

The Old Spar Shop, Fore Street

In the 1950s and 60s this was Chapman's Shop. Before Mr Chapman owned it the shop belonged to Mitchell and Stephens. They had a millinery shop above in what is now living accommodation.

Ricky & Val Fisher ran it for many years as the Spar Shop and in recently it has been converted into two shops.



Chapman's by James Platt

On the left hand side of Fore Street, just down from Little Hill, Chapman's grocery shop, a remote branch establishment of a Wadebridge based purveyor, occupied the ground floor of an austere looking three-storey building. A sign, "L. Chapman & Sons", jutted slightly out from the building at the first floor level. It was a long sign, the letters running in vertical sequence from top to bottom. Two plate glass windows of passable size on the ground floor shed light onto the activity within the shop, when there was any.

A long marble topped counter stood on each side of Chapman's shop, one to the left and one to the right as you entered. There were at least five shop assistants; three devoted to dispensing the perishables on the left, and the others handling the dried and tinned goods on the right. A large red trimmed bacon slicer stood erect in the centre of the left-hand counter for pending use when there was bacon to cut. My mother was much given to using the expression, "If we had some bacon, we could have some bacon and eggs – if we had some eggs!" Yes, Chapman's had no bananas.

Chapman's sometimes did have fresh eggs for sale but, in their general absence, blue wrapped packages of a yellowish powder known as "dried eggs" could be obtained and made a not acceptable scrambled egg dish. Gulls eggs were a better substitute in season and moorhen's eggs were better yet. However, Chapman's did not sell any of those.

Adjacent to the bacon slicer sometimes stood an enormous cheese with a big block of butter and another of margarine from which tiny portions, exactly equivalent to the amount prescribed as the standard ration, were cut upon presentation of a valid ration book.

In front of the right hand counter, a row of open tins of biscuits leered at hopeful customers. There were "Cream Crackers", "Marie", "Nice", "Rich Tea" and "Digestive" varieties to name a few, and a few is more or less all that they were. The biscuits were sold by the pound in largish paper bags of the kind that made such a satisfying explosion when blown up and burst with a clap of the hands. Broken biscuits cost less than the intact variety. It therefore paid to take your own measure of biscuits from the open tins and break some of them while doing so. A half a biscuit dipped in your tea was just as satisfying as a whole one – and actually soaked up the tea more efficiently.

Jack Provis worked behind the left hand counter, tall and sleek in his dustcoat, the gloss on his hair rivalling the gleam on the static disc blade of the bacon slicer. Jack, a splendid pianist, had worked for a while for the NAAFI, where his great talent had been in huge, popular demand. He became a master organist at St Peter's Church after the war and played regularly at services for many years. It was worth going to Church just to hear his renditions of "Jesu, joy of man's desiring" or "I know that my Redeemer liveth".



Handing over the weekly rations in the 1940s - Joan Honey (now Murray) hands Mrs Crockford (a 'dear little lady' who lived up Church Hill) her weekly rations. Looking on Veronica Keat, Albany Rickard and Reg Gorman

However, Jack's "tour de force" on the organ was the "Trumpet Voluntary". I doubt that this classic was ever played anywhere more stirringly, more triumphantly, or with more raise-the-roof power than it was by Jack Provis in his prime.

Chapman's was managed by a gentleman named Mr Hillman who was nothing if not an unabashed extrovert. He lived on Trewetha Lane, a few houses up from the Temperance Hall. Mr Hillman certainly had a Christian name but I never heard it invoked. He was most dapper in his craftily cut suit or blazer, with slick hair on which the comb strokes lay like plough lines across a well-trimmed lawn. He evinced a graceful economy of movement and had an insistent manner of speaking in a mildly off-cockney accent that tended to get under your fingernails and which might have placed him dangerously close to being typed as a spiv in a more sophisticated part of the country. You could see him in Arthur English's famous radio persona, the "Prince of the Wide Boys", although on reflection there was also a leavening of Uriah Heep in his character.

Irrespective of a tendency to unctuousness, Mr Hillman was a dynamic organiser whose agreeable manner and community spirit were always absolutely to the fore. His most celebrated role was that of a regular public performance MC, at which he truly excelled. Mr Hillman's compering of talent contests and charity concerts, in both the Temperance Hall and the Church Rooms, were masterpieces of the man rising above the quality of the material. Mr Hillman's party piece was to divide his invariably capacity audiences into two groups, separated by the aisle. The group on one side of the aisle would be charged with singing "It's a long way to Tipperary", while their counterparts had to sing "Pack up your troubles in your old kit bag". The winning side drowned out the loser with the power of its choral might. It sometimes made for better entertainment than did the competing talent, about which the kindest thing to be said was that was a fortunate thing that misrepresentation was not a crime.