

Gregory's General Store

This shop began life as a pair of houses built in 1883 in Lawrence Lane, Old Hill, about five miles from here. The houses were built by Charles Gregory who was an ironworker. Eventually the family moved into one house where Mrs. Gregory began to run a shop from the front room. As trade expanded the building was converted to a double fronted shop.

The shop sold 'a bit of everything' as it was a General Store so it was a bakery, pub, dairy, tea merchant, hardware store, tobacconist, sweetshop, chemist and finally haberdasher!

It sold meat and dairy products from the counter at the right-hand end, groceries and greengrocery from the centre counter and an unlikely combination of sweets and drapery from the other end.

There was a big trade in home brewing supplies as many people in the area brewed their own beer. However, people could also buy beer for tuppence halfpenny a pint (about 1p in today's money) from the stone jars shown below.

At Christmas a few toys were stocked but usually these and all but the most mundane articles of made-up clothing and footwear were ordered from 'the catalogue' and collected from the wholesaler's warehouse once a week by Mrs. Gregory.

Nearly everything needed by the community in and around Lawrence Lane was stocked at the shop, although in those days the needs of the working people were fairly basic.

In an age when television, washing machines and a well-stocked refrigerator are usually taken for granted, it is easy to forget that around the turn of the century many shops would sell a single egg, half a loaf, or an ounce of tea to customers who did not have enough ready cash to stock up beyond the next meal.

Packets of cigarettes are shown but many people would buy 2 cigarettes and a match for 1d. That's how children and teenagers started smoking! At the time, shopkeepers and even doctors knew little about the terrible effects of cigarettes.

Sugar was sold in blue paper bags to make the sugar look whiter.

The haberdashers 'cabinet' with needles, lace, thread was actually an old cigar cabinet made by Henry Winterman. It is polished and shows off the goods well to customers.

You can still buy some of the products sold in Gregory's, like Camp Coffee. Compare the 1920s label with the 2009 version.

The shop remained in the Gregory family until 1936.