W.G. Palmer on horse c1900.

Page 2: c1920. Chris's grandfather with his young nephew Jonny Stevens in his delivery cart.

Page 3: John Palmer's house around 1950s- 1960s. Chris's grandmother, on an occasional holiday visit, is standing at the gate. One side of the balcony has been closed to make an office.

Page 4: In the 1930s, The two large shop windows can better be seen in this photograph.

Page 5 (below): Chris Palmer's (other) Great Grandfather's shop, post office and bakery (now the Cottage Inn) photographed around 1900 (A.J. Anstee)

