

Gatehouse Shopkeepers
Bakers – 42 High Street



A Brief Chronology

The property at 42 High Street has been associated with various bakers for nearly 200 years.

1782 : the first feu charter was issued to John Hunter, baker, whose family ran the bakery for 3 generations until the business became bankrupt in 1895.

1901 : William Walker, a baker from Kirkcudbright, ran the bakery followed by his sons William and Robert.

1955 : John Kean ('Jock') bought the bakery business.

1965 : Jock Kean died and title passed to his wife Jessie.

1976 : Jessie Kean sold the business to Archibald Wood after which the building was used as a gift shop.

Much of the information below comes from Jock's daughter, Peggy Gillespie née Kean, and also Ian McGaw who trained as a baker with the Kean family between 1962 and 1967.

The Kean family

John Kean, always known as Jock, was born in Dalbeattie in 1904. He trained as a baker with Smart's of Dalbeattie. In 1929 he was married at Girthon Manse to Jessie Lindsay McCulloch from Gatehouse. They lived at 8 Digby Street, Gatehouse, until Jock bought the bakery in 1955 when they moved to 44 High Street, an old-fashioned house with a sitting room and 4 bedrooms above the bakery.

Jock and Jessie had 4 sons and a daughter. Only Jackie the oldest son, who was a joiner by trade, was not involved in the bakery business, although his wife Ruth, who he married in 1955, worked in the shop.

Jock's bakery business was very much a family affair. He was a hard task master and expected his family including the grandchildren to help out. All the family learned how to bake. Some, like Jim, who was a trained plumber, and Peggy, a dressmaker, gave up other stable jobs to join the family business.

Two sons Jim and Quentin drove the bakery vans and baked when needed. Quentin also worked as a mason, helping out at the bakery between 4am and 7am during busy times. Youngest son Drew trained as a baker and later learned cake decorating.

Jim and his wife Maisie (married in 1952) moved into 8 Digby Street after Jock and Jessie moved to High Street.

In 1954 daughter Peggy married Burns Gillespie, a motor engineer with The Stewartry Dairy in Kirkcudbright until but his father-in-law offered him a job as a van man. Peggy and Burns spent their early married years at 44 High Street.

Peggy and Maisie helped out wherever they were needed - the bakery, the store and the shop.

Peggy remembers that her mother Jessie worked extremely hard behind the scenes, keeping the business going. She often finished cleaning up at 2am as Jock was starting work in the bakery. By 6am, after a few hours sleep she was back at the bakery preparing breakfast for the staff. Her next job was to finish off the cream cookies before making sure the shop shelves were well stocked ready for 7am opening.



1954 : Burns Gillespie & Peggy Kean marriage.

The Bakehouse

Jock was in charge of baking. He and Archie McCormick started work at 2am, making the bread and rolls so that they had time to prove before baking and be ready by 7am.

Others started work in the bakehouse at 5am and included Jim McCulloch, Jock McRobert, who replaced Peter O'Hare who died in 1966, and William McKee also worked in the bakehouse at different times, as did Ian McGaw.

Kate Geddes, Anne Wood and Hazel Brown also worked hard as bakery assistants, washing and clearing up, and carrying out various other tasks.

The Oven

This was originally coke-fuelled which had to be re-lit every Sunday afternoon. Later it was converted to gas, and Peggy remembers that the bread was never the same again.

It was a large oven and Ian remembers that one of the first skills he learnt was to use the 'peel' - a large wooden paddle - to move things around the oven.

There was a great deal of banter in the bakehouse. Archie McCormick was a WWI veteran and told tales of his adventures at the Somme. Football was also a popular topic as the men supported a variety of football teams.

The Shop

The shop opened at 7am in summer and at 8am in winter, although some people called in for hot rolls and bread before opening time. It closed at 5pm throughout the year.

It was quite a small shop with a long narrow passage for customers. The rest of the shop was taken up with shelves laden with produce and a high counter. At busy times the queue for the shop sometimes stretched passed the Well Entry further up High Street.

Peggy, Ruth and Maisie worked in the shop as well as many others over the years.

They included Margaret Sloan, Gladys Hunter, Nena Shaw, Jessie Margaret McIntyre, Sally Robison, Mary Harvey, Elizabeth Jardine, Jessie Thomson and Anne Wood.

There was no time during the day to stock shelves in the shop or the store. This had to be done early in the morning or in the evening after the shop had closed at 5pm. Jessie often packed tins with shortbread at night. Keans were well known for their 'Fleetvale' Shortbread. Younger members of the family baked cakes and helped re-stock the shelves when they could.



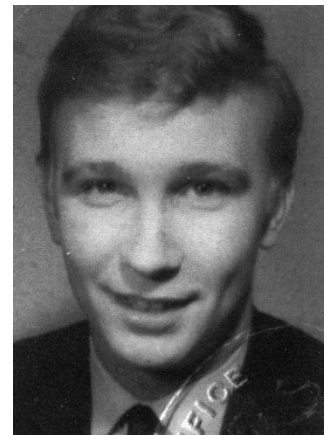
Jock Kean



Archie McCormick



Gladys Hunter



Ian McGaw

The Vans

The Keans had a two vans which delivered food around the town and local area, 6 days a week. The shelves in the van were laden with all the goodies made at the shop. Peggy's husband Burns and her brother Jim were the van men, and Quentin also helped out if needed.

Jim concentrated on sales to farms and cottages in the Borgue area. Burns did a variety of runs in the town and up the Fleet valley and out to Skyreburn. Over the week the vans also visited areas as far as Twynholm and Kirkcudbright, Laurieston and New Galloway.

During the summer months, the van routes would include various holiday homes and caravan parks.

People would often leave a hand-written order along with some money in a box on their doorstep before maybe going out for a few hours. Leaving bakery at an empty home could cause problems, and some amusement. The words used to describe bakery products varies from region to region within the UK so a morning roll might be called, for example, a bap or a bread cake or a muffin in other areas.

Gatehouse crumpets and pancakes are quite different from English varieties. Some customers got new and interesting goodies left for them. More regular customers had a monthly account.

Keans also supplied and delivered bread, rolls, scones and pancakes to all the local hotels.

Produce

Bread

Various types of bread were made including a square pan, a special recipe large brown and a 'wee special' small oval loaf. Keans also bought plain loaves from The Land o' Burns Bakery in Ayr. These were very popular for making working-mens 'pieces'.

During heavy snow periods in winter, farmers would collect bread in bulk using tractors and then make deliveries to farms and cottages.

Rolls

The baking pans each took 36 rolls. The oven could take 10 rows with 5 pans per row, a capacity of 1800 rolls. At least 24 pans were baked each day (864 in total), but many more were needed to meet summer demand.

Scones

After the bread was made, the ovens were used to make cookies, muffins, tea cakes and penny scones. Oven and wheaten scones were mixed, rolled out and sprayed before being cooked in the oven.

Meanwhile Jock made mountains of scones, pancakes and crumpets on a coal fired hot plate. He also made tattie (potato) scones, big soda scones, small girdle scones.

The crumpets were delicious. (*I remember all my visiting relatives calling at the bakery to collect a dozen of the thin, light-as-a-feather crumpets, before they returned home.*)

Another speciality, very popular at The Murray Arms Hotel, were Swiss pancakes. These were small thicker pancakes, split and filled with fresh cream and strawberry jam, with icing sugar on top.

Sweet Pastries

All the pastry for these small cakes and tarts was made using hand worked machines that required a lot of patience.

The pastry was used for pineapple tarts, jam tarts, cream horns and fruit squares. The latter, known as fly cemeteries, required the fruit to be soaked overnight and then a special tinned apple sauce was added prior to baking.

Savoury pastries

Pie shells had to be made with different pastry before being filled with meat from the butcher. Jock had his own special pie spice to add to the mix to make Scotch Pies.

Mince and onion slices were also popular and the Keans made dozens of sausages rolls from puff pastry rolled round sausage meat from the butcher.

Cakes

After the pastries were baked, the ovens were used to make cakes of all kinds.

Sponges, fruit cake, sultana cakes, Madeira cakes - all in 3 different sizes

Later in the day these cakes and buns would be decorated.

Wonderful Memories









Pancakes



Girdle scones



Crumpets

 <p>Fly cemeteries</p>	 <p>Cream cookies</p>	 <p>Pineapple tarts</p>
 <p>Cream horns</p>	 <p>Tattie scones</p>	 <p>Soda scones</p>

Special Occasions

Easter – Large numbers of hot cross buns were made to a very special recipe.

Christmas and New Year

In the days when Keans Bakers were in business, New Year was more of a celebration than Christmas so it was the busiest time.

Different kinds of fruit cakes - dark fruit, light fruit and sultana cakes were popular as well as a special fruit loaf.

Many of these were posted to customers at this time of year. Shortbread was also posted out to customers. It was packed in a metal tin and wrapped in tartan paper.

Steak Pies were also in demand at New Year. Peggy remembers baking over 50 pies each day at this time of year. The meat came from the butcher and it was cooked in the oven with onion. Then a special spice added before being topped by puff pastry and returned to the oven.



Weddings

Many couples who married in Gatehouse would have had a Kean's wedding cake. Drew had done extra training in cake decorating. Later Wull McKie from Kirkcudbright worked a half day a week decorating cakes. He came out of retirement to help out and was very skilled at his job.

The majority of wedding cakes had 3 tiers, but Gillian Craig (married in 1970) had the first and only 4-tier cake to be made at Keans – it was quite an achievement for Drew.

It was a tradition to put the wedding cake on display in the bakery shop window the day before the wedding.

When we married in November 1972, Graham and his sister walked down High Street the evening before the wedding and were amazed to see our cake illuminated in the window.

Friday Nights

After Jock died in 1965, Drew started to work from 11pm on Fridays. This meant there was someone at the shop when the Friday night dance finished at the Town Hall, and there was a demand for hot pies.

Gatehouse Gala

For the annual barbeque in Gala Week, Jessie cooked dozens of hamburgers and sausages in the big oven so they only needed to be reheated on the night. Many dozens of rolls were also needed.

Borgue Village also had an annual barbeque. Jessie would cook the pig in the oven so that it was easy to serve at the event.

Summer was a very busy time for the bakery. Peggy remembers that she and Maisie would go to work at 5am to bag up orders and fill the shop shelves before returning home to get their children ready for school. They would be back in the shop by 9am.

Closure

Bakers of Repute
JOHN KEAN
Family Baker
42 HIGH STREET,
GATEHOUSE
Telephone 261

WEDDING CAKES, CHRISTENING CAKES,
ANNIVERSARY CAKES, BIRTHDAY
CAKES — TO ORDER

Home Made Bread, Plain and Fancy Teabread,
Meat Pies etc., Fancy Cakes

FAMOUS FLEETVALE SHORTBREAD

Wholemeal Bread our Speciality

Also — Van deliveries to Camping Sites

Sadly Jock Kean became ill and died in 1965. Jessie was now the owner of the business. Drew looked after the bakery and Jim the shop and other retail work.

The business continued until 1975 when Jessie sold the premises and nearly 200 years of baking came to a close.

Jessie Kean died in 1984.

Jock's special recipes continued to be used - by Drew - when he moved to Linlithgow and opened a shop and bakery. It too was a very popular shop.

Jim and Quentin left the bakery business and found new employment 'south of the border'.

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TO ORDER

HOME-MADE BREAD, PLAIN AND FANCY
TEABREAD

MEAT PIES, ETC., FANCY CAKES

FAMOUS FLEETVALE SHORTBREAD

WHOLEMEAL BREAD OUR
SPECIALITY

Peggy's husband Burns died in 1967 aged only 38, but Peggy has remained in Gatehouse, as has her sister-in-law Ruth.

Apprentice baker Ian McGaw left Gatehouse to join the merchant navy as a cookery trainee. For many years he worked for Shell Tankers and said that his training in Gatehouse was his 'Gateway to the World'.

Plan drawing of 42 High Street – Kean bakers

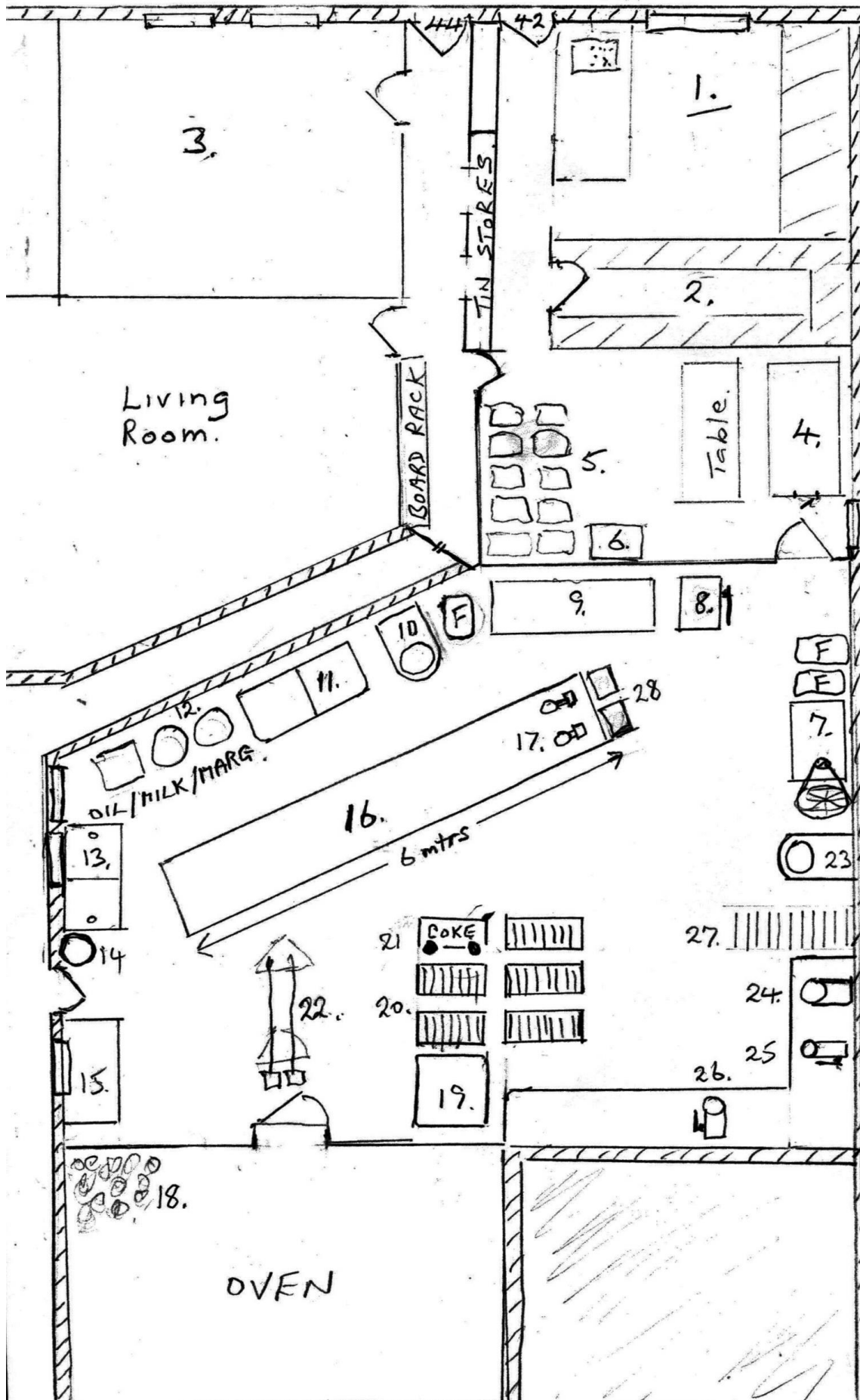


Diagram and key by Ian McGaw

Key to diagram on previous page

1. Shop
2. Bakery Store – oil, malt, salt, dried fruit, marzipan etc.
3. Bread, cakes & biscuit store
4. Hot Plate
5. Flour Store F = Flour
6. Bread Slices
7. Large Bread Mixer
8. Dough Breaker
9. Worktop & Dough Vat
10. Large Mixer
11. Fridge
12. Oil, milk & margarine
13. Sinks
14. Water Heater
15. Rough Bench
16. Main Worktop
17. Scales
18. Coke Hearth
19. Proving Steamer
20. Pan Racks
21. Coke Barrow
22. Overhead Peel Rack
23. Large Mixer
24. Small Mixer
25. Tart Press
26. Scotch Pie Die
27. Clean Pans
28. Sugar & Salt