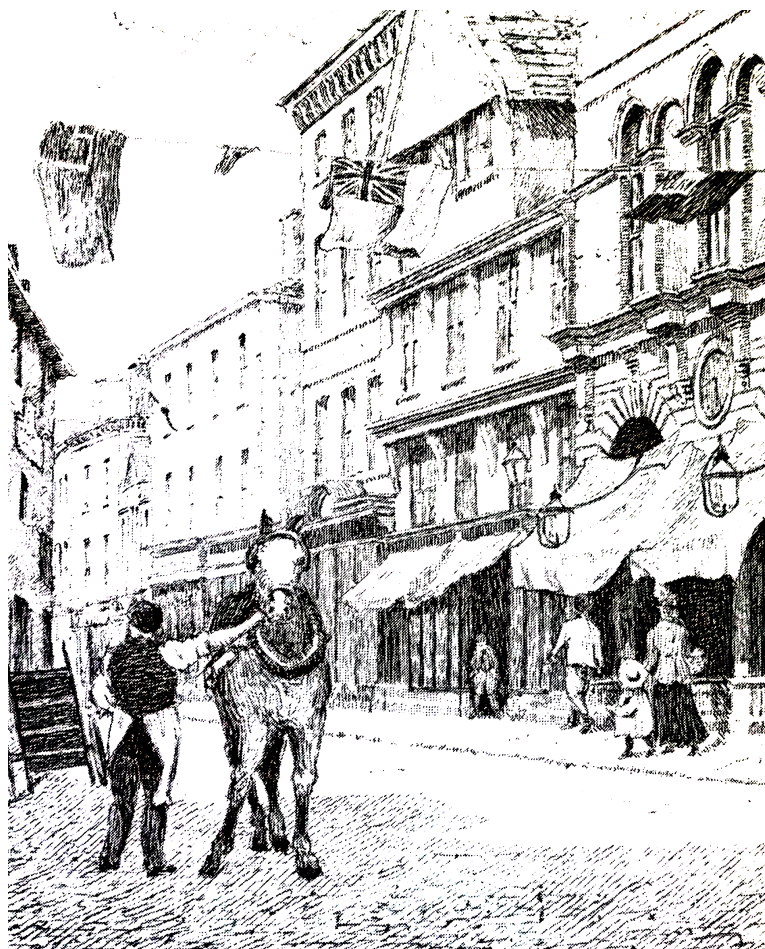


Silver Street



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Wakefield Historical Society welcomes all those interested and curious about the remarkable history of Wakefield and beyond. We encourage research, provide talks, publish books, and are happy to respond to historical enquiries.

Website: www.wakefieldhistoricalsociety.org.uk

The Upper Westgate Heritage Action Zone (HAZ).

Wakefield Council and Historic England are investing nearly £4 million pounds in 2020-2024 to regenerate historic buildings in the Upper Westgate Conservation Area to bring new life and make it flourish again. As their contribution to the project, members of Wakefield Historical Society are researching the buildings and yards and publishing their stories.

Silver Street



Silver Street in 1981, ©Wakefield Libraries Photographic Collection

Silver Street is often described as one of the oldest streets in Wakefield. The name might lead the researcher to believe that this would have been the home of jewellers and silversmiths over the years but it seems that drapery was one of the predominant trades. However, J W Walker informs us that in the seventeenth century, it was known as the leather booths containing the stalls of leather merchants and purveyors of fancy goods and ornaments; the street could have come into being in this way, as a lane allowing access between the booths.

My research has focussed on specific buildings on the north side of Silver Street; No 10 next to the Black Swan, 14 and 16 which share the

large, white square building on the corner of King Street and Numbers 18 and 20, currently owned by Hofmanns.

Number 10 Silver Street

So let's start with No 10, adjacent to the Black Swan. The drawings of Henry Clarke in the late 1800s show a handsome four storey building, much taller than the present two storey one.



We also know what the shop looked like in 1882 from building plans, when John Cutler Athey bought the house and shop and made alterations; it had a central door with 2 large windows and ornate columns either side. He was a linen draper who lived with his sister and niece, a draper's assistant. Shortly after buying the shop, he was the victim of a robbery, with George Henry Carter, a 30-year-old dyer, stealing 5 pairs of stockings and sentenced to 5 years penal servitude for the crime. This seems harsh until a closer look at the prison records show that between 1876 and 1883 this man, who was 5'7" tall

with dark brown hair and a scar on his left shoulder, had been charged 7 times with drunkenness, 5 times with vagrancy, was 3 times a disorderly pauper and had been arrested 6 times for being a rogue and a vagabond.

In 1886, Athey sued George Moody, landlord of the Black Swan next door, for 'Obstruction of Light'. The Wakefield and West Riding Herald

informs us that between 1848 and 1860 the house and shop Athey had bought were lit by four windows. James Loveday, then the tenant of the shop and building, placed boards before one of the windows, thus converting it into a cupboard. In 1885, Athey broke away the temporary boards and had a new window put in the space. Moody then blocked up this window with a board, painted it black and completely obstructed the light. The defence was the window had been effectually blocked up for over 35 years and that non-use for that period was conclusive evidence of abandonment of right. The judge said the whole thing was not worth two pence half penny on either side and that he would take time to consider his decision. So neighbourly disputes are nothing new.

The 1901 census shows draper Henry Brooks living with wife Beatrice and 11 month old daughter Muriel; he is a draper with two draper's apprentices boarding with him and Kate Dutchman, a 20 year old general domestic servant.

By 1911, Henry has moved onto Blenheim Crescent in Wakefield and a 48 year old grocer's manager, Samuel Douthwaite, is living there with his 75 year old mother Martha. Nothing unusual about that. But 48 year old Samuel is married at this point with two children, George and Kathleen; a divorce petition by Samuel in 1914 tells the story of a fractured family. He had been married to his wife Arabella for 30 years, both of them being 51 years of age. Arabella was being sued on the grounds of her adultery with John Cadman, a man she eventually married in 1915 after the divorce was granted. According to newspaper reports, Samuel and his wife had separated in 1908 but following a sighting of his wife with another man in 1912, he and an inquiry agent went to a house in Wakefield Road, Normanton, climbed a ladder, and using an electric torch, were able to see Arabella and John Cadman in the bedroom.

What is unusual is the divorce. Before 1914, divorce was rare; it was considered a scandalous and expensive undertaking, requiring proof

of adultery. In the first decade of the 20th century there was just one divorce for every 450 marriages.

It seems likely that Samuel was manager for H Brown and Sons, grocers, who were at No 10 from 1906 to 1927. No 10 eventually lost its top two storeys in 1944 when the owners, Brook Hardcastle, who sold radio sets and had branches in several northern towns, submitted plans to reduce the height of the building.

Numbers 14 and 16 Silver Street

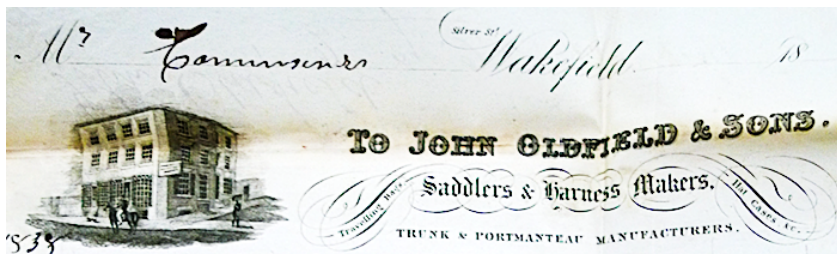
14 and 16 Silver Street occupy the same building on the corner of King Street. In 1911, when the shops were sold along with 18 and 20, Silver Street was considered one of the best shopping streets in Wakefield.

For a considerable number of years around the middle of the 19th century, these two shops were inhabited by John Oldfield and George Binns. The Westgate Paving Committee and Street Commissioners of the time took their roles very seriously and had contacted the owners of the two shops in 1851, advising that the three grates they had put in front of their shops needed to be made less by one foot at least towards the curb stone of the foot pavement as the way they have been placed may be a bad precedent to others who may make similar alterations and who have on former occasions been prevented bringing grates too far from their houses on foot causeways. The state of the roads was also important to them, and around the same time we can see that road sweeping without prior watering was greatly annoying the public and that in future the roads needed to be watered before they were scavenged or swept.



14 and 16 Silver Street today

The Lighting Committee's reports of 1848 show that there were only two lamps on Silver Street, one outside Mr Waller's shop and one outside Jeremiah Dunnill's. Lamplighter Mr Johnson had 67 lamps on this round, one of four rounds covering the whole of Wakefield, a total of 286 lamps.



Bill heading John Oldfield and Sons, saddlers, 1838. *Street Commissioners Voucher book* WWT1/1/15. West Yorkshire Archives

John Oldfield and his sons were saddlers and harness makers, occupying No 14 for over 40 years from at least the 1830s. In 1849, his daughter Elizabeth married John Parker at West Parade Chapel. John Parker was a Town Missionary. According to Kate Taylor, the Town Mission, founded in 1840, *'employed agents whose tasks were to conduct services, visit the working classes to read from the scriptures and to comfort the sick and attend the dying. Women were enlisted in 1841 to raise funds to give to the destitute. The Mission was dependent on subscriptions, donations, legacies and collections at special services held primarily at the Baptist, Independent and Methodist Chapels. The agents held regular services at the workhouse and, it was reported, saved the Poor Law Union the cost of employing a chaplain.'*

In 1862 the 22nd anniversary of the Wakefield Town mission was held in the Music Saloon, Wood Street when 'friends of all denominations were invited to attend'. Tea on the tables at 5 was followed by a public meeting over which William Henry Leatham Esq presided.

The bill heading places John here in 1837 and a closer look reveals interesting details; the small paned bay windows and central doors with steps up to them, the entrance to the yard at the back and the garden adjacent which remained until sometime in the 1850s.



On John's retirement in 1853, a newspaper contained two adverts placed by John's sons, both citing long experience in their father's business. George Oldfield, saddler and harness maker, informed the public that he had succeeded to the shop and business his father had carried on for 30 years, he had experience in some of the finest establishments in London and that he was an agent for the Gutta Percha Company, an English company formed in 1845 to make a variety of products from the recently introduced, easily moulded natural rubber, gutta-percha. Unlike other natural rubbers, this material was thermoplastic, allowing it to be easily moulded. Nothing else like it was available to manufacturing until well into the 20th century when synthetic plastics were developed. Alarminglly, Mr Rogers, a Leeds dental surgeon visited his premises every Friday; gutta-percha was used in early dental work.

Around the corner in the Corn Market, 'opposite to Mr Fennell's, wine merchant', John Oldfield Junior had opened an establishment manufacturing trunks and portmanteaus.

George's son, William H Oldfield, took over the business in 1875; in 1877 he removed to 'more commodious premises, No 10 Silver Street' (two doors above the old premises); the Oldfield family had been in the corner building for 45 years at that time. In the 1881 census, 27-year-old William was an out-of-employment saddler living in Drury Lane with his wife.

The property was unoccupied on the night of the census, 3 April 1881, but a trade directory of the same year lists John Eland and Company, tea dealer, at this address. John is a grocer and provision dealer by 1889, continuing his business from the premises but living in Newstead Road as the Wakefield Express in May 1889 informs us:

'Shopbreaking in Silver Street - Charles Stead (Zetland Street) and John Wroe (Pincheon Street) labourers, were brought up on remand Monday, charged with having feloniously broken into the lock up shop of Mr John Eland, grocer and provision dealer in Silver Street, on the night of the 17th inst. The defendants are young men, and Stead seemed to feel his position acutely. Mr Eland, who lives in Newstead Road, said he was called up on the night of the 17th at 11.45 by Police-constable Thompson. On going to his shop he found that the glass in the fanlight over the back door had been broken but nothing had been disturbed inside. Mr Joseph Taylor, jeweller, Silver Street, whose premises adjoin those of the prosecutor, deposed that at 11.45 he heard a noise in the yard. On its being repeated he got out of bed for the second time, and saw a man standing on a step-ladder at the back door of Mr. Eland's shop. Witness called out "Police!" - whereupon the man on the steps said "Come along." Directly afterwards a second man came from the shop, through the fanlight, and fell into the yard. Both then made good their

escape. Mr Hy Hussey, Barstow Square, deposed that on that night he was waiting for a friend and kept walking up and down from 9.20 to 10.40. During that time he frequently saw the prisoners loitering at and about the premises. Police-constable Pearce proved the apprehension of the prisoners on Sunday. A coat and pair of boots found in the yard were also taken there, and in the presence of each other the prisoner Stead accused Wroe of having broken the glass, and of having induced Stead to enter the premises. Stead's younger brother, John William, proved that the coat belonged to Charles. Committed for 3 months each to prison.'

Ten years later, the shop was occupied by Taylors Drug Stores Limited who were 'pioneers of low prices'. They were lessees. In advertisements redolent of more modern times, they describe themselves as the well-known chemists, patent medicine vendors and perfumers who were the first to give the public in the north of England the benefit of reduced prices for pure drugs and chemicals, homeopathic medicines, sick room and nursery requisites, toilet articles and perfumery etc. The advert goes on to say they have broken down the exorbitant prices of the ordinary chemist and today stand as the first exponents in the drug trade of selling every article they deal in for the lowest possible price for cash. By 1902 they are also describing themselves as Italian warehousemen. They were not averse to free distribution of items to promote their wares; 2000 bottles of Crosby's Balsamic Cough Elixir being given away to the inhabitants of Wakefield and district and a free distribution of Munyan's Paw-Paw pills.

From the time of the first census in 1841, George Green Binns, silk mercer and draper occupied No 16, and lived there with his family for at least 20 years until his death in the 1860s. Mrs Binns also had a business and advertised her French and English millinery rooms alongside her husband's business. The census records show how precarious life could become and after George's death, Mary and eventually her daughters tried to continue the business 'at the old

house in Silver Street, entrance at the side'. In November 1862 they had removed to Teall Street, Borough Market; April of the following year found them moved into the shop in Wood Street, lately occupied by Mr Bagshaw, chemist and by 1867 they had moved again within Wood Street to the house occupied by Mr Holdsworth. Curiously, the 1861 census shows daughter Mary Sarah had married George Rowe, a silver smith, but she is living without mention of him, as a housekeeper with her parents and describing herself as a silversmith's wife, husband abroad. In 1871 she is living with her mother and sister in Back Wood Street, description the same; in 1881 she is living at Fall Ings House with sister Susannah who had married corn factor John Wilson, and by 1891 she is a boarding house keeper in Margaret Street, still no sign of the mysterious husband.

By 1871, Joseph Taylor, mentioned in the above account of the robbery at Mr Eland's shop, had taken over No 16. He was born in Sandal around 1840 and married Hannah Robinson in December 1867 at St Paul's, Alverthorpe and they had a large family. Hannah kept a high-class registry for servants and adverts in 1889 show she required staff such as cook generals, housemaids, a page to sleep at home and a nurse for an invalid lady. Curiously, one of the adverts requested an experienced waiting maid who had to be tall with no fringe.

Joseph's obituary in 1912 records his death in Bournemouth but gives details of his life:

'Death of an Old Tradesman - We regret to announce that the death has taken place, at Bournemouth, during the week, of Mr Joseph Taylor, who for many years was a highly respected tradesman of this city. The late Mr Taylor was apprenticed with his uncle, Joseph Taylor, who had a jeweller's shop at the bottom of Park Street, after which the business was removed to Silver Street. After finishing his apprenticeship, deceased removed to Taunton, where he managed a shop. In 1876, when his uncle retired, Mr Taylor succeeded him, and he carried on the business for a good many years. The deceased was one of the promoters

of the Wakefield Tradesmen's Benevolent Institution, and he acted as its first honorary secretary. He was also president of the Tradesmen's Association in 1885. For many years he was connected with the Parish Church Choir, and afterwards the Cathedral choir, retiring from active service on June 1905. He was also identified with the British Friendly Union, and once acted as secretary. Mr Taylor has not been in the best of health for some years, but all the same his death came as a shock to his many friends in Wakefield.'

The 1891 census shows that Joseph and Hannah are still living and working at 16 Silver Street but just after the turn of the century, Charles Sharp, shop manager, is living there with his wife Florence, followed in 1904 by the similarly named Josiah Tyler, boot and shoe manufacturer. By 1908, Greenlees and Sons, shoe manufacturers, were leasing the shop, continuing until at least 1927.

18 and 20 Silver Street

The drawing of John Oldfield's shop on page 6 shows a garden adjacent where 18 and 20 now stand; maps show the garden was there until sometime in the 1850s.

Between 1881 and 1911 the building housed two shops which were known as 'The Arcade'. At No 20, Harvey Padgett ran his Umbrella Infirmary, the 'oldest established business in the city', making umbrellas and gold mounted walking sticks; Miss Lily Nottingham, ladies' outfitter, inhabited No 18 amongst others over the years.

The shop and adjoining yard were bought by the Hofmann family during the 1930s and David Hofmann remembers the shop containing old light fittings and a spiral staircase leading up to the floor above. The Hofmann family have been in Wakefield since 1897 when Charles,

a butcher, left Halle, a small village near Stuttgart and settled in Wakefield. He opened a small shop near the Opera House but in 1912



the firm moved to 111 Westgate. After Charles' death, his wife Sophia ran the business until son Harry could take over. Harry's two sons John and Frank continued the business, John as a butcher whilst Frank started the bakery side; the business continued to expand and is a familiar name to Wakefield residents.

Sources:

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