

**A HISTORY OF THE SMALLWOOD FAMILY
BAKERY BUSINESS IN CHELSEFIELD VILLAGE**

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(nee Smallwood)**

**Plus additional detailed information and inspiration
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The history of the Smallwood family bakery business in Chelsfield Village spans a period of 70 years. Throughout that time the bakery with its shop and daily deliveries was an integral part of life in the Village and far beyond into the surrounding areas. Even into the 1950s residents used local shops and availed themselves of house to house deliveries of basic provisions. The Smallwood bakery was one of the foremost by providing daily supplies of bakery products over a period of 70 years.

The Smallwood bakery business was founded by Mr. Thomas Smallwood in 1882. (Mr. Thomas Smallwood Snr. was Betty Smallwood's Grandfather). It was located at Crosshall in Chelsfield Village and from that premises bakery products were sold and also delivered to the surrounding areas.

There was also a second bakery running in Chelsfield Village at that time which was located at premises nearby which are now private houses called "The Old Bakery" and "Courtyard House". This second bakery was known as The Climax Bakery and was owned and run by Mr. Horace Groom and his wife. Thus two bakeries were successfully operating in Chelsfield Village at the same time.

In due course Mr. Thomas Smallwood's son - also called Tom Smallwood - developed a baking business with his wife (Nell) at Faversham in Kent and this ran most successfully there for many years. The time came when Mr. Horace Groom decided to give up his baking business following the death of his wife and at this point Tom Smallwood decided to take over the Groom's bakery premises and he moved his business from Faversham to Chelsfield Village. The name "Climax Bakery" was retained by Tom Smallwood when he transferred to Chelsfield.

For a while the two Smallwood family bakeries ran alongside each other and did so until 1933 when Mr. Thomas Smallwood decided to retire. Subsequent to this it was decided to merge the two bakery operations in Chelsfield Village onto one site at the premises nowadays known as "The Old Bakery" and "Courtyard House" (two private dwellings).

In the earliest period of the Smallwood bakery business at Crosshall the premises consisted of the bakery itself with the ovens etc. plus private living accommodation attached for Mr. Thomas Smallwood and his family. The bakery also had a shop facility for selling produce directly from the premises. Betty Smallwood recalls that customers did not actually enter a shop area as such but were served at a counter with the various wares being brought there from the area behind where they were stored. The top half of the counter had a door which could be pushed open by the customer and at the same time a bell rang inside the shop which summoned staff to the counter for service. There was a display window for the bakery products which still looks much the same today although, of course, Crosshall is now a private house.

As well as sales direct from the Crosshall premises the bakery produce was delivered six days a week to a wide area around Chelsfield Village. The areas encompassed included Well Hill and Park Gate, Pratts Bottom, Halstead, Green Street Green and Chelsfield Lane with no delivery charge ever levied on the customer.

For many years the bakery produce from Crosshall was delivered using a horse and cart as the mode of transport. At that time Mr. Thomas Smallwood owned the field at the rear of Crosshall where the horses were grazed and kept in stables which were built there. Deliveries were made throughout the year and in all weather conditions no matter how difficult that might have been. In particular, Betty Smallwood recalls the extremely heavy snowfall of 1926 when deliveries had to be made using pack horses to carry bread to the local villages and outlying dwellings. The usual horse and cart transport would never have got through the lanes which were almost completely blocked by deep snow which reached the level of the top of the hedgerows in that memorable winter.

In later years at Crosshall the horse drawn transport of the bakery produce was replaced by motorised means such as a van or lorry. However, in conditions of extreme snowfall or icy lanes the delivery of bread etc. must have been just as difficult and unpleasant as in earlier times but customers' needs were always met somehow. Over the long period of its operation the Smallwood name was held in very high regard and no wonder when customers were never left short of supplies no matter how adverse the conditions week by week.

After the retirement of Mr. Thomas Smallwood in 1933 it was decided in due course to move the Crosshall bakery business onto the site already being used by Tom Smallwood and combine into one baking facility.

As already mentioned this site is now occupied by two private dwellings called "The Old Bakery" and "Courtyard House".

"Courtyard House" was indeed a Courtyard at ground level with the floor area above being the flour store at the Bakery. The sacks of flour were delivered by lorry - the vehicle backed into the Courtyard and the sacks were unloaded by hand. Each sack was carried (on a man's back) up wooden stairs at the rear of the Courtyard to the flour store above. The sacks, of course, were huge and must have been immensely heavy - especially towards the end of each delivery! The floor of the store must also have been very strong indeed to support such a huge weight of sacks. I have heard it mentioned that a four inch thickness of timber was used in the flooring which I can imagine could well have been the case with such a weight to support.

The premises now called "The Old Bakery" did indeed contain the baking ovens and the preparation and storage area for the large range of bakery products. At the front of the building there was also a shop area with a counter and display shelves. Customers could call in and purchase the bakery produce fresh from the ovens and indeed there was a brisk, regular trade from the Village area and beyond.

As at Crosshall there were also daily deliveries of produce to the wider Chelsfield area which in those later times was undertaken using van or lorry transport. Bobby Hogben remembers working at the Bakery as a boy on Saturdays undertaking deliveries with the van alongside Jim Smallwood (Tom Smallwood's brother). The day involved an early start but it finished around 2.00 p.m. with a reward of 2s 6d for the help given. Bobby recalls that getting back at around 2.00 p.m. enabled him to catch the 477 bus to Orpington to go to the cinema or "pictures" using his hard-earned cash! Half a crown went a long way in those days; I remember that even in the late 1950s I would get 2s 6d for helping my Grandparents (Mr. and Mrs. Parkes) in their garden every Saturday morning. It was a good reward then but probably sounds a meagre one now if you do not happen to be able to recall that period in Chelsfield.

The premises at "The Old Bakery" also contained a small teashop in the front of the building as well as the shop counter. Access was by the same door as for the shop counter with two or three sets of tables and chairs set out for use by the visitors. Tea or coffee was available as well as the large range of produce to go with your beverage fresh from the baking oven. An elderly friend used to drive the 477 buses into Chelsfield Village at that time and he clearly recalls being able to call at the Smallwood teashop for refreshment during his stopping-off break. The teashop was also a regular "port of call" for hikers or cyclists passing through the Village on a day out. Betty Smallwood recalls that larger parties of visitors were also catered for by using the lawn area in the back garden at the rear of the bakery premises. It was here that trestle tables and chairs could be set out and all needs by way of refreshments could be supplied - e.g. teas for parties of hikers etc. I have long felt that this is a facility sorely missed in present times when it is impossible for visitors passing through the Village to obtain so much as a cup of tea let alone fresh baked cake or a pastry to go with it! It is not surprising that on warm, summer days Betty Smallwood and her family were kept busy with such business - especially on Saturdays.

The Smallwood bakery produced a large range of items to suit everyone's needs and tastes. This included loaves of bread of various sizes and shapes (e.g. cottage, bloomer, tin, batch, Hovis etc.), rolls of different sizes and types, pastries, buns, fancy cakes, sponge or fruit cakes, fruit pies etc. Betty Smallwood recalls that a large cottage loaf was sold for 2d (old pennies, of course) in the shop at that period. Also hot cross buns were 14 for one shilling (under 1d each). This brings to mind the rhyme "hot cross buns, one-a-penny, two-a-penny".

Much larger cakes were made to order for the local community and these included Wedding Cakes which were expertly decorated by Tom Smallwood himself. Indeed the cake for my parents' wedding in 1947 was produced by Tom Smallwood in his bakery. No doubt many other residents will be able to say the same when reminded of Tom's wonderful skills at decorating cakes.

Another example of Tom Smallwood's baking skills which must certainly be mentioned came to the fore at the time of the Harvest Festival Services at St. Martin's Church. Tom always produced a loaf of bread in the form of a sheaf of corn which was placed at the altar and greatly admired and appreciated by the congregation each year.

There is one other bakery product for which Tom Smallwood is still associated - namely his wonderful meat pies! Even now people remember them with affection and relish as they were so delicious. When they were sold at the Five Bells one person would have one and then his companions would rapidly follow as they looked and smelt so desirable! Once eaten you would want to have one another day. Betty Smallwood still remembers how popular and famous her father's meat pies became. A large tray of these steak and kidney pies would be delivered over to the Five Bells every day as they were so popular and sought after there as well as at the Bakery Shop itself. They were sold at 3d each (old pennies, of course) and being so large and well filled they made a good hot meal in themselves. The meat for the pies was supplied daily by Charlie and Rose Strout who were one of the main suppliers of meat to residents of Chelsfield Village and far afield at that time. Betty recalls that their neighbour Miss Verells was ill at one period and Mrs. Nell Smallwood (Betty's mother) used to prepare beef tea (from the meat for the pies) to help Miss Verells in her recovery.

At this point I would like to include a mention of the family members and local residents who worked in the Smallwood bakery business over its long and distinguished existence in Chelsfield Village. It may well be the case that older readers who remember this era in Chelsfield will be able to recall other folks at the bakery as well.

First of all there was Mr. Thomas Smallwood and his wife Mrs. Annie Smallwood

who founded the Smallwood Bakery at Crosshall in 1882

Then there was Mr. Tom Smallwood (Thomas and Annie's Son) and his wife Mrs. Nell Smallwood

Also there was Mr. Jim Smallwood (Thomas and Annie's Son) and his wife Mrs. Phyllis Smallwood

Jim Smallwood and his wife had two children - Patricia and Roger

Jim Smallwood and his wife first lived at "Wyche Way" (next door to "Cross House") and then later moved to "June Cottage" next door to "The Old Bakery". Jim worked inside the Bakery and also undertook deliveries of bakery produce in the wide area around Chelsfield Village.

Jim was profoundly deaf following service in the First World War.

Also there was Rose Smallwood (Thomas and Annie's Daughter)
Rose worked in the Shop at the Bakery and lived at the Bakery

Also there was Nancy Smallwood (Thomas and Annie's Daughter)

Also there was Nell Smallwood (Thomas and Annie's Daughter)

The Smallwood Family (contd.)

Then there was Betty Smallwood (now Betty Owen) - Tom and Nell's
Daughter

Betty worked both in the Bakery plus the Shop and Tea Room

Also there was Rosemary Smallwood - Tom and Nell's Daughter

Rosemary worked both in the Bakery and the Shop business

Rosemary married Fred Smith from Crosshall - a friend from
childhood

Rosemary now lives in Australia but still takes a very keen
interest in all news and activities in Chelsfield and its
residents.

Also there was Tommy Martin - Annie Smallwood's Brother

Tommy Martin lived at No. 4 Rock Cottages and worked in the
Bakery at Crosshall.

Tommy's work in the Bakery at Crosshall involved starting
very late at night and/or very early in the morning; whilst
walking across the road to the Bakery on one of these occasions
Tommy was stopped by a policeman who was suspicious about him
being out and about at such a time of day (or night!).

Also there was Eddie White - who married Alice Mills from
the Five Bells Pub

Eddie White worked at "The Old Bakery" as one of the bakery
operatives at that premises.

Also there was Lily Owen who worked at "The Old Bakery"
during the wartime period.

A particularly difficult period in the history of the Smallwood
bakery business was during the 1939/45 War and no doubt also during
the 1914/18 War.

The wartime hostilities during the 1939/45 period gave rise to
severe shortages in the vital ingredients used in the baking
process - particularly flour and yeast but also sugar etc. All
supplies to the Bakery were strictly controlled and monitored by
Inspectors with a requirement for meticulous record-keeping by the
Smallwood Bakery.

Conversely, customers were strictly rationed in terms of the
amount of bread etc. able to be purchased which again added to the
amount of record-keeping necessary at the Bakery.

This situation had to be endured not only during the 5/6 years of the War but also for a number of years after the end of the hostilities. The constant worry arising from obtaining supplies and dealing with the sales on a ration basis took a great toll on Mrs. Nell Smallwood in particular. Sadly, Mrs. Smallwood's health deteriorated with the need for constant nursing care over a long period.

The closure of the Smallwood Bakery in Chelsfield Village took place in 1952.

After such an enduring and distinguished presence in Chelsfield Village closure came as a cause of very great regret to many customers over the wide area around the Village. I am sure that the Smallwood Family felt the same way after 70 years of successful baking and distribution of produce to generations of Chelsfield families.

The bread from the Smallwood Bakery was always hand made and baked in the traditional ovens fired by either wood or later coke (I stand to be corrected on the latter points by more knowledgeable readers!). Today I am sure that the Smallwood loaves would be snapped up by customers keen to enjoy real bread and not the tasteless cardboard from some of the modern outlets calling themselves bakeries.

However, events over the years have led us all down another path and we can now only be grateful for all that has gone before. I do hope that although the Smallwood Bakery Business in Chelsfield Village has disappeared now this effort will have enabled such a distinguished history to live on for the future.