

WOOD AND SONS GROCERS

“From 1907 till around 1928, Charles A. Wood & Sons delivered all provisions, including freshly-baked bread, by a horse-drawn van, to homes in Benson, Roke, Berrick and Ewelme six days a week. Paraffin oil and vinegar were dispensed directly into customers’ own cans and bottles. Sugar, biscuits, and most dry goods were stored in large containers, and sold by weight, then wrapped in twisted paper cones. Butter and lard was patted on marble slabs, and wrapped in grease-proof paper”.

The canvas-covered, horse-drawn van or vans were kept behind the Castle Inn, as were the horses (two per van). Presumably Woods & Sons didn’t have stabling. It was from Castle Yard in 1922, that the vans and horses had to be rescued from a fire.

Tommy Selwood worked at the Woods & Sons shop for about 4 or 5 years. He started in about 1918, when he was 14, as a general errand boy. His older brother was already working there.

The Woods entertained all the staff to lunch every Sunday. It was in their house that Tommy heard his first wireless broadcast, from a large, wooden-cased edifice, complete with fretwork frontage, which Mr. Wood had recently acquired. The late Enid Brighting worked in the shop for several years, as a cashier.

John Aldridge’s “My Village” suggests that the proprietors of the shop were as follows:

1830 John Baily

1841 James Burgis Sr.

1883 John Burgh

1895 Hannah Burgh

1903 Walter Fuller

1907 Charles A. Wood & Sons

1935 Frank Mattingley

1939 Chamberlain & Son (this was probably the time when the building was divided into shop/house)

Chamberlains carried on until the late 1950s. After that it became an antique shop, trading as “Sarum Antiques”, first under George Newton, and then Mike Hatton. Later it changed to a pine and gift shop called “Bumpkins”, with Julie and Steve?, then reverted to antiques and pine with Dane Clouston, and is now a private house owned by Karen and Sean Savage.

According to the 1911 Census, John George Wood (31), a grocer and an employer, was living in the High Street, Benson-on-Thames, Oxfordshire, with his wife, Frederica Wood (32), his partner, Frank Mattingley (3), a grocer (single), and a visitor, John Edward Valentine Henwood (58), of independent means.

John Wood was born in Croydon, Surrey, Frederica in Glentworth, Lincolnshire, Frank in Stanford-in-the-Vale, and John Henwood in Cornwall. John and Frederica had been married less than a year, and had no children. They occupied nine rooms.

Although the address says "High Street", I assume it means the Castle Square premises. John and Frederica went on to have 3 children - Barbara, Eileen and John Allen Wood.

John Allen Wood was born in 1918, to John and Frederica Wood, of 25 Castle Square, Benson, grocers and part-time bookmakers. He attended Benson School, then Wallingford Grammar School. After leaving school, he worked for a while at the Cowley Works, and then became a chef at Brasenose College, Oxford. He joined the RAF in 1938. His service no. was 901160, and he became a Sgt. tail-gunner with 35 Squadron. He died (missing in action) on 3 March 1942.