

Bakeries in King's Cliffe

For centuries bread was an essential part of people's daily diet. To meet this demand there was always more than one bakery in the village, even as recently as the 1970s.

The Wills of people in King's Cliffe going back to 1598 give us the names of some early bakers here: Jeffrey Sherman; Thomas Smith, Thomas Garratt, William Neabon, Richard Blake, Giles Law – but we do not know where their bakehouses were. In the 18th century records of the Magistrates Court bakers can be found 'Breaking the Assize of Bread' - selling bread below weight – for which they were fined 6d – the equivalent of 2½p.

'Assize' weights for bread were first introduced by a law in 1266 in the reign of Henry III. This law linked the price of wheat to the price of bread. The 'assize' weight for each size of loaf reduced when the price of wheat increased. The weights and prices were set out in a very detailed scale, too complicated to reproduce here!

New laws were passed in 1808 and 1810 which affected bakers up and down the country. Every baker had to have scales fixed in his shop and proper weights of the 'assize' weight of the different loaves in general use. Customers could insist on a loaf being weighed in front of them and any under-weight had to be made up. Any baker failing to meet these requirements could be fined 10 shillings – a great deal of money 200 years ago.

The Act of 1810 also stipulated that 'no baker should use his oven to bake any meat, pudding, pie or victuals after 1.30pm on a Sunday; and that no meat, tart, etc, was to be taken to or from any bake-house during the time of divine service'. The penalty for breaching this law was 5 shillings for the first offence, 10 shillings for the second and 15 shillings for the third.

Many families relied on using the baker's oven to cook their Sunday meat dinner, usually with Yorkshire pudding batter underneath, as they did not have the means to cook it in their own homes. The meat and pudding in a baking dish would be carried carefully to the nearest bakery.

The first detailed census in 1841 lists as bakers: John Wade, with apprentice George Sneath, in Park St; William Wadwell and his son, in West Street; Mrs Ann Rate, also in West St; Benjamin Howes, miller and baker, with Thomas Preston, a journeyman baker, in Hog Lane (Forest Approach); and Thomas Thompson, a journeyman baker, living in Bridge Street.

In 1911, there were five bakers: William Ingle and his son Ernest in West Street (in the current bakery shop premises); John T Featherstone whose bakehouse was in part of what is now no.22 West Street (he worked the tower windmill in West Street to grind his flours); William Peake whose bakehouse was down some steps off Pig Lane (now Forest Approach) behind the houses recently built as nos 1 and 2 Forest Approach; Joseph Slingsby in Park Street (later Woodings) and Sargent Hill, principally a confectioner, very nearby at what is now no.18 Park Street.

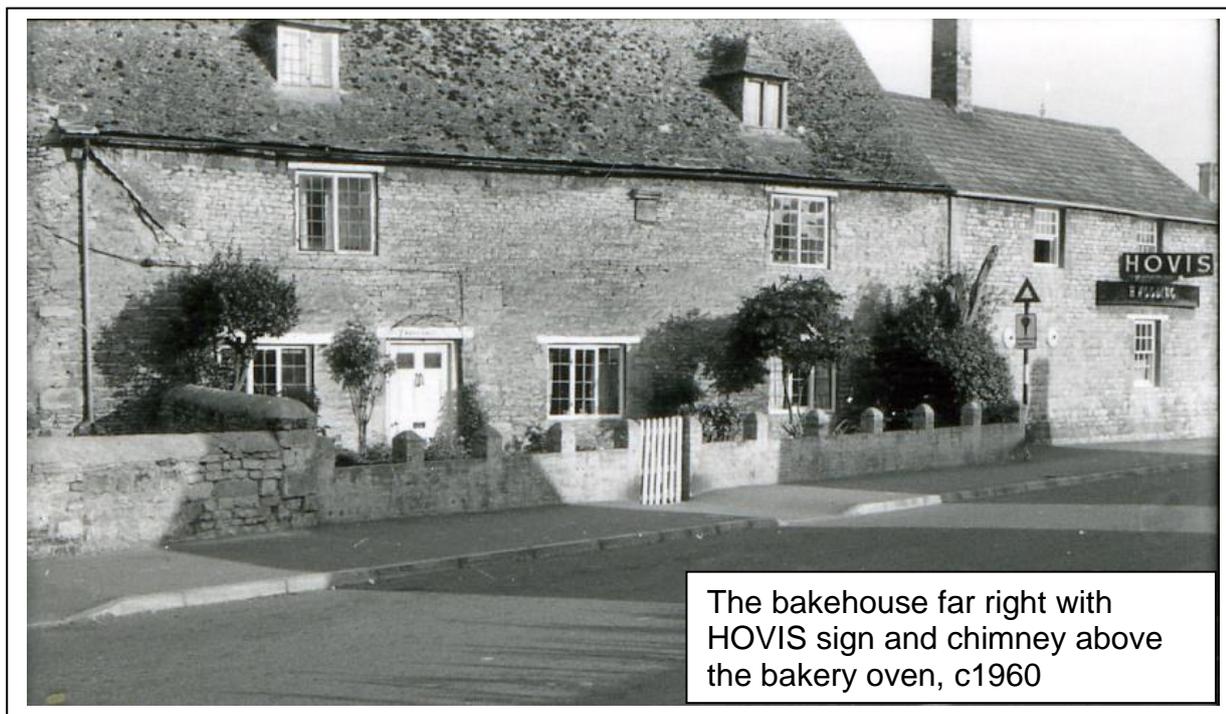
As recently as the 1970s, there were still three bakers in King's Cliffe: Ernie Elliott on the top corner of Bridge Street; Harry Wooding in Park Street; and Jack Chown in West Street.

Elliott's bakery at the Park Street/Bridge Street corner (with HOVIS signs in the picture below from the 1930s) was owned and run by Ernie Elliott from 1928 until he retired in 1974. The

bakery was on the Park Street side and, in the early days, there was also a café in the room on the corner. Fish and chips were very popular: sold on some evenings from the passageway onto Bridge Street they often led to queues out onto the street!

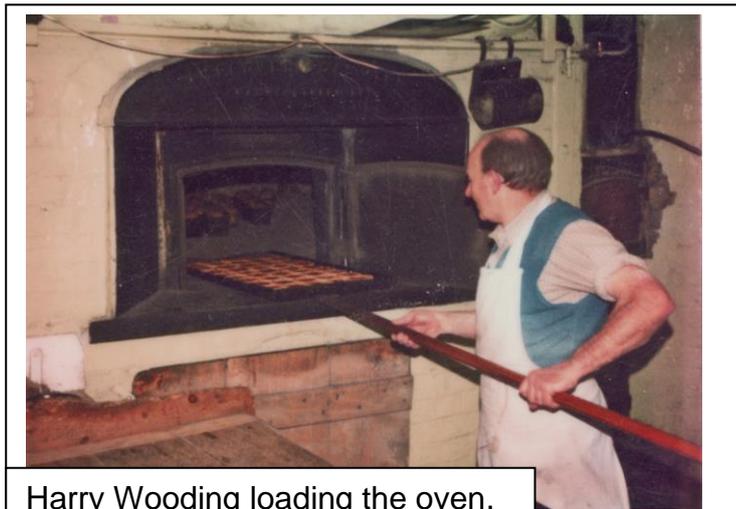


Harry Wooding originally worked for baker Gordon Green in his bakehouse in Park Street – previously Joseph Slingsby's bakery.



The Greens had no children and when Gordon Green died, Harry Wooding took over running the bakery. When Mrs Green died, she left the house and business to Harry Wooding who ran it in his own name from early 1944 until he retired in 1978. Situated as it was beside the

village school, Wooding's bakery was very popular with the children coming out from school! Kind Harry gave them small buns of baked bread which the kids called 'Littl'uns'.



Harry Wooding loading the oven, photo taken c1960.

After Harry Wooding retired, he and his son, Peter, who had worked with him in the bakery, converted the right-hand part of the bake-house into a shop for John Wooding's greengrocery and fruiterer business, with a much larger front window and a door directly onto Park Street. Some years later the old bake-house oven was taken out and the shop area was extended and re-organised into a self-service layout.

Jack Chown had the bakery in West Street, now the bakery shop and café, for thirty years from 1955. We can trace the succession of bakers here back to at least 1794 when George Richardson sold to John Wadwell who, in turn, sold to his son William, a baker. The Wadwell family owned the bakehouse and adjoining cottage until 1885, leasing the bakery to tenants including John Sharp and brothers Charles and George Eudall. In 1885 James Kingston, already a baker in King's Cliffe, bought the cottage and bakehouse. By 1911, William Ingle and his son Ernest, bakers and confectioners from Whittlesea, were his tenant bakers.

Then in 1921 the Ingles bought the cottage and the bakery business from James Kingston. In turn, in 1934 they sold the premises and goodwill of the business to Tommy Knight who had previously worked for Gordon Green in Park Street.

There was a protective covenant in the contract for sale. The Vendor was bound for five years not to carry on or be concerned with the business of a baker within a 5-mile radius 'as the crow flies'.



The old bakehouse with original oven and dough trough, as it might have looked in 1911.

Following the sudden death of Tommy Knight in 1955, Jack Chown took over the bakery and was there until 1985. Then came Clive Tolson and, from 1987 until 2018, Oliver and Karen O'Sullivan. When they retired, present owner Tom Priestley bought the bakery. He has developed the wholesale side of the business, now baking off-site, and opened a bakery café alongside the shop in West Street.

You can see items relating to these old bakery businesses at the Heritage Centre, including a bakery basket and the old dough trough from the West Street bakery; a peel, oven rakes and the enamel sign from Harry Wooding's bakery.