

22. WORKING LIFE AROUND MARKET SQUARE

EXPLORE AND DISCOVER

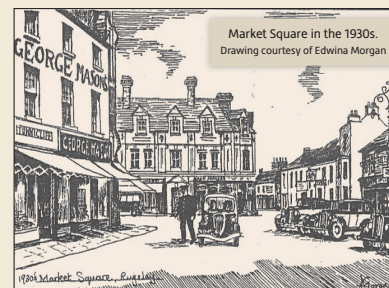
George Key and the donkey jacket

In the late 1870s John Key had a draper's shop in nearby Lower Brook Street. In 1888 his son George set up his own business on the second floor. Later that year George introduced a new type of coat made of thick, hard-wearing material, which he had developed for the navvies who were building the Manchester Ship Canal. The coat became known as the Donkey Jacket - named after the 'donkey engines' that some of the navvies worked on. The mail order business, now so popular, was pioneered by George Key through his catalogue, *The Keystone*. Ladies' clothes were sold by mail order after the First World War, and the firm lasted until 1984.



A man wearing a donkey jacket.

Many of Rugeley's former shops and businesses are remembered by the town's inhabitants. Next to the clock tower stood Whitworth's the grocer's (maker of delicious pork pies!), later to become George Mason's. Next to the grocer's was Tunnicliff's, the baker and confectioner. It had been in the town since the late 1800s and remained until the 1950s.



Market Square in the 1930s.
Drawing courtesy of Edwina Morgan



Market Square in the 1950s.
Drawing courtesy of Edwina Morgan

The Phoenix Tannery

There have been tanneries in Rugeley since the 12th century. One of the most recent was the Phoenix Tannery that was established before 1851, and continued until the late 1950s. Hides were soaked in lime before having the hair scraped off them, then laid in open tan pits between layers of oak bark, when water was pumped in. The oak bark was ground by a small factory in Bryan's Lane.



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According to local historian Alec Neal, before it closed in 1958 Rugeley's Phoenix Tannery supplied the green leather for the seats in the House of Commons.

Harris' ironmongers and ironworks

Rugeley's iron production started as early as 1231 and became a major industry. There were a number of ironworks in the town. In 1855 a Mr. Harris opened an ironmongery business in Paris House in Market Square. It later moved to the corner of Anson Street, and opened its own foundry, the Phoenix Iron Works, a few doors away. The foundry made metal garden equipment, including garden rollers.



Stirzaker's Tobacconist and Hairdresser's at 30 Upper Brook Street, c1890-1892. Pictured from left to right are Joe Heatherley, Mr E Stirzaker and Mr Jack Cope. The shop was later taken over by Joe Heatherley.
Image courtesy of Staffordshire Arts & Museum Service



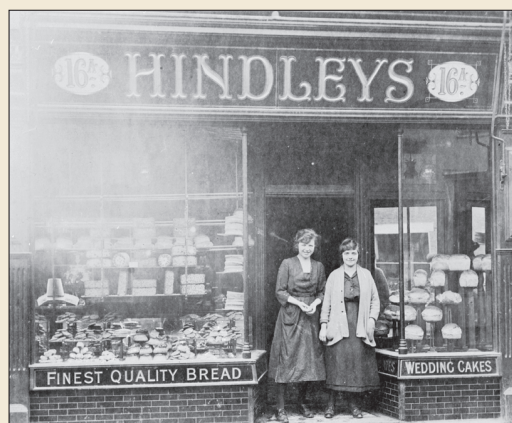
This photograph, taken in 1961, shows the area of the town centre that was cleared later that decade to make way for the indoor market. Pictured is Pamela Logan, Miss Colton 1961 title holder.
Image courtesy of Staffordshire Arts & Museum Service

Degg's Garage

Mr Degg, who had started out here in Anson Street making and repairing bicycles, ran a successful garage. In 1902 he became the first car owner in Rugeley. At this time, his garage was the only one between Birmingham and Manchester. During the Great War, he ran a taxi service for the soldiers stationed in nearby military camps. One of the taxis was driven by his sixteen-year-old daughter. The garage closed in the 1960s.

The Palace Cinema

Next to Mr Degg's garage was the Palace Cinema, where the library now stands. In the days of silent films a violinist and a pianist provided live music, with kettle drums adding extra impact to the dramatic scenes.



Joseph Richard Hindley's baker's shop at 16a Upper Brook Street, c1920-1929. The firm celebrated its centenary in 1993, when it employed over 70 people. A Rugeley resident recalled that at their other premises in Wharf Road they offered the use of the ovens, as they cooled, for local women to cook their joints of meat.
Image courtesy of Staffordshire Arts & Museum Service



Rugeley's main shopping area before 1973 pedestrianisation.