

Harris business at 97 High Street

Our earliest records show that the property, now 97 High Street, was owned by Richard Sheen, a baker.

In 1740 he married Elizabeth Sadler of Garsington.

On 21st Feb. 1764 a settlement was made on the marriage of his daughter, Elizabeth, to James Morrell, a lawyer in Oxford. The agreement was between Richard Sheen, baker, Jeremiah Morrell, maltster, James Morrell, gentleman, Joseph Sadler, gentleman.

Elizabeth died in childbirth the following year, aged 23. There is a plaque to her memory in Garsington church.

Richard Sheen's will dated 26.5.1797. states ~ "I desire to be buried in Cuddesdon Churchyard in decent manner as near as may be to my late father and mother....and that two upright grave stones may be put up and a flat one over my grave even with the surface of the ground. And from after the decease of my wife all land....to James Morrell.... land now in the occupation of John Mott.. ..and ten pounds to the poor of Wheatley." Richard Sheen had died by March 1799.

By 18 August 1799 James Morrell had inherited the property.

On 28th September 1799 the house was let to Noah Crook, fellmonger, and Joseph Holliday, innkeeper.

By 1819 Noah Crook, now a parchment maker and fellmonger, had bought the property. On the 17th April 1819 he sold to Fanny Busby, a widow with four children. Their father had died "intestate".

By 25 July 1823 Fanny Busby was dead. Her eldest son, William was trading as a butcher in Headington. He and Noah Crook sold to James Welford, a baker, from Brill.

On 21st June 1847 the property was sold for £257.14.6d to Isaac Elderfield, corndealer, of Wheatley and John Smith a surgeon.

On 16th May 1849 Ambrose Smith paid £240 for "all messuage or tenement in Wheatley with the Bakehouse, Washhouse, Bam, Stable, Yard, Garden and appurtenances."

The following year 15 June 1850 William Hale, gentleman, and John Hester, gentleman, of Oxford paid £216.

On 25 July 1859 William Hale now an accountant in Summertown sold to William Clarke Shrimpton and George Shrimpton Junior from Tetsworth, partners in a Grocers and Drapers business. They took out a mortgage with the Oxford and Abingdon Permanent Benefit Building Society. On 4 December 1863 the Shrimptons signed documents agreeing to buy a piece of land from William Brandon, stonemason, and George Brandon, labourer. They paid £3.15.0d for "part of the garden of W. and G. Brandon -- now divided by a wall. Lying on the left or northside of the High Street and having a frontage next to the street of 17 feet 3 inches or thereabouts". Finally, on 20 October 1874 Joshua Harris, grocer, paid £280 to buy the Grocers and Drapers business from George Shrimpton Junior, Wheatley and W. Shrimpton, by now in Chipping Norton. Joshua Harris raised money to secure the business by taking out a mortgage with the Oxford and Abingdon Building Society in 1874. In 1885 he secured a further mortgage with the London and County Banking Company.

There is plenty of evidence to show that trade was thriving and Mr Harris' talents seem to have been many and various. He was also a staunch member of the Congregational Church and many of the artefacts found in the house relate to church matters and music.

Charles Henry, one of the Harris' son's returned from Birmingham to run the business in Great Milton (see the letter dated Aug. 16th 1913).

Joshua Harris died on 20th August 1917. At the time of his death he owned a "house, shop and premises in Wheatley, house, shop and premises in Great Milton, two cottages and gardens in Littleworth and a cottage and gardens in Horspath". Louisa, his wife, who had clearly had a great deal to do with the business, set about continuing it.

On 20th Oct. 1919 an agreement was drawn up between Louisa Harris and her son Allen Gilbert and later in the same year she "retired from business and handed over to her son Gilbert the whole stock of trade fixtures and fittings, horses, carriages, goods, chattels and effects". Louisa died in 1931 aged 84.

Gilbert Harris continued to run Harris' Stores until 1952, when it was sold to Ernest William Eldred, also a grocer and draper.

The business appears to have been sold to Allied Land and Blanchley Properties in 1966. It was then leased to J. C. Kelly. The land began to be divided up and parts sold off. Barclay's Bank appeared. John and Battershell had bought both 95 and 97 High Street in 1971. 95 was then sold on to become a taxi business and is now Alfred Truman's.

In 1991 the O'Sullivan family bought 97, little knowing how much of the past would be unearthed