



THE Living **M**emory **A**ssociation **NEWSLETTER**

THELMA says, ‘The Wonder of Woolies!’



I worked for F. W. Woolworths for 22 years in a number of different stores in the north of England and in central Scotland. In Edinburgh I was assistant manager at Princes Street Woolworths. It was on a prime site and each floor could be jam-packed with customers, especially getting toward Christmas. There was one Manager, one Deputy, four or five Assistant Managers, as well as the Cafe Manager, (all men in those days) and as many as fifty counter assistants (all women and girls then), plus several staff supervisors, office staff, stockroom staff and cleaners. There were tunnels that went from Woolworths’ basement underneath Princes Street to the Waverley Station and the North British Hotel. We used them for storing boxes of crockery and glassware, as that was not affected by cold and damp. That would be in the mid-1950s. **Says Don Whitfield**

I used to take the cash takings to the National Provincial Bank in George Street. I went out the back door into the back lane where the goods lift was. Lorries and vans brought stock there and the stockroom was in the basement. The cash was in thick canvas bags, like small sacks and they were extremely heavy, full of copper (pennies and ha’pennies) and silver (3d, 6d, 1/-, 2/-, half-crowns) More than one trip a day would be made to the bank. **Says Don Whitfield**





3rd Leith Cubs at the back of Woolies in Laurie Street.



The Leith Woolworths was just round the corner from the Gaiety Theatre in the Kirkgate and we used to get the actors coming in to buy their stage make-up from our cosmetics department. I remember once the supervisor rushing into the office to tell me there was an unsavoury character loitering round the hosiery department and the girl on the counter had spotted him swiping a whole display of nylon stockings into the inside of his raincoat. I went off in pursuit but he was out the door and across the road in a flash. I grabbed his coat and packets of nylons scattered everywhere on the pavement. I shouted to the policeman on points duty at the Foot of the Walk to come and lend me a hand but he couldn't leave his traffic directing post. "You seem to be managing all right," he shouted back, as I rugby-tackled the shoplifter to the ground to the cheers of spectators that had gathered. **Says Don Whitfield**

The pick'n'mix, the makeup counters, and the great record counter, bought my last one there in the early 1970s. A Kate Bush album. **Says Lindsey Reid**



Woolies in the Kirkgate didnae have a restaurant like the one in Princes Street, but it was good for records. It was only 50 pence for an LP. **Says Stan Eadie**

Embassy records was Woolworth's own brand. Woolworth would use sound-alike artists to create cheap alternative versions of hit songs.





I remember spending my pocket money in Woolies on a Saturday and being mesmerised by all the wonderful things they had. Always a colourful collection of nail varnish, clip on earrings and pick'n'mix. **Says Irene Penman**

Woolies was famous for its pick'n'mix. I can remember stuffing a few in my pockets on a Saturday. I would be 8 or maybe 9 years old. Fortunately, it didn't lead to a life of crime! **Says John Cockburn.**

Upstairs in spring the counters were portioned and filled with loose flower bulbs and other gardening stuff, can still remember the smell! In winter the same counters were again used for bulbs but this time the conical screw in fairy light ones. It was like pick'n'mix for lights, each colour poured loose into their separate section. That was back early 60s when if one bulb failed the whole string failed, so spares were essential. **Says Steven Ritch**

When I worked at Dalry Road, things could get quite lively on the Saturdays when the football crowds were streaming down from Gorgie. It was sometimes easier to avoid trouble by informing customers who were already in the store that the doors would be closing for a quarter hour till the street was quiet again. Once a fan who had had a few too many did come in and started to create a ruckus. When I asked him politely to leave, he threw a punch at me. My counter staff were all women and fiercely loyal. One of them had been sweeping up something that had spilled and she charged him with her broom, shrieking, "Don't you hit my manager!" He turned tail and beat a hasty retreat! **Says Don Whitfield**



I remember in the late 50s, early 60s the dolls and monkeys hanging in cellophane bags from a rail above the toy counter. Got my first life size baby doll there, I was about six. **Says Lindsey Reid**

When I was fourteen I worked in Woolworths in Cupar in Fife on a Saturday afternoon for eight shillings (8/- for four hours' work), then all day Saturday when I was aged fifteen for sixteen shillings (16/-, minus 3d for a stamp) and later in the school holidays too. Mostly I worked on the sweetie counter and I remember we had a unit containing salted nuts that were heated under a light-bulb. We had to serve them with a scoop into greaseproof bags. Hot salted peanuts cost sixpence a quarter and hot salted cashew nuts cost two and sixpence (2/6 – half a crown) Even today I consider cashew nuts to be the height of luxury! **Says Evelyn Whitfield**



When I was sixteen, a new dashing young manager came to run the store. The first time he came round to introduce himself to the Saturday staff, he arrived at the sweetie department just as I was getting a box of chocolate drops to replenish the display. It was quite a heavy box but made out of flimsy cardboard and, in my fluster to stand up and present myself in the best light, the box wobbled, I lost my coordination and the entire contents of chocolate drops spilled out at the manager's feet. I was mortified but he good-naturedly said he would give me five minutes to tidy up and come back later to say hello. Despite that inauspicious start, dear reader, we later found we had more in common than spilt sweets and have been married for fifty-eight years. **Says Evelyn Whitfield**



Macaroni cheese in a cafeteria booth on the second floor with my mum. They had a great food department on the first floor. I got my first passport photos done in the kiosk under the stairs where the key cutters was. I bought my first makeup in Woolies, eyeliner! **Says Susan Bird**

The Wee Museum of Memory Ocean Terminal next to Royal Yacht Britannia
We are Open to visitors! www.livingmemory.org.uk

Do you have memories, stories, or photos you'd like to share?

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