

Read Sherlock Holmes stories written in Shorthand

David Byrom was born in 1922 and interviewed in 1992

When I was 14 years of age I left school to enter what was to be a long business career spread over many aspects of furnishing. When I started my first job in the morning was to brush the shop front. This was a particularly wide pavement but the front was best done early in the morning to avoid pedestrians and it was very hard when it snowed, but all the shops had to clear the snow otherwise the police came round and asked you to do it.

Duties at the shop followed, sort of washing the shop windows and polishing the exterior woodwork; then dusting the stock and helping to prepare orders and delivering small sold items like rugs and kerbs. We took these to some of the local hostelries. They had rooms, there was a room at the Rainbow, down the Fleece Yard and the Angel across the other side of the road. Local carriers would collect them and deliver to the surrounding areas and the carriage would probably be no more than two shillings.

Then throughout the months from September to March I attended evening classes at the Allen Technical School, that was every night of the week, except Saturday and Sunday, to further my education. The cost of these courses in bookkeeping, English, maths commerce, shorthand and art was four shillings and sixpence per term excluding the text books.

There was a Mr Sutton from the Central School who used to teach maths who was very good. He taught us a method where you could do addition not only vertically but horizontally and sometime diagonally. He was a very good mathematician. Mr Grimshaw used to teach us commerce. He was one of the very few teachers who had a degree. In shorthand was Miss Emily Corbett. She was very firm indeed. Shorthand was quite an interest to me. My father had been a shorthand expert – at one time he'd worked on the Manchester Guardian. He always used to write these notes in funny hieroglyphics and it quite intrigued me. There were books you could get - Sherlock Holmes stories in shorthand for example which kept everybody very enthusiastic.

The shop hours were from nine o'clock to six thirty and on Saturdays we stayed open till eight o'clock. Basically we stayed open till the people passed by the shops and went to the second house pictures.

Prices for some of the main items of furniture for the house: A rexine (artificial leather) wood-arm three-piece suite with velveteen cushions was five pounds-ten shillings., an all-rexine suite with a embossed back was seven pounds -ten shillings and a proper leather suite, of which we sold very few were sixteen guineas. A carpet square was three pounds-seventeen shillings and sixpence and a bedstead with a mesh spring and a flock mattress was four pounds and ten shillings.

Most customers bought on hire-purchase and paid weekly in amounts from two-and-sixpence to ten shillings a week. Kirkbarrow housing estate was just started about 1934, just after we came and we got quite a lot of customers from there as they moved into the new houses. Bad debt was very low but one of my jobs, when I'd been in the shop for two years was to visit the very slow payers on a Friday evening after they'd received their weekly wages.

We had one or two farmers and better off clientele – one or two people from Windermere. The farmers were quite characters. One particular farmer who came from the Dent region had three or four daughters and the procedure was that he would come in with his wife and his daughter who was about to be married. They would select the items of furniture and then they'd go off to do some more shopping. The farmer would enter into a very prolonged

debate with my father about the price. This was a semi-friendly sort of haggle but it could go on for an hour or an hour and a half.

When we first came we lived above the shop for two years. There were three other cottages in Colin Croft that were also occupied. In one of them there was quite a colourful character. He was in and out of work but on a Sunday he used to take his barrow to round about Prizet Filling Station and just sell bananas. We used to call him the banana king and he made quite a little business out of it.

Further on up Colin Croft Hadwins had a small engineering shop then past the house where Hadwins used to live right at the top was a blacksmiths shop. On the other side was the Colin Croft Brewery. This was a separate brewery before it was taken over by Scottish Brewers. They used to have their offices up behind the Midland Bank. The horse and carts used to come up to take the barrels of beer away. The cart wheels just used to fit inside the pavement on either side.

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