

Alexander Findlater & Co., Nos 17 & 8 Main St, Bray, Co. Wicklow

A photograph of the Main Street by Fergus O'Connor in the National Library of Ireland dating from about 1910 shows, in the lefthand corner, the sign and canopy for the premises of Alexander Findlater & Co. at No. 17, a couple off door up from the newly opened junction with Florence Road. The Findlater's grocery chain had at one time 20 medium to large grocery shops, and this was the only shop located outside of Co. Dublin.

Alexander Findlater

The founder of the business, Alexander Findlater, was one several Scottish Presbyterian merchants and businessmen who came over to Ireland to seek their fortunes in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Among those to make a major contribution to the commercial life of the city were John Jameson, Thomas Heiton, William Todd, Gilbert Burns, Archibald Murray, John Dunlop and the publisher Alexander Thom. Arriving in Dublin in 1823, Alexander Findlater rapidly built up a profitable wine, tea and beer business, and through a network of partnerships formed several successful companies. In 1850 he expanded into the London market, establishing the firm of Findlater Mackie and Company in Wellington Street, the Strand. Two years later, capitalising on the success of exporting porter to America, he established a brewery in North Dublin.

John Findlater

Following Alexander's death in 1873, his nephew John expanded the business, opening numerous food and wine stores in the city and suburbs and establishing a headquarters, stores and bottling plant on Upper O'Connell Street. In 1889 he brought together the bakers Mooney and O'Brien to form the Johnston, Mooney and O'Brien company, of which he was the chairman. Around 1900, three hotels, the Royal Hotel in Bray, along with the Royal Hotel and the St Lawrence in Howth, were acquired by the company, but they did not hold on to them for very long before selling them on.

The Findlaters in Bray

Alexander was noted as a generous philanthropist and largely funded the impressive 'Findlater's Church' at Parnell Square, Dublin. Among his other donations was a substantial contribution towards the building of St Andrews Presbyterian Church at Bray. With William Todd, he erected a small number of terraced houses on the Esplanade at Bray during the 1860's, designed by a Scottish architect Duncan Fergus and constructed by a builder named Potts. Having briefly owned the Royal Hotel, the company added the Bray shop with café at No.17 Main Street in 1901. The Main Street premises had previously been owned by Thomas Edward Gordon, a druggist and general merchant, and in Aug 1901 the Wicklow Newsletter reported that: "Mr Thomas Gordon

has severed his connection finally and completely with Messrs Findlater and left the Main Street house, which is now occupied by that firm". The manager of the new shop was a Mr Kelly. In 1908 thieves managed to break in and steal a large amount of stock to the value of £40, including numerous bottles of Jameson whiskey, quality hams and other luxury fare. The culprits were quickly traced to a house nearby and much of the whiskey was found buried in a field to the rear of the shop.

New Shop at No.8 & Closure of the Business in 1968

In 1929 the shop moved to a new premises, Weirs,(formerly run by Ralph Valentine), further down the street at No.8. An advertisement was published "To notify our customers and the public generally that we have taken over from our friends Messrs. James Weir & Co. Ltd., 8 Main St., Bray, their branch establishment at that address, together with their book debts and good-will in the business, and that the same in future will be worked under our name". The firm remained at this location until 1968 when, in the face of growing competition from supermarkets and other outlets, it was decided to get out of the business and close all the shops. A Dublin retail wine business was late re-established trading as the Findlater Wine & Spirit Group and was acquired by Cantrell and Cochrane in 2001. The original shop front at No. 17 was demolished many years ago and a shoe shop (McCabes) went in there. The exterior of the upper floors of No.8 (Game Stop), which features classically inspired mouldings on some the window frames, is largely intact, though the shopfront itself has been replaced with a modern signboard and steel roller shutters.

Sources Findlaters

Alex Findlater (2001) *The Story of a Dublin Merchant Family (1774–2001)*

Phoot Fergus O'Connor [Holdings: \[Main Street, Bray, Co. Wicklow\] :: Library Catalog](#)