

## Veal's Bakery Shop

This building is a replica of one that still stands at 48 and 50 Birmingham Street, Oldbury - the original building dates from the 1840s. George Veal, whose name appears in enamel letters on the window, was a confectioner and bought the two shops, bake house and outbuildings for £700 in 1879.

After his death in 1884 it was owned by his widow Emma and later her second husband Arthur Smith. They leased it to the Watt family who ran the shop with their little girl and an assistant, Miss Nightingale. The enamel type lettering on the window shows the Royal Warrants awarded to Cadbury's and Fry's by Queen Victoria because she ate their chocolate!

Some bread was delivered by a boy with a cart, often before he went to school. He would get up early to also help by greasing all the tins for baking and would often be given a bag of stale cakes as a 'reward'.

As the shop opened at 6am mine workers would call in on their way to work to buy cobs or bread pudding, known as a 'belly filler'. (Bread pudding was made by soaking stale bread in water, then adding suet and raisins and cooking for about an hour and a half.)

Bread was always sold by weight. A 1lb (450gram) loaf cost 1/2d and a 2lb (900gram) loaf 1d. Often big families would buy a 4lb. loaf for 2d. This size was equivalent to 2 of today's large sliced loaves.

The fine Victorian bread scales (the tall brass ones) were a common feature in bread shops of the period.

Most grown-ups did not ask for the bread to be weighed, but children usually did, because if the bread was underweight, then a piece of bread pudding or similar cake was added to make up the weight. The shop also sold Crawford's biscuits from large tins on display. (Crawford's is now part of United Biscuits, the makers of such famous brands as McVities Digestives, HobNobs, Penguins and Jaffa Cakes). The other scales in the shop are for weighing the biscuits (three pence a 1/4 lb), and the pieces of the block cake on the counter.

There is tissue paper on the counter, but customers rarely bothered with having their bread wrapped. Ready wrapped and sliced bread did not appear in the West Midlands until the 1930's, and probably did not really catch on until the 1950's.

The shop sold Johnston's British Wine at 2/6 a bottle. (The bottles on display in the window are modern and do not actually contain wine) Local women often called in for a glass of wine and a biscuit (price three pence). They would sit on a bench opposite the counter and catch up with all the local gossip!

The baker usually only slept in his own bed on a Saturday night. The rest of the week he would sleep on a couch downstairs in the parlour, to enable him to start baking from about 3am in the bakery across the yard.

On Sunday morning the young delivery boy would clean the ovens by climbing into them - this was the only time they had cooled down enough for the job to be done. To protect himself from the heat and soot he had to cover himself in old sacking.

The display bread has been baked with large quantities of preservative in it to make it last as long as possible, and for health and safety reasons is not for sale; however, there are traditional cakes which you can buy to take home.