

Where have all the Shops Gone?

As London Road Station has changed over the years – buildings demolished, toilets closed, staff cut, and new high-tech systems introduced – so also has the local environment. Cars – a rarity in the 1950s – now line the local streets, bumper to bumper; and many small local shops have simply disappeared, being converted to residential use. (These two are probably related, of course – local shops driven out of business by distant supermarkets which need a car to get to). Some of the shops that do remain have survived by converting to specialist use, with a larger catchment.

Being the main thoroughfare in and out of town, **Preston Road** unsurprisingly had some very impressive shops touting for business among new arrivals. No. 64, at the bottom of Ditchling Rise – where Cannadine’s now is – was once a baker’s, which had clearly pulled out all the stops to announce itself to hungry visitors:



The corner of Ditchling Rise and Preston Road in 1912

When Veronica Smith was a child in the 1950s, there were still four shops in **Springfield Road**, opposite what is now the Open House pub, at nos. 148-154, and she can still remember what they sold, and who ran them. No. 148, on the corner, was Oakley’s grocer’s shop; 150 was “The Cabin”, a sweetshop run by Miss Gander; 152 was a butcher’s run by Mr Fitt; and 154 was Mrs Pettit’s the greengrocer’s (which became a hairdressers in the 1970s). The sweetshop was widely believed to harbour mice; Veronica was told “Don’t buy anything unless it’s wrapped!” Her brother had a Saturday job delivering meat for the butcher, on his bike.

By the 1990s, probably only one shop remained, on the corner; it too soon closed. One of the others – possibly 154 – had motorbikes parked outside it at this time, and the pavement was black with oil. It is not clear, however, whether this was a shop or just the house of a motorbike enthusiast!

Many local residents will remember that the large site at the bottom of **Springfield Road** – now occupied by the three blocks of flats known as Wellend Villas – was once home to the Endeavour Garage. In earlier times the garage was known as Hartley & Midgley, and as well as the “Endeavour” site it also had a shop on the opposite corner (where Expa Market now is). Ironically, as Veronica Smith recalls, Springfield Road itself was almost car-free in the 1950s, with the visiting priest’s car a novelty, to which the local children responded by covering it in leaves (which the priest took in good heart). Even the plumber and the electrician used bikes, with their gear carried in baskets and on the handlebars. But firms like Hartley & Midgley were no doubt doing their best to increase car ownership, then seen as the transport mode of the future.



The junction of Springfield Road and Preston Road in 1960

There were two shops in **Warleigh Road**, at nos. 44 (on the corner of Clyde Road) and 48. Jean Calder remembers that the corner shop (Modern Food Stores) was “crammed to the gunnels” with all sorts of groceries, with very narrow aisles between the shelves; for Elspeth Broady it was “like Dr Who’s Tardis” and even had racks on the ceiling which could be lowered to access the goods they held. “You could get anything in that shop”, she recalls, “from a pint of milk to flower pots and dusters, bread, cat food and even single cigarettes.” It was very heavily used by the local community. Some goods were kept at the back of the shop, and requests for these items had to be relayed from one of the proprietors to the other, often using very colourful language, such as “half a pound of mousetrap” for cheese.

At that time, no. 48 was just a newsagent’s. However, the corner shop suddenly closed in the late 1980s, and reverted to a residential property, when the owners sold

up. There was then some pressure from locals on the one remaining shop to start selling food, which it did. The elderly lady who ran the shop eventually died, and her son, John Hartland, took over. He introduced alcohol sales, and the shop became the Brighton Emporium, with three floors of goods – drink in the basement, food and newspapers on the ground floor and other items, such as stationery, upstairs – much appreciated by the many students and writers living nearby, and accessed by a lovely wrought iron spiral staircase. Elspeth remembers that the shop stocked “an incredible range of wines for a small, independent shop, from very high-end French reds to some of the first organic white wines I remember being readily available.” After John sold it the shop declined, and closed in about 2011.

Jean also remembers a shop towards the top of **Clyde Road**, on the north side, somewhere between Shaftesbury Road and Vere Road. This was probably No. 70 Shaftesbury Road, which is listed in Kelly’s 1956 directory as Sidney Barber, grocer.

Ditchling Rise had at least one shop, on the corner of Winchester Street. Elspeth recalls: “I have a feeling it had been a general grocer’s, but around 1985, it had a brief spell as a small bakery, selling a range of fresh bread. I remember that on Sunday mornings, they would sell warm, buttery croissants - the smell walking past the shop was wonderful”. The shop is now a house, but its frontage is unaltered – it is clearly still, architecturally speaking, a shop.

Jeff Bradley remembers a café at the north-east corner of **Shaftesbury Place**, near the station entrance. This is not listed in the 1956 or 1974 street directories, but there were certainly businesses on this corner at times, including a knitwear manufacturer and auction rooms, and there was a piano tuner at No. 3 (later an aerial rigger).

The parade of around 12 shops on the east side of **Beaconsfield Road**, between Florence Road and Springfield Road, and the four opposite, which constitute the more recently-built **Beaconsfield Parade**, have survived largely intact, although with much change of use. In the 1950s, on the east side there was a little private library, an optician’s, a greengrocer’s, a hairdresser’s and a chemist (Mr Carey). The current delicatessen (Arkwright’s) was an ordinary grocer’s and post office; Sunny Foods was a dairy, as can still be seen emblazoned in its well-preserved stained glass.



Sunny Foods’ stained glass window

Beyond the post office, before the current chemist’s arrived, were Dorothy Crone’s haberdashery shop, which accepted weekly advance payments, and a butcher’s.

Beaconsfield Parade had a Forfar’s bakery shop, a cake shop and another hairdresser’s; Prescription Art, which in recent memory was a piano shop, was previously a second hand shop run by Mr Root. In those days, of course, Beaconsfield Road had much less traffic; most traffic coming into town would have come along Preston Road – both these roads were 2-way – so it would have been easier to get across to the shops on the other side.

Further along **Beaconsfield Road**, between Springfield Road and Ditchling Rise, there was a greengrocer (Audrey’s) where Glow-Zone now is; further along were Brownjohn’s motorcycles and Barclay’s cars; then a shoe shop (which became Travis Perkins’ hire shop); and the main Travis Perkins shop was Bernard Newman, at the front of which Phil Clarke’s Brighton Print Centre had its first home, before moving into the current premises in Preston Road. The shop and yard now occupied by Choice Car Hire was Sankey’s plumber’s merchants. At the end of this little parade of shops, No. 46 was a grocer’s (Sidney Borrer); this later became Basinghall Electrical.

There were also four shops at the **corner of Ditchling Rise and Beaconsfield Road**, where the Shahi Tandoori and the postcard shop are. On the corner was a tropical fish shop (Preston Aquarium), then Roland Typewriters. There was also an optician’s. In 1974, No. 40 was a dogs’ hairdresser’s! Opposite, the Holistic Health Clinic was once Saunders’ newsagents.

Beaconsfield Road had more shops at the Preston Circus end; the photograph below, taken in 1931, shows the west side of Beaconsfield Road and features the “head office, garage and works” of Milner & Casselden Ltd, Motor & General Engineers. This building was clearly later demolished or destroyed, and was replaced by the current Amplifon building. (Note that the next two properties at least – ordinary houses nowadays – also had shops). The houses in Preston Road can be seen in the background.

