
CHANGING NEWTOWN: PART I

The Photographs of Ron Haines & Derek R. Parker, 1971

CHANGING NEWTOWN

Newtown is an old town, dating back to the thirteenth century. For much of that time, the town hardly changed, nestling in the great loop of the River Severn. But in the past two hundred years, the town has witnessed two periods of intensive change. The first was at the beginning of the nineteenth century. This was the period when Newtown was transformed from a small market town into a manufacturing centre for the flannel industry. Many of the old half timbered structures were torn down to be replaced by brick buildings, many housing handloom factories. A new industrial suburb was established in Penygloddfa.

The second great period of transformation took place in the final three decades of the twentieth century. The Labour government of Harold Wilson decided that the Newtown area should be designated a New Town with a population of some 60,000. The scheme was never fully realised, but enough was done to change the town in a few short years. A Development Board for Rural Wales was set up to supervise the transformation. Many of the early nineteenth century buildings were demolished to make way for new houses, flats, a shopping centre and a new office structure to house the Development Board. The southern and western fringes of the town were transformed by the building of new housing estates. Even the course of the river itself, the river that had defined the town, that provided the water for the carding and fulling mills and which occasionally threatened to engulf it, was changed for ever.

Two local photographers, Derek R. Parker of Llanidloes and Ron Haines of Newtown, documented some of the changes taking place. Their collection of photographs, taken in 1971, provide a fascinating record of Newtown on the cusp of change.

Newtown March 1967: An aerial view from the North.

Below us is Milford Road with the river snaking around. Already there are indications of the river defences to prevent a repeat of the infamous floods of the 1960s. Back Lane has not yet connected up to Broad Street. The Back Lane car park has been laid out, but allotments occupy part of the space. Many Flannel mills are still present clustered behind each side of Broad Street. Beyond the gasometer, on the other bank of the river, the Rack Field is clearly visible, where, in the nineteenth century, the finished flannel was pegged out to dry after fulling.





A derelict
handloom
flannel factory
awaiting
demolition
probably on the
east side of Old
Church Street.
Today, the site
is occupied by
St Marys Close.

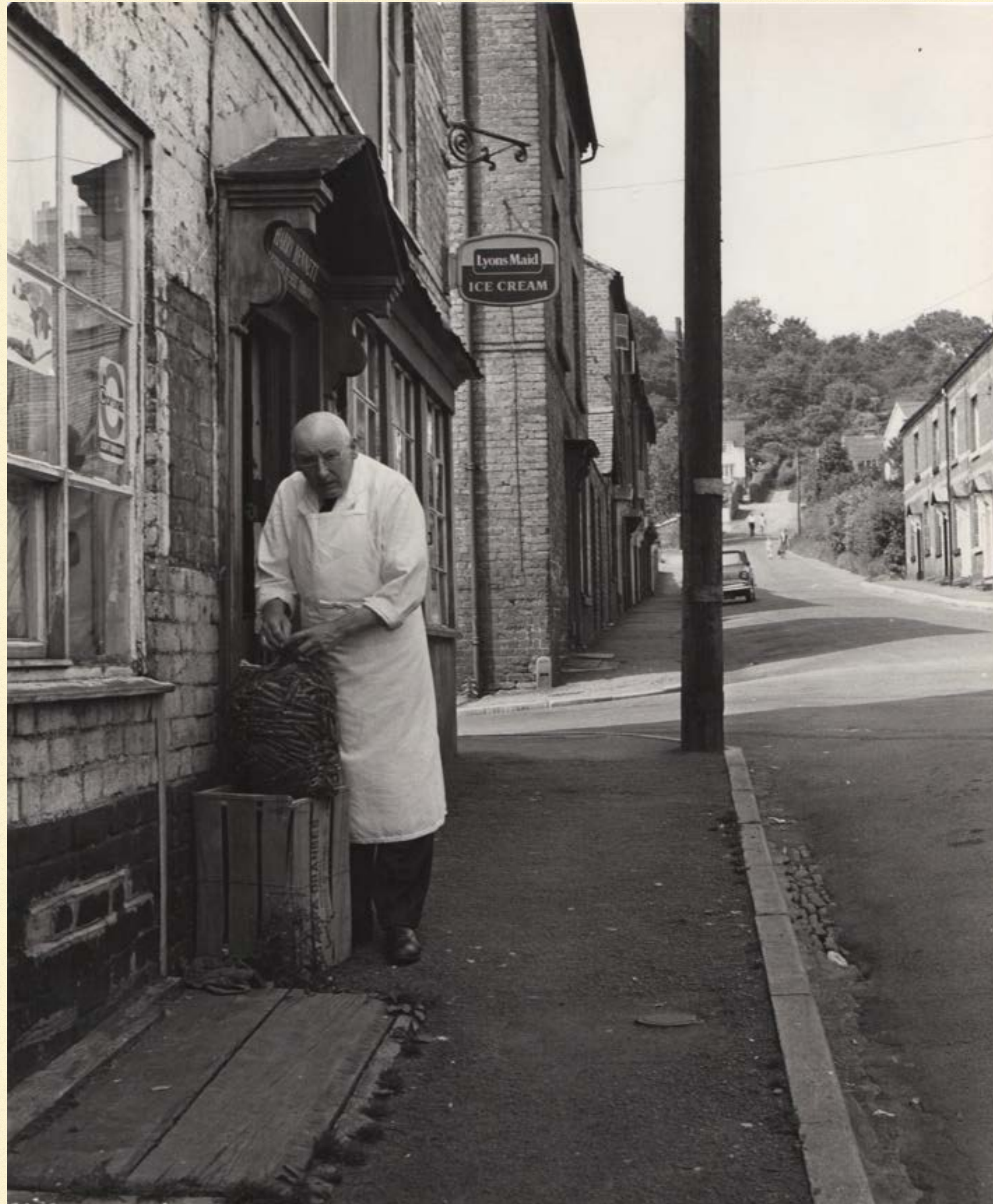




A vanished courtyard at the bottom of Chapel Street, Penygloddfa, gave a view of St Mary's Church in 1971. Today, the view is obscured by new development.



Harry
Bennet's
shop, Bryn
Street,
Penygloddfa
(now Stan's
Shop).





Chapel Street, Penygloddfa: a street without a chapel. The English Calvinistic Methodist Chapel was built here in 1844. It was subsequently demolished forty years later, but the street name remains today.



Crescent Street, Penygloddfa, one of the first streets to be laid out in Penygloddfa in the 1820s.



century weir, built to serve the flannel mills, was still there in 1971, but it was soon to be removed



Flood prevention scheme works below St. Mary's Church



CHANGING NEWTOWN: PART 2

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The King's or Ha'penny Bridge provided a useful pedestrian route from the town centre to the Canal area on the other side of the river. When, in 1971, the river bed was scoured and changed as part of the town's flood prevention scheme this bridge had to be demolished. It was replaced by a single span concrete bridge a few yards downstream. The new bridge was officially named the Ha'penny Bridge, so its predecessor is generally referred to as the King's Bridge. In the modern view, the bridge is just out of shot to the right.



The Severn from the King's Bridge. The modern view is taken from the Ha'penny Bridge which is a little further upstream from the 1971 view.



The Severn at Shortbridge Street before the flood prevention scheme. In 1973 the course of the river was diverted and the Gravel Car Park now takes its place.



The Rack Field from Shortbridge Street. In 1971, it was situated on the north bank of the river. Today, it is buried beneath the Gravel Car Park on the south side of the diverted river.



Parker's Lane still remains recognisable 50 years after the black and white photograph was taken, but the old flannel mill and half timbered building have been adapted for new uses.



Frolic Street,
looking towards
Park Street. The
old three storey
weavers'
cottages were
about to be
demolished to
make way for
modern flats.





Ladywell Street and its surroundings was a densely populated part of the town. However, by 1971, the houses were already beginning to be demolished and many of the residents had moved to the new Maesyrhandir housing estate. The area was then cleared and the eastern end of Ladywell Street became the Ladywell Shopping Centre.

