

Village Echoes

The sad demise of Sizzlers brings to an end a long tradition of butchers in Goudhurst that goes back at least 200 years. Since their sign was removed the name F Southon has been revealed. The late Gladys Townshend recalled in the Millennium Book how Fred Southon had a lock-up butcher's shop at the bottom of Hunts Lane where they made 'really lovely sausages'. She remembered that they had subsequently moved to the High Street. However, Gladys' memory would have only gone back as far as about 1916 as she had been born in 1911. The Southons go back further than that.

The Pigots directory of 1839 lists only two butcher's shops, one being run by Jane Hazelden and the other by William Hazelden, relationship not known. According to the 1841 census William was based in the High Street with his wife and family whilst Jane lived nearby, a widow with four children. The first mention of the Southon name appears in that census when 40 year old Charles Southon lived somewhere in Goudhurst town listed as a butcher. He and his wife Ann had five children. The same census records a fourth butcher's shop run by a Philip Swatland.

Bagshaw's Directory of 1847 still includes William Hazelden, but David has replaced Charles Southon. By the 1851 census Jane Hazelden, now aged 80, had moved to live with her son-in-law, a farmer, in Gills Green. David Southon is still listed in Melville's 1858 directory together with two more shops run by James Mann and Mark Stokes. No details or locations were given but in the 1861 census more was revealed: the Southon shop was on the Plain but, as David was also a farmer with 30 acres, he left the day-to-day business to Charles and his brother William. James Mann, described as a master butcher, had his shop in the High Street. Mark Stokes also had this title, and his shop was next to the Eight Bells pub, which used to be next to the Star and Eagle. In addition, Thomas Blunt now plied his trade as a master poulterer in Hunts Lane, no doubt where Fred Southon eventually moved to.

By 1871 David Southon was the only butcher listed in Goudhurst, still on The Plain, but his farmland had increased to 80 acres. This stayed much the same for several years but as his sons Frank, John and George grew up, they gradually joined their father in the business so that in 1899 the shop name had become Southon and Sons.

By 1901 father David had died, and son John was running the butcher's shop, which had moved to the High Street. Frank was living in Church Road and ran the farm. During the next ten years the Southon butcher's business moved yet again to North Road where David and family now lived. There was a new name in the list of Goudhurst butchers when Edward B Ratcliff and Sons set up in trade on The Plain. In 1895 a third butcher, William Burfield, had come on the scene, moving into premises in the High Street. This business was eventually taken over by his two sons, John and William, to become Burfield Brothers. John Burfield was an active member of the community as honorary secretary of the Goudhurst Hall and Reading Rooms.

The Ratcliffs were a short lived concern and were gone by 1918 when Fred Southon now appeared in North Road as the butcher. This was probably the premises that Gladys Townshend remembered. He doesn't appear in 1922 when an Alfred Williams briefly ran a butcher's shop somewhere in the High Street. However, the Burfields had expanded their empire by moving into fish. John established the new shop in the High Street whilst Burfield Bros moved their butcher's shop to the Plain.

In the 1920s Henry Brown and then Douglas Ford ran the butcher's in North Road, probably as managers, while Fred Southon ran the farm. It wasn't until about 1935 that he returned to the High Street, where he was to stay until his death in 1942.

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