

An extract from *The Wonder of Woolies* compiled by Derek Phillips

In the Twickenham store I was occasionally moved across to the biscuit counter, where the biscuits were not sold in packets but weighed out of large tins. One of the most popular tins with the less-well-off families was the one containing broken biscuits.'

Carol Annelay

Woolworth's was not merely a place to shop but an institution which exuded a permanence such that we couldn't imagine life, or a town, without them, a focal point in smaller communities which arguably held town centres together, an anchor which we fondly imagined would always be there.

Ian McGill

Sweets and chocolates were sold in bars and tubes from the flat counter. These included Woolies own brand of chocolate called Melba, which tasted awful. A boiled sweet called Spangles was popular at this time, as were Wagon Wheels which have shrunk considerably over the years. Sherbet dips always sold well, with their liquorice straw inside. Penny and ha'penny sweets were sold loose, such as Trebor chews, flying saucers and gobstoppers. The counter also sold salted peanuts and cashew nuts, hot from a machine, and Smiths crisps which came only in plain flavour with a tiny bit of salt contained in a twist of blue paper loose in the bag.

Jean Croft

One day when I was 14 and working at the Herbert Morris factory in Loughborough, someone came in to tell us that Woolworth's had some soap and combs on sale. We all rushed down in our lunch break and joined the queue; it was about half a mile long. When my turn came the combs had all gone and all they had left was a round block of shaving soap. We used it for ages, as we could not buy soap: some used a fork from the table to comb their hair, not having a comb. Later, I went to work in Woolworth's in the Market Place in Loughborough.

Zena Foster



Outside Woolworth's in Chertsey High Street, London, on New Year's Eve 1945.

Picture: Popperfoto/Getty Images

Didcot Woolworth's was a brilliant place with its own staff canteen. The meals were cooked by Mrs Bishop and were well balanced, just like school dinners with a meat or fish dish, vegetables, potatoes and a pudding. They also cost the same - one shilling. Although I did not keep my first wage slip, I made a note of it: it was £3.8s 5d. Out of this, I gave my parents £1.10s a week towards my keep and spent the rest on records, visits to the cinema or going to Oxford for the day.

Ann McKinley

When I was 14 I became a Saturday morning assistant in Woolworth's in Terminus Road, Eastbourne. I was paid 3s 3d an hour, which was better than the Co-op at 2s 6d an hour, but not as good as Marks and Spencer. I was put on the toy counter and loved it. My counter had a mass of small sections divided by pieces of glass and kept in place by metal clips. Each compartment would have a few bags of marbles, balloons, cars, cowboys, mouth organs, snowstorms or ping-pong balls.

Helen Meyrick

I bought numerous kitchen utensils for my bottom drawer from Woolworth's in Birmingham when I became engaged. I purchased one item every few weeks. These included mixing bowls, a teapot and a frying pan which I still use today more than 70 years later. I got them all for the grand sum of sixpence each: it was a lot of money out of my ten shillings weekly wage, having only 1s 6d pocket money each week.

Olive Wiggett

In Woolworth's you could spend your pocket money on Christmas gifts like bath salts, chocolate liqueurs for 19p, tins of salted peanuts, Cuthberts seeds and the Winfield brand. On holiday or a day out, you always popped into Woolies to see if you could find a different pick 'n' mix or mum could find that plate to match those cups. Then there were Admiral swim shorts, buckets and spades, fizzy pop and cheap sunglasses for the beach. Chasing around in the car with dad to find that extra tin of Cover Plus paint in the same colour from another branch, and buying my first single and LP.

Tim Godfrey

When my mum was 13 years old in 1934, she contracted polio and spent a year in hospital at Bath. After coming home her parents took her to Weymouth on a day trip. It was the very day that Woolworth's opened there, and she bought a pair of china dogs. On Sundays, when I was a small child, I was allowed to hold them, but only while sitting down: at other times they remained in pride of place on top of mum's piano. Mum passed away in 1998, but I still have the china dogs, and treasure them.

Paula Perry

At Christmas or when Southampton Football Club were playing at home, Woolworth's in Above Bar became so crowded that the manager introduced a one-way system, ushering the shoppers through the entrance to shuffle down one side of this long narrow building, and along the bottom past the tea-bar where customers were standing drinking their tea with their cups and plates resting

on a narrow shelf fixed to the wall. They would then be pressed up the far side and out through the front door. A certain amount of unofficial 'price crowding' took place, where a penny or so was added to the authorised selling price. When the district manager paid a visit, there was a scramble to get the prices changed back to the correct amount.

Harold Gilham

This is an extract from *The Wonder of Woolies* compiled by Derek Phillips with a foreword by Paul Atterbury of *BBC Antiques Roadshow*

**Paperback, 200 pages, with 50 black and white and 20 colour photographs. £8.99
ISBN 9780955333453**

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