

GEORGE WEBSTER OF WESTGATE WAKEFIELD



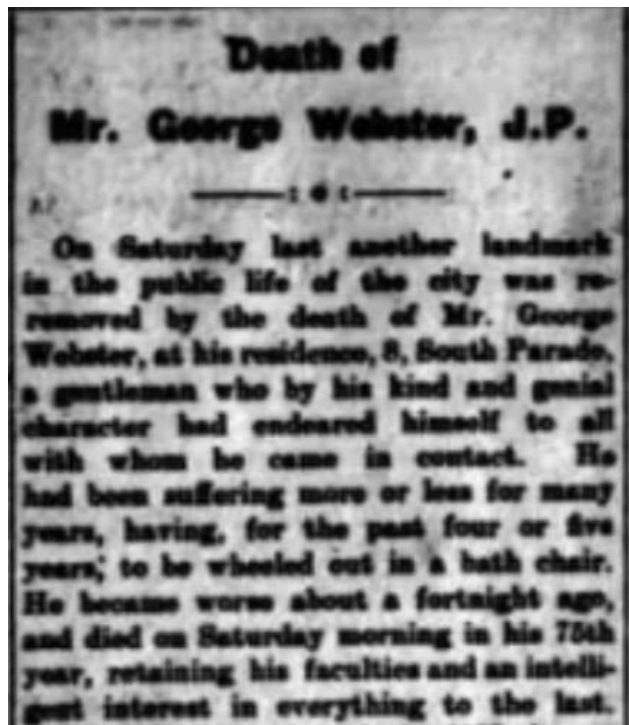
Number 70 Westgate, Wakefield was a grocers shop for over a hundred years. The Census of 1851 shows Benjamin Lynas, a tea dealer and master grocer, working and living at 70 Westgate. He remained there until George Webster took over the grocery business. It was usual at that time to live above your shop which is why the first floor of the building has a bay window.

George was born in Halifax in 1838. His father, also George, was a grocer. The family were Quakers and young George was sent to Ackworth School to complete his education. He was then sent to Scarborough as an apprentice grocer. His employer was John Rowntree of Newborough, Scarborough who had a large grocery shop at the top of Blands Cliff. In the 1861 Census Rowntree lived above the shop with his wife, four children, a niece, a governess named Elizabeth Benson, four assistants including George Webster, a cook and two maids.

John Rowntree had worked at the shop with his brother Joseph but Joseph moved to York and began his own business on Pavement. Joseph's two sons, Joseph and Henry Isaac, worked in the York shop until their father's death when they commenced as chocolate and cocoa dealers. Their business expanded, it became very successful and by 1890 they had built a large factory for the production of chocolate and sweets. The name Rowntree of York is still known today and their Quaker belief led to the Rowntree Foundation and Joseph is still remembered for his philanthropy. George Webster was the same age as the two brothers who started the chocolate business and it would seem likely he would have known them through his time working at their uncle's shop. If George had become a chocolate dealer maybe Wakefield could have had its own world famous chocolate works and invented Fruit Pastilles!

George moved to Wakefield in 1863 and together with his brother, John, bought a grocers shop on Kirkgate, Wakefield close to a house called The Grove which gave its name to Grove Road. In 1864 he married Elizabeth Benson in Scarborough: she had been the governess in the Rowntree household. Their first child, George, was born in 1867 in Wakefield followed by Arthur and then two daughters Margaret and Mary. By 1881 the family had moved to Halifax and opened another grocers, at that time they had a governess, servant and nursemaid. The shop on Kirkgate remained part of the Webster business.

Soon after this George returned to Wakefield and purchased 70 Westgate on the corner of Cheapside. The business was very successful and the family lived there. The Census of 1911 showed George, a widower aged 73, living at the property with his two unmarried daughters and two servants. He died in 1912 by which time he had moved from the shop to 8 South Parade, Wakefield. His funeral was a grand affair and it is interesting to note that a George Rowntree JP from Scarborough attended the event so the relationship between the two families had continued. George Webster had become a Unitarian while living in Wakefield therefore his funeral was held at the Unitarian Chapel only a few hundred yards from his grocery shop. His close neighbour on the opposite side of Cheapside, Jeremiah Dunnill, who owned a music shop, presided on the organ.



The grocery business was taken over by George's sons, George and Arthur. They expanded the business to include a cafe on Cross Square as well as the two shops on Kirkgate and Westgate. The firm of Webster Bros continued at 70 Westgate until the 1960's. The change in shopping habits and the beginning of supermarkets ended the hundred years of grocery business at this address.

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WAKEFIELD

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