

MEMORIES OF SHOPS AND SHOPPING AROUND ST JAMES STREET

In 1870 the Great Eastern Railway opened a station at St James Street. As a result, this end of the High Street developed into a bustling shopping centre where

When I first started working in Walthamstow it was incredibly run down but it had three branches of the Co-op down there at the time. It had Woolworths. It had Sainsburys down there and it had Marks & Spencers."

Steve Brickell former Walthamstow Town Centre Manager born 1948

Woolworths, Sainsburys and Marks & Spencers chose to open branches. But by the 1980s the tide had turned, and the major stores and local customers abandoned the St James Street area. But some impressive Victorian buildings and architectural features still remain,

Now through a year-long Townscape Heritage regeneration project Waltham Forest Council, supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund, has given the St James Street Conservation Area the opportunity to become a destination for shoppers and visitors once again.

"The James Street end, when Marks & Spencers and Woolworths were there, that would be the busy end, it would be the lively end, it would be where most of the stalls were. The top end of the market used to be pretty dead, so it used to be as you would walk up the market you would come across less and less people as you went to the top. That all changed significantly when Selborne Walk was built."

Jane Twinn

By the end of 2017 £2.9 million will have been spent on shop fronts, historic building restoration and environmental improvements.

For this associated exhibition Waltham Forest Oral History Workshop has recorded interviews with more than 30 shoppers, shopkeepers and stallholders. They can be heard here alongside other voices from our archive, some of them dating back to the First World War. We have also explored archive sources in Vestry House Museum and selected images from its extensive collection of historic photographs, to demonstrate how local shops and the local population have changed over more than a hundred years.

Map of local area showing dates of opening of shops block by block

Clock House 1813

1-17, 1890
High Street

1-23, 1887
St James Street

2-10, 1895
St James Street

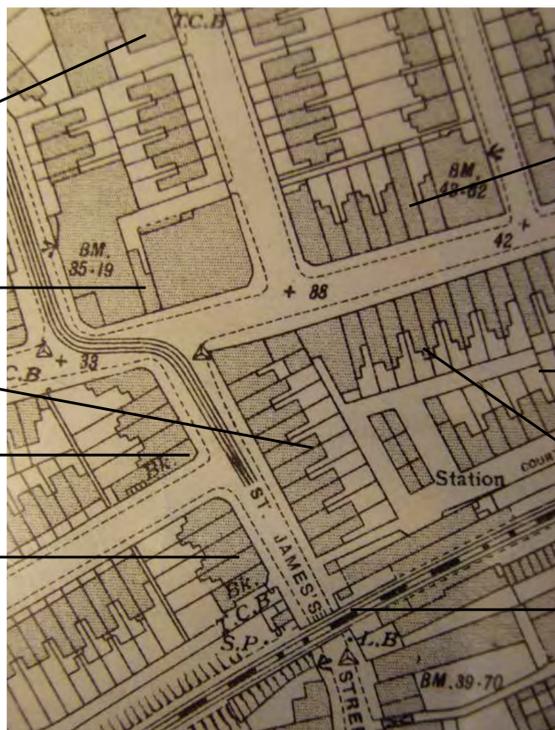
12-22, 1895
St James Street

1890, 19-37

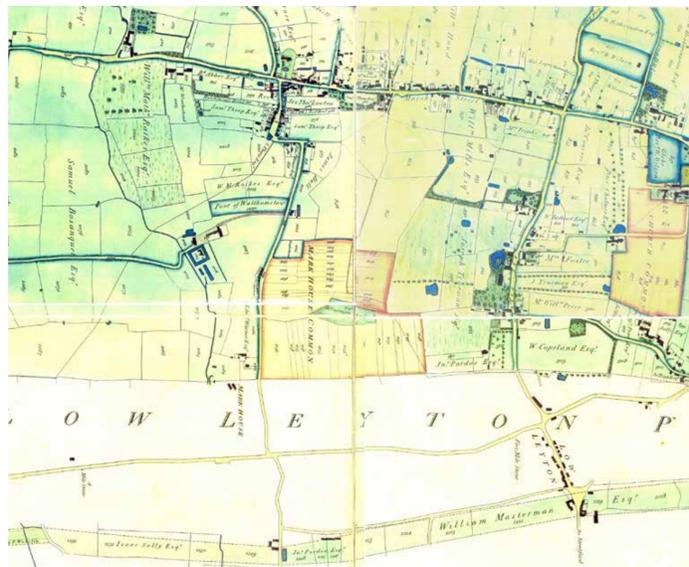
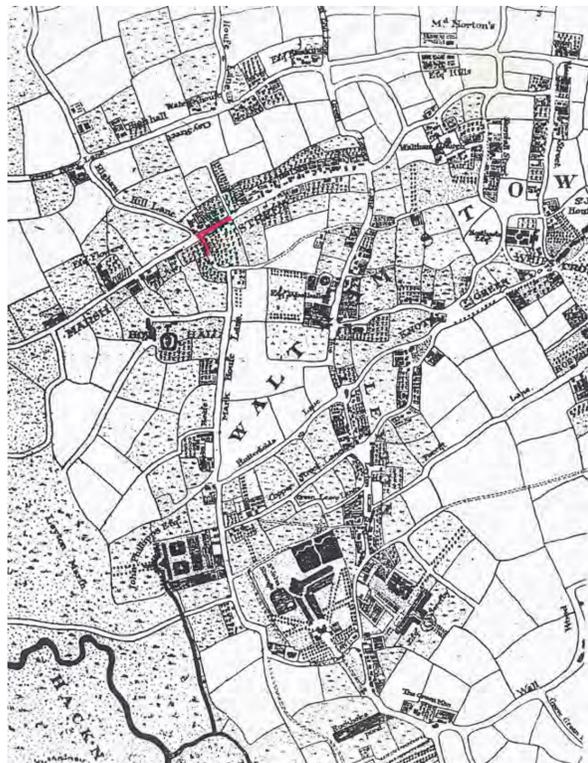
1896, 24-32
Courtenay Terrace

1890, 2-22
High Street

1870 Station
St James Street



THE LOCAL AREA FROM THE EIGHTEENTH TO TWENTIETH CENTURIES



John Coe's Map of Walthamstow 1820

The woods have vanished and there has been a some development of smaller terraced houses in what is now St James Street The street is wider than in the Roque map. This appears to be caused by a small pond on the southern corner. Marsh Street still has the mansions with substantial rear gardens.

Part of John Roques Survey of London 1741-45

These maps clearly show the change from a semi-rural environment to that of a heavily built up suburb of London. In the earliest map there is extensive woodland (possibly orchards) on either side of the road which was to become St James Street The four distinctive 'dog legs' in the road of today are defined by field boundaries. It is crossed at its northern end by Marsh Street which is bordered by mainly eighteenth century mansions on the north side with a few on the opposite side.



Ordnance Survey Map of 1913

The railway has reached Walthamstow and has stimulated the growth of the town. The street patterns are almost complete. A tramline from St Andrews Road in Higham Hill to Lea Bridge Road opened in 1905. Marsh Street had become High Street in 1882 to reflect its new status as the premier shopping street. Most of the large houses have been demolished to be replaced by shops. Because of its excellent travel links local landowner, Courtenay Warner, built attractive three and four storey terraces of shops in St James Street and High Street.

Population of Walthamstow			
1861	7,137	1911	124,580
1871	11,092	1931	132,972
1881	22,531	1951	121,135
1891	47,154	1971	101,914
1901	96,720	2011	109,424



Ordnance Survey Map of 1865

St James Street is now on the map as a result of the adjacent church built in 1842. The wedge shape of the road is still there although the pond has disappeared to be replaced by a grassed area. The Essex Brewery, opened in 1859, was established on the corner of St James Street, South Grove (which now has a row of terraced houses on its north side) and Markhouse Road.

Advertisement (Right) from Berrett's Walthamstow Directory of 1877. This is for Cawthron, one of a number of food shops in St James Street

To be Sold by Auction by FRANCIS PEETE, On Monday next, at Four in the Afternoon, at the Chequers in Marsh Street, Walthamstow, Essex.
A Freehold Estate, situate near the Coach and Horses in Marsh Street aforesaid, known by the Name of Biggs's Land; consisting of three Dwelling Houses, with a Garden to each, a large new Brick Barn, and three Caisseries, a new Brick Stable for eight Horses, and a Haystack over it, a Hayhouse, a Chaffhouse, and a large Dutch Barn, an inclosed Field of near four Acres and an half of as good Land as any in England, and wherein is excellent Brick Earth and Tile Clay, together with near three Acres of Marsh Land, all well tenanted, &c.
 Farther Particulars may be had of Mr. Peete, at Mile End; and at the Place of Sale.

A 1765 newspaper property advertisement with very similar language to today's estate agents! It shows the still rural nature of the area and gives a hint of where all the bricks will come from to build houses in the next century.

LBWF Vestry House Museum



A View Looking North up St James Street

This rural scene was possibly taken in the 1860s but could be later. It shows an already established settlement. There is a shop within the left hand terrace. There are at least 17 shops and businesses listed in St James Street in 1877. The building opposite is the Coach and Horses (minus its bracket pub sign). All these houses, except the pub, will be demolished by the early twentieth century.

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Advertisements, 1877.

The Oldest Establishment in Walthamstow.

ROBERT CAWTHRON,
Family Grocer & Provision Merchant
 POST OFFICE,
ST. JAMES' ST., WALTHAMSTOW.

FINEST NEW SEASON TEAS.
 Crosse & Blackwell's Jams, Jellies, Marmalade, Pickles, Sauces, Potted Meats, Essences, Currie and Mulligatawny Paste, &c.
KEEN'S GENUINE MUSTARD.
 HUNTLEY AND PALMER'S, AND PEEK, FREAN AND CO.'S BISCUITS AND CAKES.
 FIELD'S SELF-FITTING CANDLES (ALL KINDS.)
 Best Store Dips. Patent & Wax Carriage Candles Tapers, Lighting Wicks, &c.
 HOUSEHOLD SOAPS OF THE BEST MANUFACTURE.
 TOILET SOAP, UNITED SERVICE, HONEY, BROWN WINDSOR, GLYCERINE, ELDER FLOWER, CURD (IN BAR & TABLETS).
Finest Refined Colza Oil. Finest Crystal Oil.
 BRUSHES, BROOMS, AND MATS OF EVERY DESCRIPTION.
 AUSTRALIAN PRESERVED MEATS.
 PARMESAN, CHEDDAR, DERBY, DOUBLE GLOUCESTER, & AMERICAN CHEESE.
Mild-Cured Breakfast Bacon;
 (A Speciality to which great attention is given).
YORK AND WESTPHALIA HAMS.
 BATH CHAPS, RUSSIAN OX TONGUES, HAM, TONGUE, AND CHICKEN SAUSAGES.
FRESH DORSET AND NORMANDY BUTTER.
 FOREIGN AND BRITISH WINES.
 Sole Agent in the Neighbourhood for the Celebrated "Belgravian" Rolled Ox Tongues and Collard Head.
PORK SAUSAGES FRESH EVERY DAY.

THE COMING OF THE RAILWAY

In the 1860s Walthamstow started to expand. This led to proposals to build a line that would run from Bishopsgate in the City to Chingford. The line was completed in stages and a station opened at St James Street in 1870. The new railway stimulated a massive growth in population from 11,092 in 1871 to 96,720 in 1901. Encouraged by cheap fares many people travelled by train to work and overcrowding became a serious problem especially at St James Street with its surrounding cheap

housing. It had booking offices at either end of the platforms. Carriages designed for 12 occupants often had as many as 30 people crammed in.

In 1920 the Jazz Service was introduced by the Great Eastern Railway to some of its London suburban lines. Trains ran every five minutes. This gave some relief to the overcrowding. But by the 1930s travel patterns changed and the overcrowding subsided. The line was electrified in 1960.



St James Street Station at street level from the south in 1969.
© LB Waltham Forest, Vestry House Museum



St James Street Station in the 1970s. Since then the tobacconist's hut has been demolished and the Station Café has become a florist shop. © LB Waltham Forest, Vestry House Museum

Externally the ground floor station building largely remains the same as when built in 1898 although the second booking office has been removed and the lamp rooms on the

platforms demolished. A small shop has been removed near the north entrance. At platform level the awnings have been removed and new and not very attractive waiting shelters created.



St James Street station staff in 1914

"It used to have 'To London' on the wall, and that was there for years. I remember my sister saying, "What do they mean 'To London'? We live in London!"

Oh it's totally different, the steam trains. The individual carriages and everything. And they had a guard's van, and a ladies' carriage.

They were dirty. I can remember the smell. Always getting bits in your eye."

Members, Coppermill Recycled Teenagers

"Those trains were phenomenal. Each N7 (locomotive) used to carry ten carriages behind it. They was compartment stock so you have six seats that side, six seats this side. Then you would have about a dozen people standing in the middle hanging on to the luggage racks or sitting in the luggage racks sometimes. It would get into Liverpool Street. The doors would open and everybody would fall out."

Les Diggins born 1946



St James Street Station about 1974 from the London bound platform. The decorative awnings are in the process of being taken down.
© Walthamstow Historical Society

COURTENAY WARNER - GRIFFINS AND 'W'S



A photo portrait of Thomas Courtenay Warner

In 1891 Warner formed his own building company which was responsible for a number of large housing estates within Walthamstow and Leyton. The classic design of housing was ground floor and first floor maisonettes. Rents were cheap although tenants had to be of good standing and in employment.

Most of the shops in both St James Street and the very lower part of the High Street were built by Thomas Courtenay Theydon Warner (1857-1934). He was also responsible for the adjacent residential Clock House Estate with its distinctive green and cream colour scheme. He lived for a time in the Clock House in Pretoria Avenue. Warner was active in politics. He was Member of Parliament for North Somerset from 1892 to 1895 then for Lichfield from 1896 to 1923. He was also the first mayor of the Borough of Walthamstow after its incorporation in 1929.



Clock House about 1818. The Clock House was the Warner family home. The use of expensive cream coloured Suffolk brick made the building stand out. © LBWF Vestry House Museum



A comparative photo from 2015. Robert Wilkinson



F Day and EG Day working in the Co-op bakery within the Clock House at Easter 1914. They later went on to form their own bakery business in Walthamstow. © LBWF Vestry House Museum



A 2017 photo of a High Street top window with a moulding containing a W crest. Robert Wilkinson

The shops were built to a very high standard with a number of decorative features including a large 'W' and stone griffins, mythical beasts with the body, tail and back legs of a lion, and the head and wings of an eagle. The shops were three and four storeys high which allowed a reasonable amount of space for resident shop keepers.

The people who started to rent the shops from 1886 onwards came from all over the country and beyond. Many lived above the shop and some in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries employed live in maids.

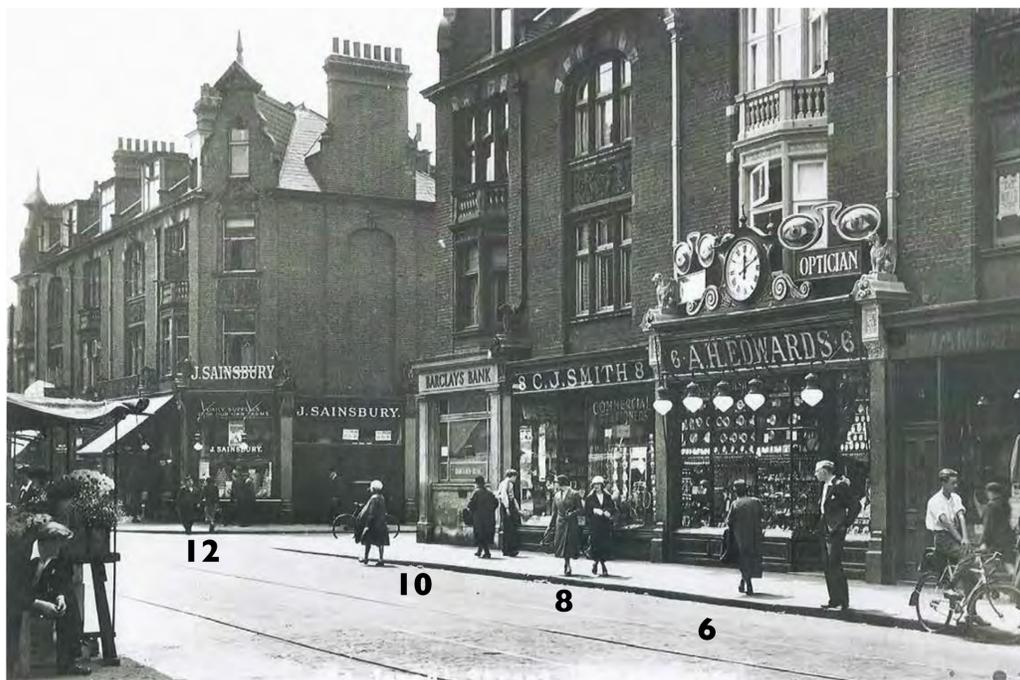


A line of High Street Griffins. Robert Wilkinson

THE HISTORIES BEHIND A PHOTOGRAPH

ST JAMES STREET 19TH JULY 1938

It is ten past twelve on a sunny day and we can see the end of a flower stall. So there are still stalls in St James Street. No vehicles on the road, not even a tram which is not surprising for the trams were replaced by trolleybuses in the previous year. The rails are still set in the road. For the drivers this was a retrograde step as the trams were guided by the rails but the trolleybuses with no power steering had to be driven by a steering wheel giving a lot of strain around the 'dogs leg' turnings in St James Street.



No 10 Barclays Bank Perhaps the person with the bike outside Barclays is withdrawing cash over the counter, the only way to do so in the 1930s. The Bank replaced two others at 13 St James Street and 7 High Street both taken over by Barclays in 1914. Before Barclays it had been an outfitter shop as well as a Post and Telegraph Office. In 2017 it was a food store.



No 10 St James Street Barclays Bank 1956



No 12-14 St James Street Costa Coffee. Robert Wilkinson

No 12 Sainsburys in those days were described as provision merchants. Their branches were small but fairly close together – there were four branches locally. By this time they probably stored perishable foods in the cellar with blocks of ice to cool but not to freeze the food. Refrigeration was introduced into their stores in the 1940s. The sign above the corner window states 'DAILY SUPPLIES FROM OUR OWN FARMS' so still the need to have regular supplies of fresh food. Service was personal with assistants fetching or cutting and wrapping the food to order.

The shop had always been a food store. In 1901 it was a cheesemongers with three young male staff and a 50 year old housekeeper. Sainsburys acquired the shop in 1903 and in 1911 the manager and family lived in the flat above. By 1965 it had become a television rental shop then among other uses, a flooring contractor, a second hand shop and in 2017 a

“Half the shop [No 8 St James Street] was sort of taken over with toys and games and a few books. And the other half was fishing equipment, nets and keep nets and rods and that sort of thing. So it was a dual interest for me... I was never really into spending the whole day at the reservoirs in the pouring rain. (But) yes I used to like fishing...”

To get home we used to have to walk past the toy shop. So it was always an event to spend a few minutes looking in the window, hoping what I'd get for my birthday. The cheaper toys it was always Woolworths, anything for a shilling I think in those days.” Gary Heales born 1953



No 8 St James Street EastEnders Second Hand Shop 2014. Robert Wilkinson

No 8 C J Smith In 1938 it was a commercial stationery shop. However it also sold fishing tackle. In the 1950s it had one window for fishing tackle and the other window for toys. It had started in 1895 as a doctor's surgery but by 1901 had been taken over by Charles Smith, then aged 60, as a piano shop until 1920 when it sold stationery. It was C J Smith until 1980 when it became a typewriter ribbon agent and in 2017 is a second hand shop.



No 6 St James Street Scrivens Opticians – note the changed face and location of the clock

No 6 A H Edwards In 1938 this shop clearly displays its wares as an opticians. Many people remember the massive pince-nez glasses as well as the large clock. Alvan Edwards who, like a number of people mentioned, came from Devon. In 1891 he was listed as a watchmaker and had a shop in the High Street. He is listed in 1895 as a jeweller but by 1914 as an optician. Notice that the clock has Roman numerals in 1939. In 2017 there is a replacement clock face and the clock itself has moved slightly. However there is over 100 years of testing eyes in this shop.

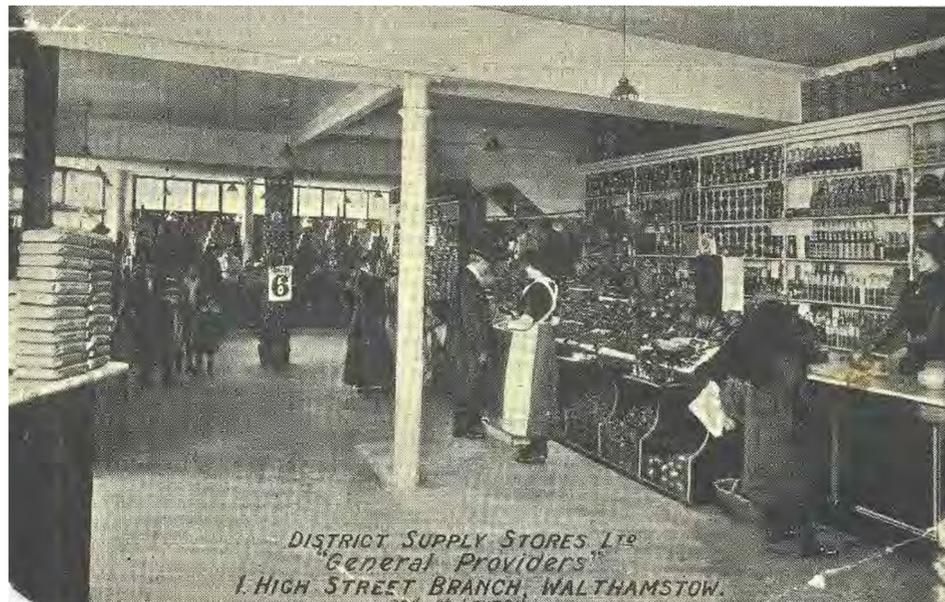


No 10 St James Street Moonlight Food Store 2014 Robert Wilkinson

1-5 HIGH STREET “WOOLIES”



District Supply Stores Ltd exterior around 1910. © LBWF Vestry House Museum



District Supply Stores Ltd interior around 1910. © LBWF Vestry House Museum

First recorded in 1890, the initial tenant of two of the end three bayed shops was Fish Brothers who were listed as furniture dealers and pawnbrokers. Between 1901 and 1908 Boyds, who made pianos in nearby Haringgay, were in occupation of No 1. Number 5 was occupied by 'oil and colour men' until around 1908. The District Supply Stores then took over Nos 1-5. This shop was part of Warner Estates, opened in order to serve their

"I remember going in there [Woolworths] with the twins in their pram, and in those days they had low counters all the way round, and I pushed the pram round and stopped here and there looking on the counters, and I didn't realise that they were nicking things. They were just babies, putting their arms out and picking things up, like a toothbrush."

Betty Millard

tenants on the Clock House Estate and was one of a number of branches in Walthamstow and Leyton near to other Warner estates. This venture does not seem to have lasted long as in 1916 Woolworths took over part of the terrace. It advertised itself as the '3d and 6d Stores' - all goods at these prices.



F.W. Woolworth shop 3-5 High Street undated probably in 1910s © LBWF Vestry House Museum



F.W. Woolworths in 1964 with its 1930s façade. The adjacent LCS sign stands for London Co-operative Society. © LBWF Vestry House Museum



Site of Woolworths in 2017. Now a car park and hard to imagine there was ever a Woolworths here. However look on the right hand side of the wall of the present International Stores... Robert Wilkinson



In the late 1920s Woolworths expanded rapidly claiming to open a new shop every 17 days. The existing Walthamstow store was not forgotten, expanding twice in the 1930s and having a makeover of the frontage in art deco style. In 1974 the store relocated further up the High Street to larger premises. This reflected in part that the St James Street end of the High Street had lost its importance and

An Ordnance Survey map (Left) of the 1920s showing the Woolworths store expanded to the rear (in green outline). It appears that No 1 is still a self-contained shop. Note also that

the action was further up nearer to Hoe Street. The site became a car park upon demolition of the building in 1975. The Woolworths brand lost its way towards the end of the twentieth century and the company ceased trading in January 2009 with 27,000 job losses nationally.

Lidstones (in blue outline) has also expanded at the back of its shop. The small building between them is a bank later incorporated into its neighbour on the right of the map.

LIDSTONES DRAPERS & MILLINERS



A drawing of Lidstones in 1906 The St James Review

Numbers 9 to 17 High Street saw a variety of uses early on. In 1899 J Lidstone & Co started to acquire a number of shops at the lower end of the High Street starting with numbers 2 and 4 on the south and then more on the north side of the street including 9 to 17. The owner, James Lidstone, born in 1869 and one of 11 children, came from Devon and set up in Walthamstow, buying the business from Thomas Brailey who came from the same Devon village. In the 1901 Census James Lidstone is living above the shop along with five of his assistants.

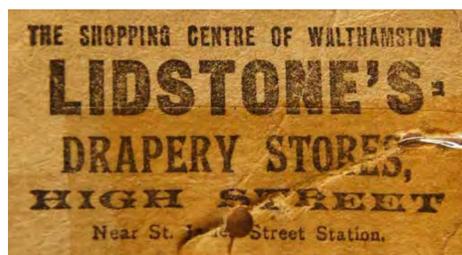
2 and 4 High Street were sold to Montagu Burton in the 1930s who rebuilt them in their own house style. In 1946 James Lidstone sold his remaining shops to the London Co-operative Society. He died in 1948. Many people remember the overhead pulley system used to pay for goods. This survived under the new ownership of the Co-op's furnishing department until it became a supermarket in 1963. The building in 2017 was occupied by the International Supermarket, a Turkish run equivalent.



Undated photo of female staff in the yard behind Lidstones. © LBWF Vestry House Museum



Undated photo of delivery drivers and van © LBWF Vestry House Museum



Undated team ticket with an advert for Lidstones on the rear. Derek Lidstone. Robert Wilkinson



“He (my grandfather) started a drapery shop in a busy Walthamstow High Street owned by Mr Brailey when it came up for sale. So he bought it. Over the next ten years or so he acquired nine more shops ending up owning numbers 2,4,6,7, 9,11,13,17 and 19 High Street, providing nearly 300 feet of High St footage. He installed impressive glass windows and an arcade, making Lidstones the grandest store in the area, on a par with the likes of some of the drapery stores in Oxford St. By now the store traded in a very wide range of merchandise including drapery, millinery, ladies’ and children’s clothes, hosiery, corsets, gloves haberdashery, jackets, as well as bedsteads, bedding, curtains, carpets and linos and other floor coverings.

To look after all of this my grandfather now had a staff of nearly 60. He devised a credit system which allowed customers to put down a deposit and pay off on a monthly basis. This was very innovative at the time He also was a pioneer in shortening working hours for staff. But the main reason for his success was that he always selected the latest merchandise very carefully at the keenest prices.” Derek Lidstone



Undated photo of delivery drivers and van possibly a few years on. © LBWF Vestry House Museum



A 1963 photo of the Co-op supermarket in the former Lidstones building. © LBWF Vestry House Museum



The corner frontage of 17 High Street – the windows have been bricked up but there will be a neon sculpture to be erected in 2017. Robert Wilkinson

FROM PENNY BAZAAR TO MARKS AND SPENCER



A view of the shop front of the London Penny Bazaar. The design of the frontage is very similar to the M & S Penny Bazaars.

© LBWF Vestry House Museum

“One of the favourite shops was the old Marks & Spencers. Because it was thought of as being ever so slightly upmarket, when I was a child it was a bit of a treat to go in there and actually buy anything. It was like the posh shop, compared to Woolworths and Sainsburys and everywhere else”.

Jane Twinn



The same view in 2014 since then it has become a 'Well' branded chemist. Robert Wilkinson

Mention has been made of famous chain shops and stores opening up in the west end of the High Street. Woolworths is a good example expanding to a much deeper three bay store. Some famous stores started much more modestly however. Marks and Spencers are known today for their large stores. However they started much more modestly. Michael Marks started a 'Penny Bazaar' in Leeds in 1884. Everything cost a penny. Thomas Spencer, a cashier, went



A view of the whole building date unknown

© LBWF Vestry House Museum

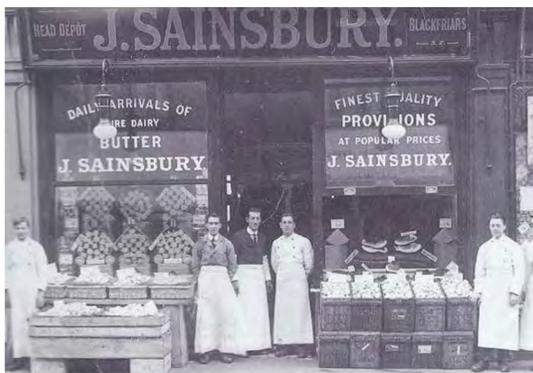
into partnership and they opened the first Marks and Spencers shop in 1904.

The branding was an immediate success and they had many imitators including in Walthamstow a branch of the London Penny Bazaar at 19 High Street. One way to deal with competitors is to buy them and that is what M&S did in 1914. By the 1930s M&S started to sell clothes at a maximum price of five shillings (25p). The shop moved to 43-49 High Street in 1931. No 19 High Street is now a chemists.

SAINSBURYS



A street view of St James Street looking south around 1914. Sainsburys traded from the prominent corner shop from 1903 to between 1962-5. © LBWF Vestry House Museum



Undated photo of 18 High Street. Sainsburys occupied these premises from 1903 to between 1962-5.

© LBWF Vestry House Museum



Windmill Restaurant 18 High Street in 2014. There have been two hot food shops here since its closure.

Robert Wilkinson

This chain of food shops was founded in 1869 by John and his wife Mary Ann Sainsbury. From the start they tried to distance themselves from their competitors by only having fresh and unadulterated food. In the days before refrigeration this presented a challenge. Their window signs included the slogan Milk Delivered Three times Daily. Along with fresh food there was an emphasis on hygiene in their shops.

By the turn of the twentieth century Sainsburys expanded their network of shops through buying up local grocers. This might mean not just one shop but a number to serve very local areas. There was also competition with other food shops like Home and Colonial, Cullens and indeed corner shops. Therefore it was important to have more than one shop in a large busy high street. This is in fact what happened in this part of Walthamstow Sainsburys had shops in Hoe Street, a double fronted shop at 42-44 High Street, nearby at 18 High Street and just round the corner at 12 St James Street.

In Sainsburys and other food shops service was at the counter rather than passing through a checkout. As there was no refrigeration either at home or in the shop customers would make an almost daily trip to buy fresh food.

FAMILY BUSINESSES



Butchers Mary Anne Eaton.

This image shows a relic of the earlier settlement, a 16th or 17th century house which has been extended to include a shop at the front. It survived long enough to be numbered 25 St James Street.

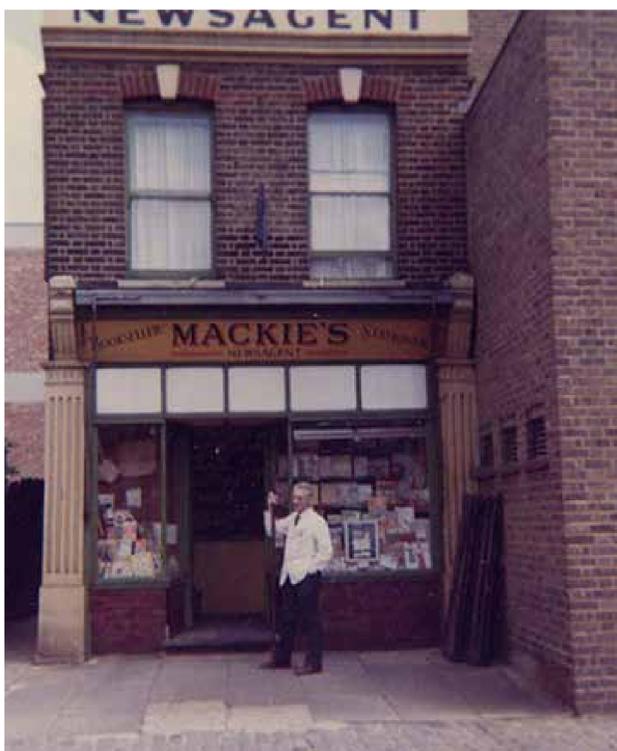
We have explored the history of some of the chain shops in previous panels. Family run businesses did and possibly still do form the majority of traders locally. Most of the shops in the St James Street area opened between the late 1880s and early 1890s. At this time there were no chain shops or department stores. Very few

people who started businesses came from the local area. Indeed the earlier traders in St James Street and High Street seem to have disappeared when the new shops were built. As the population of Waltham Forest has grown more diverse so have the shopkeepers and stallholders.

In 1901 Mary Anne Eaton is shown as a widow. Also living with her were her son a butcher, another butcher who boarded with them and a housemaid. The business survived the death of her husband and she is on the shop sign as the proprietor. © LBWF Vestry House Museum

Below: Flower Shop Arjun Singh, Simran Flowers at St James Street Station

"This flower shop is owned by my sister and we've been running it for about five years. Recently we have been having an issue with Tesco's opening up and offering a large amount of flowers. But we have customers who are loyal to us. And we are very close with our customers and our community. Everyone knows us now. We've constantly tried to work with what we have, like we are known for having roses, specially this blue type of rose - nowhere else in the whole of Walthamstow does it. It's only through trial and error through so many years that we know people are looking for certain things." Photo Megan Cupid



Left: Newsagent Shop, Ernie Mackie, Courtenay Place

"My maternal grandfather was a newsagent who had a newsagent's in Billet Road. My grandfather also had a shop which was just off the High Street in Courtenay Place. Newspapers and sweets and cigarettes was what he sold, and I think they did sell knitting patterns. And he also ran his own private library. I think they paid a little bit of money and then they could borrow books and bring them back.



Above centre: Krantas Lithuanian Restaurant Giedre Biliotaviciute

"I came from Lithuania. This area was first area when I came to London - it was 2004. We worked very hard when we came, it was very difficult time, and opened this coffee shop after three years. Sometimes people like to try something new and they come in to try our food, and lot of people have been coming seven years, English people. A lot of people from East Europe come, but most people are from Lithuania because they feel like at home. We have very nice desserts. Nice cake. Sometimes people come in [and say], "I drive two hours and three hours for this cake". Photo Megan Cupid



Left: Trust Shoes, Shop and Stall

Sabbir Baiyat was born in India and came to the UK in 1976. In 1990 he settled in Walthamstow. His first job was on a market stall opposite the now closed Marks and Spencer store. He set up his own stall selling shoes and opened the shop in 1995. "The stall I never finish, still I am carrying on. Now, after I got a shop, still I keep the stall in front of my shop. So I never give up the stall. The stall is main. Because of the stall I can get more customers." Photo Megan Cupid

MARKET STALLS



Coloured photograph of St James Street around 1905. The photograph was probably taken soon after the tramway opened and Tram No 1 is on its way to Higham Hill possibly posed for the camera. The stalls are a mixture of trestle tables and a costermonger's barrow. © LBWF Vestry House Museum

As with the shops, market stalls started trading in St James Street and worked their way up the High Street especially as St James Street got more and more crowded with motor traffic to a dangerous extent for stallholders. In the early days the market was almost as much a place of entertainment as a place to buy cheap goods. Traders like the Sarsaparilla Man and the Cough Drop Man were great performers. Stalls stayed open much later than now and at night were lit by naphtha flares.

“My husband’s brother had the one (a stall) in High Street. We had the one in James Street. But we had to move from there because it was dangerous. So we moved round into the High Street and that’s where we stayed.”

Maisie Strutt born 1911 Interviewed 1987



Stalls in the High Street looking east from St James Street in 1939. These stalls would have been put out very early in the morning and removed at night to Courtenay Place. Note also the art deco Burtons store behind with billiard hall above. © LBWF Vestry House Museum



Maisie and Tommy Strutt at their sweet stall in the High Street. The sweets were made at 39 Markhouse Road and transported to the High Street on a barrow. © LBWF Vestry House Museum

“Alf Price was my mum’s cousin’s husband. When he came out of the Army he got himself a fruit and vegetable stall right on the corner, first stall as you went into the street from Blackhorse Road. He was there for many years. He had an unfortunate incident where a lorry going round a tight corner, brakes failed or something. But the lorry ploughed right into the stall and put my uncle into hospital for about six weeks. Really shook him up.”

Gary Heales born 1953

“(My Dad) was the most well-known stallholder in the whole of Walthamstow. The haberdasher. The Zip Man, they called him. Zips and buttons and lace, marcasite buttons, and he had famous film stars come down there, for the films. They wanted to put the buttons on for the studios.”

Brian B



Alf Price at his stall, the first in the High Street, outside the former Co-op supermarket. © LBWF Vestry House Museum



A pre decimalisation fruit stall in the High Street around 1970. © LBWF Vestry House Museum

Until 1932 stalls and pitches were largely unregulated except for an 1890 regulation to prevent fights between stallholders looking for the best pitches. One of our interviewees, Mr Levine, who was born about 1910, remembers “At that time in 1926 you had to stand at a street corner when a policeman blew a whistle and people rushed to get a pitch”. With the introduction of a licensing system, not only was there a calmer start to the day but money was available to help pay for clearing up the market at the end of the day.

Today the stalls have long gone from St James Street but the change in orientation of the High Street to Selborne Walk regularly means empty pitches at the lower end.

THANK YOU

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Funders



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Interviewees

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*Mission Grove School
Year 5s in 2016/17*



*Coppermil Recycled
Teenagers*

Farida My name is Farida and today we are interviewing students from Mission Grove in Year 5 about what they mostly like in Walthamstow. Ryan, what do you like about Walthamstow?

Ryan I like supermarkets because they have lots of new things instead of old things and they have lots of interesting stuff.

Farida Olivia what have you seen changed in the past few years?

Olivia I've seen the market change quite a lot because you've got new restaurants at the end and we've also got a cinema. And I've heard Walthamstow has got more eco-friendly. And it seems we might have more birds and more cycle paths.

Does anyone remember the offal shop?

Liver, sheep's brains. I remember when I had my twins at home my Mum coming to me bringing these brains, all cooked. And the nurse came in and said, "Oh good I'm glad you're having a dinner. What are you having?" And when I told her she went [retching sound] and ran out the door. They looked like roe. You used to put parsley with them, and onions.

Did your families use the pawnbrokers?

The only pawnbrokers I know is Fish Brothers down the High Street.

Dad's suit was always in the pawnshop during the week. Went in Monday morning so that we could pay the rent, and it had to come out by Friday or Saturday morning so that he could go out to the pub.