

Reminiscence notes on  
**W. A. Hall's Fish & Chip Shop,**  
1 Ballyclose Street, Limavady

By Diana Madden (nee Hall) and Alex Hall

Our shop was a hive of activity especially on a Friday and Saturday night when it was queued outside the door. The 'town' was packed on both of these nights and many of the people came in from the country on bicycles. These bicycles were parked around the shop and the house. My brother Alex told me that he sometimes had a wee 'scoot' around on a 'borrowed' bike, but it was always left back where he got it!! Many 'Characters' frequented the shop – I remember one of these characters playing the spoons and dancing around the shop to entertain us. On a Friday, the Factory Girls (Daintyfit) got a half-day, and they came in their droves to the café for fish and chips. Everyone worked very hard to get enough food ready for them coming.

On the Twelfth of July we set up a stall outside the shop to sell crisps, minerals and sweets.

It was a great time in my life as our house was attached to the shop. I was born and brought up there and was surrounded by colourful people at all times.

The shop was situated at 1, Ballyclose Street where the road turns down to Alexander Road (formerly Alexander Terrace) and opposite the bus station. It was demolished to make way for the new road and our garden is now part of the Park below Tesco. The park is where the railway line used to run.

**Shop Keeper- William Andrew Hall**

My Father, William Andrew Hall, owned the shop. He originated from Larne and his Father was a farmer, and he came from a family of 14. He married my Mother, Catherine Young, a local girl, and moved to Limavady, from Belfast, to be near her family. They moved to 1 Ballyclose Street in around 11th September 1950 and the shop was demolished in 1970.

My Father was a tall, distinguished and very fair man. He was known as Mr Hall. He worked very hard every day in the shop with late nights on a Friday and Saturday. My Father wore a white apron, tied at the front, and he did most of the cooking at the pans.

## Shop Exterior

The shop and house were made of wood until my Father employed a builder, Mr Mullan, and his brother, to build brick around the wood. It was pebble dashed in white. The frontage of the shop was in red brick half way up, with decorative wood on the top half.

The sign, which was above the entrance was small, blue and read 'Confectioner' at the top, 'W.A. Hall' below this in the middle and 'Tobacconist' under this. There was also a Coca Cola light below this sign. There was a café window to the left with Fish Coca Cola Chips written at the top, and a shop window to the right with Player's written at the top.

The door was wood and glass and had the rays of the sun on it. Our 'Hall' door was to the side of the house. The Chip House was to the right of the shop window. Cars could park in the little car park at the front, which held about three cars.

## Shop Interior

The shelving and counters were wooden and there were two wooden money drawers under the counters. When you entered the shop the counter in front was high (like a shelf). People leaned on this counter and looked down to a lower level counter where the paper stayed to wrap the fish and chips. I remember this paper originally being newspaper until the 'sanitary man' said it had to be white. Sometimes we still wrapped the newspaper around the white paper to keep the contents warm. The salt and vinegar also stayed on this counter. There was an area beside this where milk was kept and poured for the café. Small bottles of mineral (delivered by Maine) were uncapped here also. The other counter ran at right angles to the front counter. On top of this was a glass cabinet, where bread, buns etc. were kept. This is where the sweets were weighted on large white Avery scales and served. The sweets were on shelves behind in jars. There was an ice cream fridge here also and you could buy a poke or a slider.

The door to our living room was behind the top counter. The café could have held about 30 people and there was a jukebox and at one time a slot machine there. On a Sunday afternoon all my sister's friends would come and dance in front of the jukebox to the latest hits and I remember joining in to make up a dance for the hit song at that time 'The Hucklebuck'. My sister Yvonne knew how to 'fix' the jukebox so that we didn't have to put any money in!!

There was a grill in the ceiling of the 'Room' (café) to let the cigarette smoke escape.

The Chip House held the pans, a manual potato chipper, an electric potato peeler, a sink to wash dishes and a tank of gas with a ring to heat beans. A stainless steel counter for boning and battering the fish was also in here.

## **Produce on Sale**

We sold: - Fish, chips, steak & kidney pies, mince pies, rissoles (known as pasties), and battered sausages- all deep fried and beans.

On special occasions (like when the Trend Show band came) we provided tea, bread and butter).

We sold:- coal, milk, minerals, bread, sweets, my favourite being San Toy Mixture from Horns, which you do not get any more ( 1lb Roses cost 1/6, 1lb Quality Street cost 1 shilling, 1lb Lucky Numbers cost 9d (you can't get Lucky Numbers any more) and a small bar of Cadbury's dairy milk chocolate cost 6d), penny chews (dainty), ice cream and lollipops, cigarettes, tobacco and a selection of nearly everything e.g. shampoo, soap, sticking plasters, pot scrubbers, packets of elastic bands, pens, pencils, Brasso – the list goes on.

You could buy one cigarette for 2d or 3d out of the packet, which lots of people did. The most popular cigarettes were Embassy Regal, Embassy Reds, Blues, Greens and Woodbine. We sold snuff and chewing tobacco, which were kept in a special drawer, and also pipe cleaners. A small bag of chips cost 6d, a large bag of chips cost 1 shilling, a fish supper cost 2/6 and a single fish cost 1/6, but there were two fish in the bag and a few chips!! (Prices approx. in 1968/69).

Travellers (sales reps as they are known now) used to come at different times to take orders for sweets etc. The sweet van parked outside and I used to love going into it to see all the boxes of sweets that were for sale. Mr Boggs came every two months with a suitcase with all his different wares e.g. pencils, rubbers, water pistols, elastic bands, toy guns etc. Dominic used to come on a Friday to take the order for Doherty's- this is where the rissoles, pies and sausages came from. Lynas's delivered the fish.

## **Shop Owner and Shop Assistants**

My Father owned the shop. My sister Yvonne and brother Robert also had full time jobs in the shop. We had many staff over the years who were local people and were all part-time. I was in the shop from I could 'see over the counter' until we left. Recently I was talking to a former staff member and she told me when she was about 12 or 13 she asked Mr Hall for a job. He was standing behind the counter having a cigarette!! He told her to stand behind the counter as she was not very tall. He stood back and had a look and then went and brought out a wooden mineral crate and told her to stand on it. He stood back again to have another look and said "Start on Saturday at 4 o'clock". She also told me that when the shop closed on a Saturday night there was still time to get up to the Services Club for the last dance!!

### **Other Shops/Businesses of the Town**

The shop beside us was Mrs Mullans (grocery). The shop across from us, beside Cannings Garage, was Matt Alcorns (grocery). Wee Matt, as he was affectionately known, sold beautiful ham and cheese. I would go over for a wee bottle of Lucozade and a chat with Matt. He was a small man from Limavady who was very intelligent and witty and always had great conversations with his customers. He was a fantastic artist and could speak French. He once helped me with my art homework. He didn't like being called Matt and told us it was Mr Alcorn. Albert Irwin had a sweet shop 'up the steps' in Ballyclose Street, Annie Quigley's pub was also on the same side of the street further up and John Thompson (grocery) had a shop at the end of Ballyclose Street beginning of Church Street. McNulty's chip shop was on the other side of the bridge as was Paddy Mullans (sweets and grocery) and Mrs Mullan (his wife) had a children's' clothes shop, and beside this was Moore's the Jewellers. The only original shop which was there at that time and is still there is LHC, known then as McIntosh's.