

Bray Bakery (Bannon's Jewellers) 15 & 16 Main Street, Bray

A distinctive two-storey building consisting of two shops at the junction of Florence Road near the centre of Main Street. The first-floor facade at the front finished in yellow brick with three bands of brick picked out in black, while the side of the building is finished in plain render. The decorative details which survive include brick corbels under the eaves and a moulded cornice and coigns at the side of the building. A large window at the Florence Road side is a more recent addition. A plaque high up on the gable at the corner with Florence Road carries the date 1903, commemorating the opening up and completion of the road from Florence Road on to Main Street. This involved the demolition of two shops, Nos. 13 & 14, along with several run-down cottages behind them, for which compensation was paid to the occupants (see a previous post for the tragic upshot). Of the two shops, No. 15 was a stationers and tobacconists, which in the 1890's was being run by Thomas J. McCann. He was leasing it from Thomas Allen who, with his brother Patrick, ran a well-established bakery and confectionary business next door at No. 15, known as the Bray Bakery. One measure of the success of the business was that Bray Bakery under Thomas Allen was selected to fulfil a contract to deliver loaves of bread to every poor family in the town of Bray to celebrate the Queen's Jubilee, paid for by a Mansion House committee. The bread vans belonging to the bakery were kept in sheds at the rear of the premises on a site belonging to John Fanning of Florence Road. New car sheds were built there in 1902. The stationery and tobacco shop at No. 15 was listed as vacant in 1901 but it was taken over by George Wilde not long after that, and subsequently he and family ran it for many years.

Both Nos. 15 & 16 were on land which had been leased by Thomas Allen from Henry Whitton, a farmer and contractor who lived at Rathdown House, Windgates. The Whittons, tenants of Mr Morris at Windgates House, were not wealthy farmers, but Henry Whitton did have long-standing contracts with the local authority for the repair of roads. In addition to his interests in the shop next door, Thomas Allen also held a field at the rear of shops and a few small cottages belonging to the Rev. Robert Humphreys, which he sublet. Rev. Humphreys was the Dean of Killaloe and Rector of Nenagh and lived at Tulla Rectory, Co. Clare. A graduate of TCD, in 1852 he married Sophia Anne, fourth daughter the late Robert Christie, and as a result had acquired a lot of property off Main St, much of it run down. In 1891 he was granted an order of possession against Thomas Allen, Edward Clifden and Wm Redmond for some of these properties on Main Street. In 1902 Thomas Allen was leasing three small cottages to Mary Bernes, Wm. Redmond and Wm. Kinsella on Crutchley's Lane, which belonged to Rev. Humphreys. There was a minor scandal in the same year when it was discovered that the Dean had applied for a public licence for a disused premises at No. 52 Main St. A representative from the Temperance Society in Dublin was sent out to challenge the application, during which it was stated that there were already plenty of pubs in the area, with an estimate

of 30 in the town being offered. In his defence, Rev. Humphreys successfully argued that he was merely acting on behalf of his co-owners, Anna Sophia King, Edith Elizabeth King and Elizabeth Jane Murphy, and that the application for a transfer was simply for the purpose of keeping the licence live with no intention or reopening the publichouse at that time. In 1904 it was reported John Plunkett, Town Commissioner and building contractor, was putting some of the derelict property owned by Rev Humphreys in order.

In the early 1900's. Thomas Allen was living over the shop at No.16 with his wife, five children, his brother Patrick, and three young female boarders, who were probably working in the bakery and confectionary shop. Joseph Allen, a brother, died at Shamrock Cottage on Main Street in 1907, and was buried at St. Peter's cemetery in Little Bray. In 1911 Thomas and family were still living at Main Street but he appears to have purchased Vevay House (Sunbeam) shortly before his death (his executor arranged for a transfer of a licence from there to a Mrs McCall of Main Street). He died suddenly in 1915 shortly before Christmas day. According to his obituary he was "one of the most respected merchants in the town". He was said to be "a broad-minded, generous-hearted gentleman, (who) took a great interest in all pertaining to the good of his fellow-townsmen and had by his ability and energy built up a lucrative and flourishing confectionary and bakery trade". The funeral took place on Christmas Day to St. Peter's cemetery. Predeceased by his wife, the chief mourners were his sons, Thomas, John & James, John and Frank Byrne, John Heffernan, James McSweeney, Patrick Atkins (nephews) , and James McSweeney (brother-in-law) and James McSweeney.

Some other members of the Allen family operated the well-known Allen's Menswear shop located at No. 100 on the other end of Main Street. That closed in 2018 after trading for over a hundred years. The former bakery and confectionery shop were used as an auctioneer's premises and as a branch of the First National Building Society late in the twentieth century. In 2003, the firm of Bannon Jewellers, established in Talbot Street in 1942, moved in and continue to trade successfully at No. 15, with another branch being opened more recently at the Frascati Centre, Blackrock .The adjoining premises is in use as a cafe.

Source. Goodge Street View; Norman Ashe Aerial Photography; contemporary newspapers. This post first appeared in the Victorian Bray Facebook page in November 2024