

The Hardware Shop

The original building was situated at 34 Pipers Row in Wolverhampton. It was built around the first half of the nineteenth century but the shop is set in the 1930s.

The premises are an extension of the ironmonger's shop next door, so they appear to be run as one business.

The ironmonger's shop specialises in 'tools for the trade' whereas the hardware shop sells anything and everything for the home. The shop never actually existed so the Museum put it together from whatever fixtures and fittings could be found. The counter, window backs and the glass-fronted china case were bought from Manby's an ironmongers in Skipton. The other two glass-fronted cases used to belong to David Hayward's - a brush making firm in Bloxwich.

In the 1930s the standard wage for a hardware assistant was about 10 shillings (50 pence) a week. That's worth about £15.00 in today's terms. The hours were very long: both shops would be open until 8 o'clock at night on weekdays and until 9 or 10 o'clock on Saturdays. Goods such as tin baths or baskets would be hung and displayed outside to attract customers.

When you entered the shop there would be a strong smell of paraffin, the major source of lighting and heating for families. On the counter there is a bell to get the attention of the shopkeeper.

The till was made in America by NCR in Dayton Ohio, one of the biggest suppliers in the civilised world.

Today's tills work out the change to be given to the customer but on these old ones the shopkeeper would have to calculate the sum in their head.

The shop would charge 2d a roll to trim wallpaper on a machine for this purpose. People could have keys cut, buy circular metal 'pot mender' patches to keep their pots and pans going, and home shoe repair kits - called 'Blakey Segs' containing replacement toe caps and heels. Most people had only one pair of shoes which had to last for years!

Monday was washday. A posser was used to press on the clothes in the washtub and the mangle was vital to press out all the excess water before hanging the clothes on the line - no tumble dryers or spin cycles in those days.

The shop also sold flat irons which were heated up by putting them in front of a fire or on a cooking range. Most families owned at least two flat irons so they could heat one up while the other was being used.

Wooden pegs were sold for 'pegging out' but also as toys as girls would make their own peg dolls as shown.

Wooden rat and mouse traps are also sold and if you had beetles or cockroaches which thrived in damp places you could buy the Demon Trap for 2/6.

On bath night once a week the big galvanised bath would be put in front of the fire and the heated water would be shared by everyone - waste not want not! - children first, in order of age with father back from the coalmine last of all; then maybe the dog would get a scrub, and the water would finally be thrown in the yard.