

"Along the Front" The Shops at Chaddesden Lane End.

Early in 2022 the sign "Chaddesden Post Office" was revealed when the last occupants of the premises moved out and their signage was removed. This got me thinking about the shops as I remembered them in my youth in the mid-1960s.



The Post Office sign revealed by renovation work February 2022.

I've never understood why the street name plate at the end of Chaddesden Lane, where it meets Nottingham Road has "Chaddesden Lane End" – I remember thinking this was odd when the sign was put there! It is still there on its little stone walled island, but has now been joined by a tree and some mobile phone technology.

"Along the front" was the phrase we all used to describe going to any of the shops on the north-east side Nottingham Road leading towards town; those on the other side of the road (south-west) were known as "over the road". In the 1960s the scene was quite different to today. Along the front there was a footpath by the main road and one directly in front of the shops, but in between was an area of gravel, grit and puddles, overseen by a very large tree. Cars and other vehicles bounced and splashed across this to gain access. Today of course it is surfaced and marked out with parking spaces.



The Front, looking towards town. The rough surface, the large tree, Modes shop, Crawford's Garage and the large house just past Highfield Lane can all be seen.

There were no traffic lights at the junction and no light controlled pedestrian crossing as there is today, just a traditional "zebra crossing" with Belisha Beacons to warn drivers of its presence. In the 1960s no one would have dared to park on the wide pavement "over the road" as they do today, forcing their way out into the stream of traffic when the lights change.

I came to know the shops well, running many errands, working for the newsagent delivering newspapers from age 10 to age 18, serving in the shop on Sunday mornings too. Mother worked part-time in one shop and we had friends living above two of the shops – the shops all had living accommodation above and were good family homes with gardens to the rear. I look today at the grubby windows, blocked by scraps of cardboard or faded paper and think how happy people were to live there then, but why not now?

I have not been able to recall all of the shops, although I did find a number of pictures, especially on a Facebook page "Chaddesden Memories" where I also learned that many other people have fond memories of the shops there and of the people who worked in them.

Beginning at the corner opposite the Park Hotel the first shop was the Co-Op, a large grocery store and a separate butcher's shop, a typical Co-Op layout seen all over the town. One night, returning home late from a school disco I noticed a small van parked in front of this shop, next day we learned that burglars had stolen all the cigarettes. Next were two houses with front gardens stretching down towards the main road, a feature we found most annoying as you had to walk around them to get further "along the front". Next was Boots, the chemist and then the bread shop where my mother worked for a few hours in the afternoon. It was run by Mrs Fowler, assisted mainly by Mrs Page and one of my errands was to fetch their fish and chips from across the road on Saturday lunchtime. All the shops closed for lunch. The bread shop was owned by Mr Nicholson and supplied by Pearts who eventually took it over. I persuaded my mother to ask him why the vans were all registered in Scotland (SW xxxx); his brother ran a garage there and he got a good discount! One of our friends lived above the shop with her mother; one day we let the front bedroom door bang shut and jammed the lock, and the poor woman climbed the ladder to open the window and climb inside to open it – we were not popular.

A little further along was Thrupps, greengrocers and florists, managed by Mr Poole, father of my brother's pal, assisted by Doreen, who appeared to work mainly to finance holidays abroad at a time when very few of us would ever dream of such a thing. The garden at the back of the shop had huge rhododendron bushes which was great for making dens. Mrs Poole made the most delicious potato cakes and could feed four or five "pals" from one large potato!

I lose track rather here as to the order of the shops and must have missed a few out. There was the Meadow Dairy with the wonderful smells of cheese and bacon, to be cut and sliced to order. Here you handed over the list mother had given you, along with your shopping bag and the assistant fetched everything and handed the full bag back to you over the counter. A phalanx of ladies did all of this, including adding up the cost "in their heads" whilst engaging in an animated commentary on every aspect of life "along the front" with other customers and each other!

At about this point was the footpath through to Ravenscroft Drive after which came "the Little Dairy". This shop was "a cut above the others" and we only ventured inside if we could not obtain our needs elsewhere as it was quite expensive.

Towards the end of the row was a ladies dress shop, Modes, presided over (I think) by an immaculately dressed couple, husband and wife we resumed. Most of the men we saw worked at British Celanese or down at the railway sidings and dressed accordingly, but here was a man at work in a pale suit, with a smart white shirt and tasteful tie, highly polished shoes and beautifully cut hair, trim moustache etc, an appearance only attempted by our fathers when attending a wedding!

The very last shop was a sweet shop, with a very high counter, behind which were the rows of glass jars with good quality toffees and other delights, mostly beyond the reach of our pocket money. Our cheap "rot your teeth faster" chews came from the newsagents.

Beyond this, behind a high hedge on the roadside, was Crawford's Garage, run by Jack Crawford, who I recall as very helpful man, who would go out of his way to assist his customers. He was always patient with little boys sent by their fathers and who asked too many questions. We always thought he was a former soldier (or perhaps a p.o.w), but then so were most of the men of his generation.

Finally here was a modern detached property which stood back from the road, with a shop on the ground floor and living accommodation above. This was presided over by the inimitable Mrs Murfin, whose family, probably her sons, ran a haulage and coal delivery business around the back, with some superbly maintained dark green Foden lorries. Mrs Murfin's grocery shop was always open, early in the morning, late into the evenings, on Sundays, Bank Holidays at a time when this was against the law, but such things did not seem to concern her. We boys wondered if she ever slept or ate meals because she was always there, keeping a close eye on you. She did not suffer gladly and expected you to know what you wanted, pay for it and go! There did not seem to be anything she did not stock and she was often the "saviour" of a good housewife who had run out of something and invariably would not admit this to the husband!

Across the crossing (zebra crossing) there were far fewer shops than there are today. Beyond the post box was the Post Office, which prompted this piece of nostalgia. It was presided over by Mr and Mrs Wheatley, who became good friends because I was always in there buying stamps and envelopes and other items of stationery. Mrs Wheatley was a keen supporter of the Cats Protection league and had a display board on the gate to the left of the shop. Cats seemed such tough creatures to me I could never understand why they needed protection – I was more naïve than I'd have been prepared to admit.

To the right was Margetts, greengrocery and fruiter run by the irascible Mr Margett, who was charming to his customers, but had a reputation for being difficult! Finally here was a large butcher's, Greaves, which may have been Ryde's even then, it certainly was later, on the corner of The Crescent.

Going in the other direction from the Post office, next was The Clifton, the fish and chip shop where I queued each Saturday lunchtime for the ladies at the bread shop! You could stretch up, look over the counter, and watch the fish being dipped in batter and gently lowered into the pan, or wait for the superb "whoosh" as batch of wet chips hit the hot fat. Meat pies were heated in a domestic oven in the kitchen at the back of the shop and when these were requested the assistant would go off to fetch one. Everything was wrapped in greaseproof paper, then white newsprint and finally in a layer of old newspaper, for which there was a constant demand in all chippies.

Next door was Whawells newsagents, managed by Mr Newcombe and run in such a way that most people thought he was the proprietor, but they actually ran a similar shop on Wood Road. I started work delivering newspapers for him at age 10 – I was quite tall for age 10 and was so keen to start that he let me, saying "He's tall enough, no one will ask". Each lad had their own round and delivered morning and night, "Monday to Saturday and on Sunday morning. You looked after your customers with great care and when Christmas came you got your reward if you had done a good job all year – the tips from grateful customers far exceeded anything you could earn as a boy.

The shop was always busy; the men at the railways sidings worked shifts and would call for their newspaper and ten cigarettes on their way to or from work. Mr Newcombe used to get quite cross with us if we were messing about or got things badly wrong, but he would never be heard to swear, so he'd always say "You're a flopping idiot, what did you do that for" – we'd laugh inwardly never letting the hint of smile or smirk cross our little faces! On Sundays the papers were all marked up with the house numbers, two of us began work at about 6am and made up all the rounds ready for the other lads; if anyone failed to turn up we would have to do a delivery round as well.

The next property was still a house, but then came the original shop occupied by Lennox, which had been converted from the other half of the semi-detached houses.

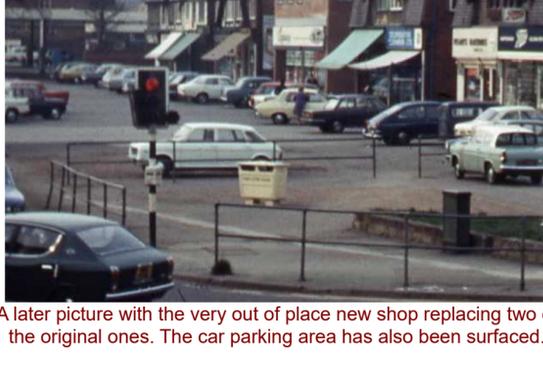
The second Lennox hardware store was next, the building still has the family name, a chiroprapist on the first floor. It was previously a detached house belonging to the Mellors. I used to be sent there with a can to buy paraffin for the stove which sat on the upstairs landing at home and provided the only heat in that part of the house, no central heating then!



Over the Road, looking towards town. Mellors house and yard, the original Lennox shop with house next door can be seen.

Next was Mellors, a timber yard and builders' merchants with premises which stretched back from the road, after that it was bungalows and then houses to Meadow Lane. My father used to send me there for sheets of glass and any other bits and pieces he needed when he was renovating my grandparents' house.

Opposite was the Park Hotel, a typical 1930s public house, much frequented by my grandfather who always stood up in "Out Options" as the beer was cheaper. He'd been a publican and hotelier many years earlier, but was an optician up to the time of his death in 1956. Last, but not least was the Essoldo (formerly The Gloria), the huge cinema which soon became a bingo hall. Cinemas did not hold much attraction for me, but my father did take me to see Cliff Richard in Summer Holiday, which I was keen to see because it featured a London bus!



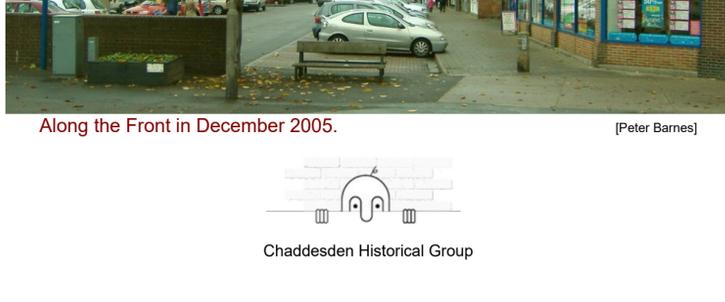
A later picture with the very out of place new shop replacing two of the original ones. The car parking area has also been surfaced.

It is easy to get carried away on a wave of nostalgia for the "good old days," but I'd not choose to go back even if that were possible. Men worked five and a half days each week in chemical and engineering factories or shunting wagons in the railway sidings day and night. Wage packets went directly to "the wife" unopened. If not working "overtime" they watched Derby County at 3pm on Saturday afternoon before adjourning to the pub or the factory social club in the evening. On Sunday there may be more "overtime" to boost the family budget or they dug the garden and cut the lawn. Children went to Sunday School and I've always thought this provided the opportunity for brothers and sisters to be created, whilst we out of the way – we never knew of course and would not have asked. Our mothers often worked part-time and managed households with few if any labour saving devices. Fridges were almost unheard of; you shopped every day for fresh food. Heating was by smoky coal fires leading to the annual ritual of "Spring Cleaning." We were happy because it was the same for everyone we knew, but going back has no attractions sixty years later.

John Bennett who also took the photos

Footnotes.

- (1) All of these are my own memories and the memory plays tricks after so many years so apologies are offered to anyone who is offended.
- (2) Most of the shops mentioned were built in the early 1930s, as shops with living accommodation. They had a "front door" at the side of the property with a staircase to the first floor. Others have been converted from ordinary semi-detached houses.
- (3) One pair of the shops "along the front" was demolished and replaced by the building now occupied by the Co-Op.



Along the front in December 2005.

[Peter Barnes]