

## SHOPPING IN WOOD GREEN HIGH ROAD

By D. Hoy

Wood Green High Road has changed so dramatically since I was a boy that it seems worthwhile to set down my memories of the road as it was in the twenties and as it developed in the thirties.

Before the war, I lived with my parents on the Noel Park Estate, at first in a flat at 199a Gladstone Avenue (the lower eastern part of this avenue), and later in a house, 84 Hewitt Avenue, very near to the junction of that avenue with Salisbury Road. Therefore, when shopping my mother and I would approach the High Road by passing St Mark's Church and continuing along Lymington Avenue under the railway bridge on the line between the Great Eastern stations of Noel Park and West Green. As Lymington Avenue was an integral part of our High Road shopping expedition, I shall first mention the shops there which I remember.

On the southern side, after crossing Pelham Road, there were three small shops before the railway bridge. The first shop, a grocers (occupied I think by Mr Crossman) was in the shape of a right-handed triangle with the hypotenuse running from the door at the Pelham Road end to the counter at the bridge end, so a customer had to turn immediately to his right on entering. Next to this was a confectioners and tobacconists, run by Mr Sutton who also sold small playthings like marbles and chalk; my father regularly bought his cigarettes there. The third shop was a cobblers and leather merchants. It is remarkable that these three shops have the same type of merchandise in 1984. Under the bridge itself there was often a stall run by an old lady in black. I know she sold washed celery when it was in season but I cannot remember what she offered at other times. Just on the other side of the bridge, between the railway embankment and the first shop, a fruit and vegetable stall had been squeezed in. Next came a dairy, originally Welford's Premier but eventually, after amalgamation in the twenties, the United Dairies. Next, on the other corner of Bury Road was Redgraves a hairdressers catering for both men and women. My father always had his hair cut there and I was sent there on occasion; for their boy customers, who were charged 6d for a hair-cut, Redgraves provided weekly comics like "Film Fun" and "Comic Cuts" to be read whilst the boys waited.

On the other side of Bury Road, still on the southern side, the corner was occupied by Sousters Dining Rooms which I suppose was a kind of transport cafe. Next door was Newmans, a newsagents and confectioners, from which any magazines we needed could be obtained. Then came an old-fashioned grocer's shop which had moved from the opposite side of Lymington Avenue during the twenties. It exhaled wonderful scents of tea, coffee, biscuits and spices. It was run by Mr Hammond, whose son was in my class at Noel Park School in the mid—twenties; when we had a class party at Christmas, young Hammond was called upon to bring a selection of biscuits and it was a surprise to me that a bill came with the biscuits which our master had to pay. At the time I thought that a shopkeeper was sufficiently well off to provide his son's classmates with free biscuits but in retrospect, this was probably not so. Next came the Mirror Laundry to which we regularly took sheets and tablecloths for laundering, and my father's stiff celluloid collars for cleaning; as I grew up, the collection of these items when ready became one of my duties, and I remember the laundry manageress as a friendly, smiling lady with auburn hair. Then, set back from the pavement, with entrances to the cheaper seats (the pit and the gallery) was the side of the Wood Green Empire. Around the age of twelve or thirteen, my friend and I would often pay a visit to the Empire when it was showing a film we wished to see. Sometimes it was a gangster film, often starring Edward G.

Robinson which had an "A" certificate (adults only), so we had to select a suitable adult whom we might persuade to take us in. In retrospect it is surprising that we were allowed to do this by our parents, since we both had very strict mothers but I do not think we concealed from them at any time where we were going or the film we were seeing. As a matter of fact, my friend's parents often pre-viewed the film we were going to see and I remember that they did ban him from seeing one, a comedy, because the star, Edward Everett Horton, was under a bed when two girls undressed. I was allowed to see the film with my uncle and I remember that the view of the girls seen from Horton's viewpoint 'under the bed' went only up to knee level, so it was perfectly innocuous. However, such was the morality of the thirties! At the Mirror Laundry end of the Empire block was a shop occupied by a printers, the Brampton Press, where we occasionally had printing done when my father could afford printed notepaper or business cards, and at the High Road end another shop occupied by Dobsons, a confectioners. Then on the High Road corner, was Boots the Chemists.

On the right—hand northern side of Lymington Avenue there were no shops before the railway bridge as we proceeded towards the High Road. On the other side of the bridge, the first shop was a confectioners. Then came Aberdours, a coal merchant, which like its rival firms, operated a horse and cart which was driven over the roads on Noel Park Estate carrying coal; I think we had a regular call at frequent intervals during the winter and less frequent intervals during the summer when a stock was built up, but other people would look out for the coalman when they needed or could afford coal, and he was quite willing to make casual sales. I suppose that some people must have ordered from the office as it occupied a shop in Lymington Avenue, but I remember no one who did.

Next door to Aberdours was Bizleys, an oilshop. This type of shop was commonplace between the wars and sold many goods in addition to paraffin and the like. One aspect of their business was anything to do with cleaning - soaps, soda, starches, brushes, brooms, mops and dusters. Bizleys also supplied china and glassware, kettles and saucepans, clothes lines, pegs and step-ladders, candles and matches. Next to this was a shop premises occupied as a renting office by the Artisan, Labourers and General Dwellings Company, which also had a repairs office in Pelham Road, some 100 yards east of Crossmans grocery shop but on the other side of the road, which was a cul-de-sac terminating in a coalyard. This company at that time owned the Noel Park Estate, consisting mainly of residential houses and flats in the area bounded by Lordship Lane, the High Road and Westbury Avenue (although there were a few roads in the south eastern corner of this area which the company did not own). In addition to residences, the company owned some of the small shops like those in Lymington Avenue near the railway bridge. An application to rent a house or flat had to be made to the office in Lymington Avenue and my mother and I made frequent visits there when my parents wished to move from the upstairs flat in Gladstone Avenue to a house in 1928, and we became quite friendly with the renting manager, Mr Clarke.

I believe that there were one or two small shops beyond the renting office towards the High Road, but by the late nineteen thirties these had, I think, all been taken over by Edmonds Bros.

Edmonds Brothers was one of the two large departmental stores in the Wood Green High Road, but the area it occupied was rather peculiar. It had quite a normal frontage for a large shop on the corner of the High Road and Lymington Avenue to a point opposite the shops running from Sousters to the Mirror Laundry. It was in this area that the departmental store had its furniture, carpet, china and glass departments, which were squeezed up in November and December to make room for a

top bazaar. This bazaar included a "cave" for which an admission charge of a few pence was made. A child walked through a corridor with, on either side, cardboard tableaux of scenes from a fairy tale and received at the end a present from Santa Claus. I have a feeling that the present was optional and required a further payment and that usually I was allowed only a walk through the "cave". Next door to Edmonds in the High Road was a men's clothiers, Keevens Brothers. Not only did they supply overcoats, suits, shirts, socks and underwear for men but they also sold boys' clothes including school uniforms, for which they almost had a monopoly for the district. I was taken to Keevens quite frequently by my mother for various items of clothing, particularly those of a certain pattern dictated by my school, but curiously my father rarely used it. A large site adjoining this shop was occupied by the Alexandra Public House. It had entrances at the front and at the side where an alley led down to the Gents' toilet which I used in times of need, although I can remember being sickened by the stench of stale beer. The shops then resumed, starting with a branch of Liptons, the tea and grocery firm headed by the local worthy, Sir Thomas Lipton (a friend of King Edward VII through his interest in ocean yacht racing and his attempts with various yachts named "Shamrock" to win the America Cup, unfortunately without success. He lived at Osidge in nearby Southgate). Next came Lyons Teashop from which, for birthdays and similar celebrations, we purchased chocolate cream buns or eclairs. On some summer afternoons in the course of shopping, my mother would take me into this teashop where I would enjoy the luxury of strawberry and vanilla ice cream served in a dish with wafers and eaten with a spoon. Then another branch of Boots the chemists (why so near to that on the other side of Lymington Avenue I know not) and then came another part of the Edmonds Brothers emporium. This extended along the High Road for perhaps 100 yards to Noel Park Road and backwards to the railway. It joined at the back to the premises abutting Lymington Avenue by a narrow area running behind the Alexandra Tavern and the adjoining shops and in this area were the departments selling curtains and bedding, such as sheets. The main part of the store abutting on Noel Park Road had the sections for haberdashery, footwear and underwear. In the High Road on the northern side of Noel Park Road was the ladies' department of Edmonds Brothers, featuring millinery, coats and dresses, etc. It was felt necessary to display goods in windows at that time to a greater extent than today and I suppose that then people only entered a departmental store with an intention to purchase. I believe that when I was a young child, Edmonds Brothers had flat shop windows which were replaced in the course of my boyhood by arcades of windows to enable potential customers to window—shop under cover. In those halcyon days, vandalism was not rife as it is today, so inside showcases, well screened from the street, remained, as far as I can remember, immune to breakage. The ladies' part of the store across Noel Park Road was not very extensive and its frontage on the High Road was probably not more than fifty yards.

A parade of shops extended from the north side of Edmonds Bros. to Noel Park Station at the bend of the road. Of these, I remember three very well. Firstly, Arthur Smith's, a well—established "gent's" outfitter, very similar to Keevens but not, I believe, quite so popular and successful, certainly not with our family. Then Hawkins, a north country firm supplying goods "from weaver to wearer" and always having a good reputation for service and quality. There my father's shirts were always purchased by my mother and she also bought linen and tablecloths and the like. Thirdly, my favourite shop in the area was Saunders, a corn chandlers and grocers; there were a number of branches of this chain in North London to my knowledge (and perhaps elsewhere). They had live chicks in spring, kept in incubators in their window which were sold to local poultry keepers who kept their stock in huts or cages on allotments or in back gardens (as did my grandfather). Saunders had a speciality, soaked and minted dried peas which were displayed in a white enamel bowl on a stand at their door; in the winter, my mother and grandmother bought and cooked these peas, as an alternative to brussel sprouts and cabbage, very much as are frozen vegetables of today.

Certainly these soaked peas were more palatable and cheaper than the tinned peas then available. Between Saunders and the station were two or three small shops, one being Yates the dyers and cleaners, and another a tobacconist. Noel Park Station was originally called Wood Green Station, I believe, but not in my lifetime. (The Wood Green Station I knew was on the Great Northern Line from Kings Cross and is now known as Alexandra Palace). My mother would often take me into Noel Park Station when my grandfather was on duty as a ticket collector in his little box, resplendent in a smart serge uniform. As my grandparents lived very near Palace Gates Station, the next station northwards from Noel Park, my grandmother often found it convenient to travel by train for her shopping expeditions in the High Road, especially as, being a railway employee's wife, she could have a privilege fare costing a copper or two. On the other side of the station was Gladstone Terrace. The shops here were somewhat specialist and mostly of little interest to a small boy with the exception of two. One, Saville Pianos, sold all kinds of musical instruments, gramophones and sheet music and always had a colourful window display. I was destined when starting married life after the war, to live next door to the proprietor. Next door to Savilles, nearer to the station, was Briggs which originally sold leather goods like handbags, purses and luggage, but later developed in include everything to do with sports and games, indoor and out; this shop is one of the few I knew as a child to survive to this day on the same site. Other shops in the terrace were Edwards the butchers, Gunns the corn merchants, Woodcocks the opticians and Edmonds, picture framers. At the end of the terrace on the corner of Gladstone Avenue came the National Provincial Bank. (The National Westminster is still there but in a new building).

Northwards from the corner of Gladstone Avenue to the corner of Lordship Lane was Spouters' Corner, a provincial version of Speakers' Corner in Hyde Park. It was an open area, perhaps 100 yards long by 50 yards wide, behind which was a row of cottages. I dimly remember there having been a smithy at the Lordship Lane end of the cottages but I believe this must have been replaced by a firm of seed merchants, Willis & Son, who in my boyhood and up to the sixties had premises in that position from which they erected extensive stalls on which they displayed all kinds of plants and garden accessories. Throughout their existence, Mr Willis and his family and staff seemed to bring a breath of the countryside to Wood Green.

As my grandparents lived near Palace Gates Station, from my earliest days I was taken from my home on the Noel Park Estate along Gladstone Avenue, across the High Road by Spouters' Corner to Station Road, along which we walked to my grandparents' house in Ellesborough Road. The northern corner of the junction between Station Road and High Road at the bottom of Jolly Butchers Hill was dominated by the local Public Library with a large clock: even now when waiting at the bus stop for a No.29 to Enfield, I instinctively turn round to check the time and recoil sadly from the blank face of the office block which has replaced the old library. Although strictly not part of the High Road, it really cannot be omitted from my story. I joined the children's section at a very early age, probably eight or nine and made regular trips there on Saturday mornings from about 1927 to 1934, selecting books not only for myself from the children's section, but also from the adult section for my mother and father. Then I would move into the reading room, where I could read "The Children's Newspaper" and I believe, also one of the well established boys' weeklies, "Boys' Own Paper" which was still published at that time, although somewhat old-fashioned compared with "The Wizard" and "Hotspur". Upstairs was the reference library from which I sought and obtained information when I was entering competitions; one I remember was identifying flags of the world.

Returning to the High Road, the shop on the southern corner of Station was Parkers the chemists, which was en route to my grandparents and therefore convenient for my mother so was used more

frequently than Boots on the corner of Lymington Avenue. Next to Parkers was A. I. Jones, the tobacconists, and then came the Nag's Head Public House, which is still there. Then came a row of shops, now demolished, of which I remember Edwards, a superior pork butchers, a hairdressers with the name of Shiers (most appropriate bearing in mind the short back and sides style favoured by most men between the wars) and dining—rooms of the Sousters type. Between those shops and the railway bridge by Noel Park Station were some public gardens containing, as I remember, only stretches of grass with an asphalt path parallel with the High Road and a few wooden seats. I remember no protests (as there would be today) at the loss of public open space when the land was sold for the development of the first super—cinema in Wood Green, the Gaumont. This opened, I think, in 1934 with a programme of two full length films, a stage show, a cinema organ recital and the latest newsreel. I went in its first week when the first feature film was "The Constant Nymph" and the leading entertainer on the stage was a crooner, Val Rosing, who sang the hit of the day, "The Sunny Side of the Street". Shops were then erected on the High Road frontage on both sides of the cinema entrance, but only the Post Office survives to this day. I left school later in 1934.

On the south side of the railway bridge on this side of the road was a footpath leading to Caxton Road. In the summer, poor children mostly girls, laid out a pattern of wild flowers, called grottos, for which they begged pennies from passers—by. On the other side of the path was an off-licence called the Railway Stores, on the corner of Blenheim Road. On the opposite corner was a furniture stores, Whittington Brothers, which one evening was burned down and I remember my father going up to see the fire. This was, I think, around 1930, when the furniture trade, like others, was in the depression. During the thirties, another furniture store, Wheatlands, was opened on the same site. From there we had a long line of single shops, 26 in number, to the corner of Mayes Road. At one time, there were three butchers, one of which was Garstons which my mother favoured and three provision merchants which I remember as being mostly concerned with poultry and dairy products because a cooked breakfast of egg with bacon or sausage was a daily ritual for those who could afford it, rather than a weekend or holiday indulgence as it is to many people today. R. Gunner at the Wheatlands end and H. Deacock at the Mayes Road end were the names of two of these provision merchants indelibly imprinted on my memory. My father was the only member of our family to have a cooked breakfast and his bacon and eggs came from Deacocks. In those days, the men who served at butchers and provision merchants wore blue and white striped aprons and it was their practice to hang carcasses of pigs, sheep and cattle as well as rabbits and poultry on hooks outside the shops. "Killed on the premises" was a common advertisement intended to indicate to the customer the freshness of the meat. The Home and Colonial Stores, a multiple grocers and provision stores, had a branch in this line of shops and this was favoured with my grandmother's custom, probably because it was near Noel Park Station. One of their specialities tempting to me was slab cake, madeira, sultana and cherry being some of the varieties sold by the pound. In those days, most commodities were weighed up as required and I was fascinated to watch the grocer's assistant adeptly constructing funnels out of blue paper for dried fruit such as sultanas, raisins, currants and prunes. During the 1920s a new grocers and provision merchants appeared, taking two adjacent shops in this line. It was called John Quality Ltd and was, I believe, an off—shoot of Selfridges. It was a largish shop, which you could walk round without purchasing if you wished, rather than, as in the Home and Colonial, having to stand waiting to be served between the grocery counter and the provision section. My mother and grandmother seemed to disapprove of John Quality's, possibly because their prices were higher than normal; however, as a child, I found it exciting to wander round looking at the different foods at close quarters, rather than having to gaze upwards at the contents of distant high shelves. From John Quality's I bought, from my pocket money, a tin

containing a small iced cake as a present for a school friend who was leaving at the end of the school year. I was about eight at the time and I remember that this purchase was allowed by my mother with considerable reluctance. I do not know whether this reluctance stemmed from the price of the cake (about one shilling, a substantial amount to a small boy at that time) or from the fact that my friend was leaving to join a Catholic school, my mother having been a Church of England school teacher.

This parade of shops was not, however, solely concerned with food - although this was of the greatest to me. There were at least four boot and shoe shops, such as Lilley and Skinner, all connected to different chains but independent of and competitive with each other at the time. There was a pram—makers, Harris & Co., and two tailors, Lockwood and Bradley (which had several other shops in North London) and Wortmans. The proprietor of the latter was a plump, rosy cheeked Jewish gentleman, short in height but full of kindness. He gave the impression that the customer he was serving at that moment was the most important person in his world. When the time came for me to have my first adult suit, I was taken to Wortmans by my parents and treated with the same prolific courtesy by old Mr Wortman. Subsequently, from time to time, I was tempted away by the lower prices of multiple tailors, but I always reverted to Mr Wortman (and in later years to his son until the latter's untimely death) when I wanted a well-made suit for an important occasion. At the Mayes Road end was an off-licence next to a tobacconists, A. Baker & Co. (as a child I could not understand why the latter sold cigarettes rather than bread).

Mayes Road led off from the High Road, half right. My father walked along it every day in the twenties and thirties to his work at Barratt and Co., the sweet manufacturers, whose factory and offices stood at the further end. My father was in charge of the transport of confectionery to the provinces, and to ensure that nothing went untoward with the loading of his fleet of lorries, he always spent Saturday morning and Sunday morning at work; most people worked a five and a half day week at that time but his appearance on Sunday, even for a few hours, was super-conscientious. At right angles to Mayes Road and therefore running from the latter's junction with the High Road a little left of a right angle was Alexandra Road. On the angle of Mayes Road and Alexandra Road was a collection of premises, something between a stall and a shop, leading up to the Salvation Army Citadel in Hayes Road.

There was a well-patronised fruiterer and greengrocers and on the corner, a seller of second-hand books. At that time there were a vast number of weekly books for boys published, all at twopence each, and this establishment sold used copies of back numbers at three for twopence (when I sold about 100 of my own used copies I received, I remember, one shilling and threepence which demonstrates the profit margin at three for twopence). However, here I was introduced to the Robin Hood Library (of which Aldine Ltd published about 80 numbers) and the Nelson Lee (stories of St Frank's public school where a housemaster, Nelson Lee, was an amateur detective). There was a china shop where you could buy odd cups, saucers, plates, etc. and a pet shop, Bennetts, which fascinated me and I was always pestering my mother to let me have a dog of my own. Eventually a little mongrel was bought for me from Bennetts but it was in very poor condition and died within days, so it was a year or two later before my lifelong ownership of dogs properly started. Another establishment made homemade sweets of the bullseye, cough candy, etc. type but as these were the kind of confectionery which my father brought home from Barratts we did not buy these, although I always savoured the fascinating odour of boiled sweets which overcame the less salubrious smells from Bennetts. On the other side of Alexandra Road, there was a similar bank of stalls cum shops, the biggest of which was a haberdashers, selling ribbons, cottons and the like.

After the gap of the Mayes Road/Alexandra Road confluence, the High Road shops started again with an oil merchants, which, besides paraffin, sold hardware and all kinds of cleaning materials; here my mother went for Hudsons (a kind of soap flakes) and Hustlers soap, which in my childhood gave a wild animal card in each packet, so it was an excitement to prise this out of the packet on purchase. From there southwards, stretched a line of nearly thirty individual shops to the next corner at Brampton Park Road. Next door to the oil shop was a greengrocers, Joels, and further along another greengrocers/fruiterers, Woods, occupied three out of four shops, i.e. a single shop and a double shop with a butchers in between. There were, in fact, other butchers in this parade of shops, one of which was named Hillers. Quite close to Joels was Wickes, bakers and confectioners, from which, when I was three or four years old, I was often bought a fancy cake (being at that time not just an only child but an only grandchild). However, one day a particularly creamy cake made me sick, with the result that, for many years, I eschewed the delights of fancy cakes and confined myself to the more mundane currant buns and jam puffs. In those days, bakers often made their own versions of cakes rather than having them delivered from a factory, and the quality of a particular type of cake varied from shop to shop — jam puffs, swiss puddings and madeleines are examples which spring to mind. After my peremptory weaning away from fancy cakes, I took a greater interest in biscuits and my favourite shop for these was Stevens and Steeds. These were grocers and provision merchants, who had a double shop in this same parade of shops, somewhere between Woods, the greengrocers and Hillers the butchers. They displayed a lot of their goods in front of their shop under a canvas awning. Among these goods were numerous tins of biscuits, which were open to display their contents, so it was a delight to go round to inspect these tins and to persuade my mother to buy my selection. After my experience with fancy cakes, I rejected custard creams and the like and I remember one of my favourites was a currant puff, which consisted of a square of feathery puff pastry with generous dried fruit mixed in it with its outside a shiny brown with some kind of sugar coating. There were always two or three assistants under the canvas awning, waiting to weigh up the quantity of biscuits required and take the money, unlike the present time when it often takes longer to pay for goods than to select them. Next door to Wickes there was Smiths, fishmongers, where we bought shrimps for tea when these were in season; these were fresh shrimps from which the head and tail must be removed and I was always glad when my grandmother was present at teatime as she would always "pick out" my shrimps for me. One other shop I remember in this parade was Peark's Dairies who were part of a chain of multiple provision merchants and grocers similar to Liptons and the Home and Colonial.

On the southern corner of Brampton Park Road, the next parade of shops started with a double shop occupied by Henry Secker, jewellers and pawnbrokers; it is interesting to reflect that on this western side of the High Road, this was the only business involving finance of any kind, every other shop being a business selling goods, unlike the present day when building societies, banks, estate agents and insurance brokers proliferate in every High Street. Next door to Seckers was Symons, another fishmongers, then yet another branch of Woods, the greengrocers.

Another couple of shops brought us to Courcy Road, beyond which a parade of another dozen or so shops stretched to Coleraine Road, and in this parade was my Mecca, the toy shop. In my infant days I was an avid collector of pieces for a model farm. These were made of metal and one could buy a pig or a sheep for one penny and a cow for twopence. A strip of hedge or a tree were similarly priced and baby animals like lambs and piglets were even cheaper. One could buy a haystack, a farm house, a horse (with or without carts or ploughs) fences and stiles. Most of the money which I received from doting relatives was spent at this toy shop for perhaps five infant years and it was with

considerable sadness that, around the age of ten to eleven, I sold my collection to obtain money for my more mature hobby, stamp collecting. In the toy shop windows, one either side of the door, a wide range of toys was displayed on stands at all levels, so that many happy minutes could be spent gazing at the items on offer, and thus a plan could be made as to the best way to spend the next sixpence. Besides the farm items which interested me, there would be large displays of castles and soldiers, trains and lines and stations, and collections of zoo animals and also circus animals and performers. Then there were dolls and stuffed animals and doll's houses and furniture. This shop was a veritable Aladdin's cave and in fact survived until my own children could visit it in the 1950s.

Almost next door to the toy shop were the "marble halls" of Sainsburys who had two or three shops. The feature of each shop was that there was a centre door from which a tiled path led to the cash desk at the end. On either side of this path was a counter stretching the whole length of the shop, and the walls were tiled in white to the ceiling. Goods were displayed along this counter, behind which stood an army of assistants. Each counter dealt with a different category of goods — one shop had one counter dealing with dairy products and one counter dealing with groceries. Another shop was devoted to meat, again with some kind of subdivision. As I remember it, on the provisions side, one assistant would deal with cheese and another perhaps with butter and lard, another with bacon and a third with eggs. I believe that one was given a chit for goods which one took to the cash desk and paid and then returned with part of it to the counter for the goods. Although there always seemed plenty of customers, strangely enough there was little waiting about to be served, because of the number of assistants, as labour was cheap at that time. Beyond Coleraine Road, there were perhaps half a dozen shops and then a terrace of houses leading to the Wellington public house on the corner of Turnpike Lane. Of these shops (which, being at the end, we rarely reached), the only one I remember was the one next to the houses, Irons which sold mangles. The houses were demolished in the early thirties and as these became vacant pending destruction some temporary stalls were set up in the gardens. I well remember buying (or having bought for me) at one of these a second-hand set of a collection of geographical books called "Peoples of All Nations", the complete set of some eight volumes (which I still have) cost only a few shillings. When shops replaced these houses, some were let in quite large units and occupied by prestigious chains like Burtons the tailors, and Times Furnishers, so shoppers were induced to visit this formerly neglected part of the High Road. Around the corner, in Turnpike Lane, was a door into the Gent's toilet of "The Wellington" which I used on occasion. Close by was a dress shop which my mother patronised, there is still one there although I doubt whether it is in the same family ownership. About 50 yards from "The Wellington" corner Turnpike Lane narrows so the shops from then onwards are further south than those which include the dress shop mentioned. In the shops in this forward position, was a shop called Lofts selling tools, an excellent specialist business from which my father (and later myself) always purchased any tool of quality needed (the alternative sources were the cheap versions at 6d. offered by Woolworths or Mann and Rankins on Jolly Butchers Hill, but for quality Lofts was the place to go).

On the eastern side of the High Road, a parade of shops for a short distance from Westbury Avenue to Whymark Avenue contained only one shop of which I have any memories, this being Elmers which sold musical instruments and above all sheet music; as at that time I had weekly piano lessons, this was the shop we went to for sheet music. The next stretch of shops from Whymark Avenue to Dovecote Avenue is a long one with about 25 shops. It was dominated by Bartons, a departmental store, which occupied six shops. Bartons was the chief competitor to Edmonds Bros. and was regarded by my mother as rather superior, although I considered that its toy displays at Christmas were far inferior to those of Edmonds. As one entered Bartons, one was greeted by a



smartly dressed floor walker who directed (or even conducted) one to the required department. Bartons, I think, displayed their goods in an arcade of glass windows, so, unlike the present Selfridge type store where people wander through to look at goods, anyone entering Bartons was regarded as having the intention to purchase (as with Edmonds Bros. but more so). Bartons store was divided into sections with long wooden counters on either side of each section; the counters were polished and mahogany in colour, but whether they were really of this wood I cannot say. Chairs were provided for a customer to sit and wait for an assistant to become available to serve, then to measure off material and to wrap the purchase. For each purchase, a bill was made out with a carbon copy, the assistant filled in the top item on his pad of bills and noted the details on the fly-leaf. The bill and carbon and the customer's money were put into a metal container which was then despatched to a central cash-desk over a system of overhead wires. Very soon the container would come back with the receipted top copy and the customer's change. As I remember it, Bartons main trade was in materials and furnishings (curtains, bed-linen, tea cloths and the like), haberdashery and ladies clothing of every description; they were not as strong as Edmonds in furniture or floor coverings and china and glass. Therefore, I came to regard Bartons as more of a feminist province than Edmonds and as I grew up tried to dissuade my mother taking me there. Bartons was destroyed by fire in the 1960s when that type of store had outlived its popularity and so was not rebuilt.

One establishment my mother did take me to in my very days was Hardingham's, a hairdressers primarily for ladies, not far from Whymark Avenue. There I had my hair cut for the first time and for a number of times afterwards until I was old enough to be sent to Redgraves in Lymington Avenue. As I have said, I came to regard this area of the High Road as feminine territory, not only because of Bartons stores but because the next two shops to the north, housed Bridgeland a ladies' costumier (coats, dresses and the like), and Clara Reid a milliner. Then after the A.B.C. teashop came another dress shop, Walters.

Next came the Palladium, a cinema in which I saw my first moving picture, a silent film having a story about one of the battles of the Great War, perhaps Mons. I was very young at the time and wonder how I came to be taken to such unsuitable entertainment — probably by an aunt or uncle I would guess. The Palladium survived until after the Second World War but could not really compete with the Gaumont built on Gladstone Gardens and the Ritz when built by the A.B.C. close to Turnpike Lane station. In the 1950s it was demolished and its site used to expand the Marks & Spencer store which had then appeared on its southern flank. On the other side of the Palladium was Woolworths, which at first occupied a single shop, but in the 1930s took over the next, which had been Lambs, an early firm of motorcar dealers. In those pre-war days, the Woolworths prime advertising slogan was "Nothing Over Sixpence" (21/2p), but to maintain this boast they sometimes had to make a separate charge for each part — a saucepan at sixpence and a lid at twopence, for instance. Next to Woolworths was Conquests, a booksellers and lending library. In the days before television, many more books were read for entertainment. The public library did not always have available (or even provide) the light reading that many people liked, so shops like Conquests would acquire books for which they would pay only a few shillings and would lend these at a fee of twopence a week. It is not surprising that, as television strengthened its hold after the Second World War, the private lending library's star waned and Conquests, the only specialist booksellers in Wood Green High Road, closed its doors and its site was absorbed into Woolworths. Two doors away from Conquests was Williamsons a baker's selling bread and cakes and also having a restaurant. They served lunches and teas and, as a boy, it seemed to me this had an air of gentility superior to Lyons or the A.B.C. which were members of chains of shops. I am not at all sure that there were not other

Williamsons shops about London, but this shop in Wood Green had for me a deliciously unique smell of tea and muffins and cakes. However, I cannot remember ever being taken into the restaurant. At the northern end of this parade of shops was Barclays Bank on the corner of Dovecote Avenue, on the very same site where it stands today.

The next stretch of High Road was bounded on the south by Dovecote Avenue and on the north by Lymington Avenue. In the middle was the main entrance to the Wood Green Empire and next door to this on the south was the advance booking office, where forthcoming attractions were advertised. It was originally a music hall, which became part of the Stoll Group, which was headed by the Stoll Theatre in Aldwych. The Stoll Group continually changed their policy to try to meet the public's requirements. Sometimes there would be a variety show and sometimes a musical show such as "The White Horse Inn"; then with the advent of the talkies and prior to the building of the Gaumont, they showed a double bill of films. Then, when the Gaumont provided two films and a short stage show, the Empire tried a bill consisting of an hour's variety and a feature film with perhaps another short film feature. Having been built as a theatre, it was not really suitable to be a cinema, so after the Second World War it reverted to its former role as a theatre for a time. After the first six shops northward from Dovecote Avenue, of which I can recall only Cousins the tailors, the parade of shops became Cheapside with its own numbers — 1 to 14. The Wood Green Empire and its box office occupied Nos.6 and 7, the Midland Bank was at No.2 and Dunns the hatters at No.13 as they are today; in fact Boots the chemists then at No.1 on the corner of Lymington Avenue remained on that site until the 1960s and Nash the jewellers was next door to the Empire at No.8 until recently. To me as a boy the most interesting shop in Cheapside was the Penny Bazaar at No.3. This had long counters on which cheap toys and other goods were displayed. Certainly many things were at one penny and the proprietors were the London Penny Bazaar Co., but I believe there were some items costing more than one penny. My memory of the place was that it was little better than an inferior market stall and certainly not of as high a standard as Woolworths. Yet this Penny Bazaar became Marks and Spencers and eventually moved southwards to No.44 which is part of its present site.

No account of Wood Green High Road would be complete without mentioning the fruit and vegetable stalls which stood in the side roads which intersect with the High Road. Those in Lymington Avenue were outside Boots the chemists, in Dovecote Avenue outside Barclays Bank and in Whymark Avenue on the east side and in Blenheim Road on the west side. A Many are there at the present time. It always surprises me that, with minor variations such as the inclusion of flowers or bedding plants, all these stalls are in competition, selling the same goods, but usually all with queues of would-be customers. In my boyhood, the stall holders were competing with the line of shops operated by Woods and also with Joels close to the Alexandra Road intersection; whilst these shops have gone, the shop competition is now supplied by the supermarkets. Yet, to my great pleasure, the stalls seem as thriving as ever. How surprising that these stalls are the constant factor in the greatly changed pattern of the High Road, Wood Green. In my schooldays there was a mix of shops selling food and merchandise, some family businesses, some parts of chains. Now most of the family shops have disappeared and nearly every shop is part of a chain. Moreover, the number of shops selling food must have halved and some that have gone are replaced by a motley collection of shops selling goods like washing machines, refrigerators, and televisions, which were undreamed of in those early years of the century. Perhaps there is a moral in the survival of the stall holders; each is his own master, working for himself, and therefore willing and anxious to provide the goods and service his customers require.