

BURTONS SHOP
40 HIGH STREET
STANSTEAD ABBOTTS

By
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A shop with a narrow frontage but a big reputation for service to the village for many years. The picture above taken on the 01/09/2010 shows Burton's shop a once highly regarded newsagents in the village. It was closed in 2017 and is now the home of Libby's Coffee Shop.

It was in 1895 when Mr James Pratt a former butler to the Buxton family at Easneye House opened the shop as a newsagents and tobacconists. For many years it was a very small shop being only about ten feet deep. A nearly full-length thin counter ran down the middle of the shop with a narrow squeeze through at the inner end. This gave access to the rear of the counter and the door that led into the store room residential rooms behind. The narrowness of the building meant there was space for no more than about three customers at a time and even less room behind the counter. Mr Pratt began by just selling newspapers and pipe tobacco expanding his offering as the years passed by. After 35 years of serving the community, he passed the business down to his son in law Mr Chris Burton in 1930.



This view shows Mr Pratt and his wife standing outside their shop sometime between 1904 and 1914. It is worth noticing that the two small cottages between the Oak Public House and Pratt's shop had yet to be converted into a shop.

Chris Burton continued to run the business much as it had been by his father-in-Law. However, one very obvious change was the renaming of the shop from Pratts to Burtons. While running the shop Chris Burton ensured his son Ken was fully involved in learning the business. Father and son often collected the newspapers from the station in the early morning and then set about creating bundles of papers for each of the newspaper delivery rounds. Ken from quite an early age served in the shop as well as delivering papers to customers in Much Hadham, Widford and Hunsdon. It was whilst doing his paper round at the age of 11 that he first met his future wife Eva in Hunsdon, at the Grocery store run by her parents.



*The young Ken Burton was caught on film in the 1930's outside his father's shop.
The advertising sign for WILL's STAR cigarettes can be seen to the left.
Beyond are the signage and petrol pump of the first garage in the village.*

In 1945, after the war was over, Chris Burton handed the shop down to his son Ken. Being a newsagent meant many long hours with Ken often meeting the first down train from London at about 5.20am seven days a week. Although the Guard and the Porter would offload the newspapers from the train the Porter would help Ken load the newspapers into the car. To make the job easier Ken would park his car as close as he could to the end of the platform on the St Margarets side of the level crossing. Once loaded he would always deftly extract two different papers from the string bound bundles, one for the station staff and one for the signal box. A daily thank you for making his job easier in the often dark and chilly early mornings. Driving his car the short distance to his shop it would then be a case of getting the newspapers all sorted ready for the newspaper boys to arrive for their preschool newspaper delivery rounds.

For many years the Burtons were ably assisted by Mick and George. Their helpfulness and affability meant that they added considerably to the legendary status of the shop within the village community. During the time that Ken and Eva ran the shop it underwent a couple of expansions in size. This was achieved by progressively taking over the once storage room and residential accommodation to the rear of the shop. This led to a significant expansion of the retail offering including such things as toys, a wide range of magazines, processing of films for holiday snaps and much else. In connection with which for many years in the 1960s a Lyons Maid ice cream sign could be seen standing out on the pavement. Burtons was known widely for its excellent service to its customers even managing to deliver newspapers on those occasions the village was flooded.



A 1973 picture of Burtons shop showing the newspapers in racks and a selection of vending machines including the green and white of the Polo mint machine on the far side of the shopfront.

JAMES PRATT,

TOBACCONIST Large assortment of Tobacco,
Cigars and Cigarettes.

Newspapers & Periodicals regularly
supplied. **NEWSAGENT**

STATIONER. Advertisements inserted in any
Newspaper.

STANSTEAD ABBOTTS.

Burtons 

Newsagent
Home Deliveries 7 days a week
Tobacconist
Stationery
Confectioner
Toys
Groceries

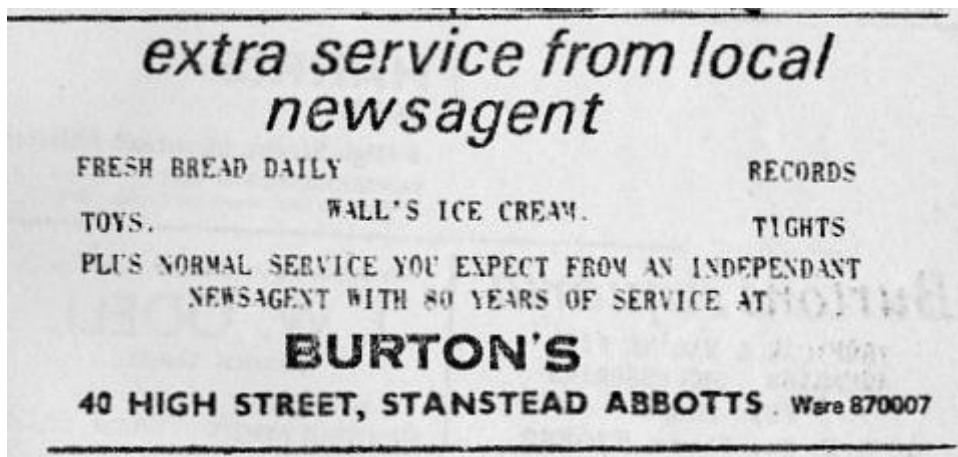
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Stanstead Abbots
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The shop frequently advertised its services in the Parish Magazine. 100 Years separate the adverts above the one on the left for 1912 and on the right 2012. It is interesting to see how the type of goods sold in the shop had expanded over time.



For comparison with the 1973 view above this colour view dates from 2013 and shows how remarkably little change had occurred to the shop frontage over a forty-year period.



The above advertisement for Burton's dates from 1978. This advert gives a good indication of the wide diversity of the goods on offer once the shop had been expanded.



Ken and Eva Burton in 1981 when they retired from their Newsagents business

Given the long hours and the seven-day week nature of the business it is not surprising that in 1981 Ken and Eva decided to retire. They felt that at the age of 61 and after 36 years running the business it was time step back and enjoy life particular as they had a Granddaughter, they wished to spend more time with. They were acutely aware that many of their customers would be most upset to learn they would no longer be running the shop and so kept their departure a secret right up to the last minute. Once the villagers learnt about it Ken and Eva received very many cards and messages wishing them all the best for the future. A clear indication of the very high regard in which they were personally held by their customers many, of whom had become friends as well as customers over the years. The business was then taken over by Mr Brian Williams and his wife Audrey who lived in Ware. The business continued to operate for a further 35 years retaining the trading name of Burtons until its closure in early 2017. After refurbishment it was to open its doors as a coffee shop trading today as Libby's.

Stuart Moye June 2021