

## Uxbridge House

When you leave Colwyn Bay Railway Station and look ahead of you, across to Station Road, the building on the bottom left-hand corner, with Sea View Road is Uxbridge House, now home to a business called 'Ethical Workforce Solutions', a training and staffing consultancy, which promotes itself by advertising on the shop front that the business has passion, is personal and professional. Look above the shop front and you are looking at a solid stone-built edifice erected over a hundred and fifty years ago and now, unfortunately, looking unkempt and tawdry.

At the tail end of the 19th century this is where Edward Henry Davies opened his grocery store and wine merchants seeing no need to advertise the fact that he was passionate about his trade and that he offered a personal and professional service, all his customers naturally assumed that that was the case. He was the first grocer in Colwyn Bay and his wines were supplied to him by the prestigious firm of Gilbey's. Today, Gilbey's make an awful lot of Gin.

Mr. Davies had arrived in Colwyn Bay from the rural county of Powys. Why he thought Colwyn Bay was a good spot to open his grocery store is now lost in the mists of time. He must however have been an intelligent, far seeing, and hard-working man with a sound financial background. He was fortunate to work in a world in which what you had was genuinely yours, where the government did not assume the right to tell you what you could do with it and where you could simply say "No; I use my own goods in my own way", where you were the master and the government the servant. One hundred and twenty years ago, in that world, he was able to thrive, running his own business in Uxbridge House.

An interesting item was written in the local newspaper on 2nd October 1896 relating to Mr. Davies' premises, Uxbridge House, and shone a light on the world as it then was. The article was entitled: 'A Big Smash – The Advantages of Insurance', with the author continuing: "Mr Davies,



Station Road

Uxbridge House, Colwyn Bay, has had the misfortune to have two of the very large squares of glass in his shop front broken. This would undoubtedly have been a serious loss to Mr. Davies, but fortunately he was persuaded, a few months ago, by Mr. F.A. Dew, auctioneer and insurance-agent, Colwyn Bay, to insure the whole of his glass in the Guardian Plate Glass Company a sound and reliable old office for which Mr. Dew is sole agent in Colwyn Bay and immediate neighbourhood. Messrs Jones and Son, Plumbers, Colwyn Bay are this week replacing the two broken squares on behalf of the Insurance Company. We congratulate Mr. Davies on his good judgment in being secured by insurance and would advise all shopkeepers and others who have expensive plate-glass fronts and showcases to have them covered by insurance at once. Now is a good time, it being quarter-day, and the winter very close at hand."

Nine years after Mr. Davies' windows in Uxbridge House were broken, the business was thriving to such an extent that he was able to purchase the Pwllcrochan Isaf Farm which stood close to the present Pwllcrochan Avenue and Oak Drive. While living in the farm and becoming a Town Councillor, he built a

house for himself, his wife, children and two servants on the farmland. He had been born in a village called Dolanog, near Welshpool and so named his new home, Dolanog. The name can still be seen prominently displayed on the gate post on Pwllcrochan Avenue. The house is a commodious, double fronted impressive structure with a delightfully draped led portmanteaux over the front door.

Mr. Davies had commissioned the architect, Mr. Adam Hunter of the Colwyn Bay architectural partnership, Porter and Hunter Estates. There are clues to Mr. Hunter's work on both the Colwyn Bay Library and Dolanog in the mosaic flooring and stained-glass windows in both buildings. Mr. Hunter sourced the bricks for the house from the Prince's Brick Works in Connah's Quay.

Mr. Hunter died on 26th February 1906 at the early age of thirty-three having led a very industrious life. He had been born in 1874 in Govan, Scotland and gained the highest distinction at the Glasgow Academy of Architects. Before arriving in Colwyn Bay in 1903 he had worked in Rochdale and Manchester. He came to Colwyn Bay to work for Mr. J.M. Porter (John Merry Porter 1863-1942) who was the architect, surveyor and agent for the



*Dolanog*

Colwyn Bay Estate Company. His office was in the building on Conway Road now occupied by the ladies' dress shop, The Mayfair. The lettering, 'The Estate Office' can still be seen etched into the stonework at the top of the building. Mr. Porter was quickly impressed with Mr. Hunter's many accomplishments and so invited him to become his business partner. After Adam Hunter's death Mr. Porter formed a new partnership with Lawrence Booth and Thomas Chadwick.

As well as Dolanog for Mr. Davies, the grocer of Uxbridge House, Mr. Hunter also helped in the design for the Colwyn Bay Library on Woodland Road West before formally joining Mr. Porter (NB: Journal October 2021) and a large rambling house called Furze Mount on Copthorn Road, Upper Colwyn Bay for Mrs. Frances Bees Barnato, the widow of the South African millionaire entrepreneur and diamond magnet, so she could well afford Mr. Hunter's architectural fees. In due course, for a while, Furze Mount became a Rest Home and Mr. Hunter would no doubt have been amazed to discover that last year the property was valued at £776,000. He also did extra designs for Dr Mould who lived in Oakhurst, Pwlycrochan Avenue.

Edward Henry Davies' grocery store and wine merchants' business at Uxbridge House was a great success. He lived in a world without telephones, computers, biro pens and television and record players; his, and his neighbours' news, came from newspapers and the gossip of his friends. Mr. Davies and his customers lived in a world in which to be deliberately idle was seen as a sin to which stigma was attached; if he wished to communicate with someone, he would write them a letter. If the intended recipient of the letter lived in Colwyn Bay, it would be delivered the same day on which the letter was written. As we have discovered, he was in business when the novel idea of insurance was in its infancy. He had no business competition from other grocers and all his transactions were cash transactions. His customers handed over their hard earned cash, it was placed in a metal container

which was propelled along a wire across the ceiling of the shop to a tiny corner office where a lady, suitably dressed in a sturdy skirt and a sensible blouse, would extract the cash and replace it with the correct change, where upon she would pull the cord which would whip the container back to the waiting customer.

In due course, during the second year of the 1st World War, Councillor Davies sold Dolanog and the grocery store, Uxbridge House and moved to Bournemouth to be near his son.

The grocery business was bought by Mr. Frank Little who already had a green grocery shop in Llangollen. Mr. Little was an orphan who had been brought up by his uncle in Chester. He was an ambitious man who wanted to better himself and so set up his business in Llangollen where he met his wife. Mrs. Little did not want to leave Llangollen but was persuaded by her husband that there were more opportunities for a better life in Colwyn Bay. They began life in Colwyn Bay in a house in Belgrave Road before moving to Braestead (No.23) in St George's Road, Rhos-on-Sea.

Mr. Little took down the E H Davies sign over the Station Road shop, replacing it with his own name and continued providing a

first-class service to the local population. Older local people still remember the rich aroma of coffee when you stepped inside the shop. Mr. Little also retained the services of the wine merchants, Gilbey's, with whom Mr. Davies had done business and of course the small container holding the customers' money continued to whizz backwards and forwards across the ceiling of the shop.

Mr. Little and his wife had one daughter, Nellie Margurite, always known as Madge, who eventually married a Bank Manager, Robert Jones Hughes. They had two daughters, Jean and Mary and Jean is still a keen member of our Civic Society.

Frank Little employed a very loyal hard-working man called Mr. Bower and when, in the early 1930s, Mr. Little became ill, he sold the business to Mr. Bower. Frank Little, who had continued to live in Braestead, died just as the 2nd World War was starting and Mr. Bower continued to run the grocery business, keeping the Frank Little name above the shop front, to the high standards set by both Mr. Davies and Mr. Little. In the 1960s, when there were many more grocery stores in the area, Mr. Bower also decided to retire and so sold the business and left Uxbridge House for ever.

From Uxbridge House, three men, Mr. Davies, Mr. Little and Mr. Bower, for over seventy years, ran a high-class grocery business. That, however, was in a different world from the world in which we now live. In Mr. Davies and Mr. Little's day free people had inherent rights, including the right to property. Now, rights are created by government order, from the European Convention on Human Rights down, and can be changed by fiat. Theirs was a world in which the alternative to work was penury. With the advent of the Welfare State, of super stores and online shopping and the plethora of a myriad forms of transport, the Uxbridge House experience has vanished forever.



*Station Road*

## Bryn Awel Gardens



*Mr Jones in his 'studio'*

As you drive along Llanellian Road from Old Colwyn, passing the football ground on your right and then turn first right, to head up to Llanellian village, you will see on your right a cul-de-sac called Maes Madog and the Rhodfa Sant Elian housing estate. This was, thirty years ago, where Mr Hugh Madoc Jones ran his floristry business, Bryn Awel Gardens. Mr Jones died aged 83 in 1992 and is buried, with his late wife, in St Elian's Parish Church Cemetery, Llanellian.

I knew Mr Jones very well and he was more than just your run of the mill florist; he was a nurseryman and a floral artist. He was born in Llanellian, his first job being a handyman on the Coed Coch Estate in Dolwen when he was sixteen years of age. I remember he told me that he had to get up at 5.00am in his very rudimentary accommodation and immediately set to work. He could still recall the early morning songs of the birds in the woods. He then became an apprentice at Plas Newydd on Anglesey and Bodnant in the Conwy Valley.

In 1924 he found a disused 1st World War army corrugated iron hut at Kinmel Park Camp, Bodelwyddan, which he moved and had it reassembled on his own land, Bryn Awel Gardens. He always referred to it as his 'studio'. Inside his studio, a ramshackle, earthen floor, dank smelling edifice, were hung dozens and dozens of placards inscribed in his own fair hands the thoughts and sayings of men and women, some well-known, and others not so well known, which he had

found interesting and thought provoking. All these placards were attached to the ceiling, the rafters and work benches, the whole conglomeration intermingled with books and boxes, racks and ribbons and flowers. In 1988, he was described by a journalist as 'one of the best half dozen or so (florists) in Great Britain', and by another, 'He is certainly a past master at floral work, one of the best in the country I would say.'

He was, however, more than just a wonderful florist; he was a wonderful Welsh man. He was kind and unassuming, jovial, and self-effacing, thoughtful, unhurried. A good companion. He was satisfied with his quiet life. He was helped

all his married life by his wife Dilys who was three years younger than him and who died five years before he passed away. They had no children.

Two of the placards hanging in the studio read: 'You can build a house, but a home must grow' and 'One of the hallmarks of a good man is his eagerness to train a successor'. Both of which would have resonated with Mr Jones' character. He did not, however, expect his many visitors and friends to necessarily agree with the sentiments hung around the studio. One announced: 'The bees are going on strike now; they want shorter flowers and more honey'.

Mr Jones' studio was unique, there was a certain magic about the whole place. There is now nothing remotely like it and I cannot imagine a man today, being satisfied with the sort of contented life which Mr Jones lived surrounded by his clutter and his friends and his flowers and his 'sayings'.

Two final examples of his sayings: 'The sun with all those planets revolving around it and dependent upon it, still has time to ripen my tomatoes as if it had nothing else to do in the universe'. 'When a husband helps his wife into the car, he had probably just acquired one or the other'.



*The 'studio', Mr Jones' work place and haven.*

## What's In A Name

On Allanson Road, Rhos-on-Sea, at number 16 is one of three houses built by Mr Colin Berry in the 1950s. (NB: Journal February 2008: The Berry Houses ). Sadly, at the moment, it is looking rather down at heel and unkempt. It is called Rangiora but due to the disheveled state of the property the name has dropped off the gate! Mr Cubbon built the house and Charlie Byron designed it, while Maldwyn Jones carried out all the carpentry work; all three men would be horrified to see it today. The other two houses that Mr Colin Berry built are Borrowdale on St Georges Road and Hillgate on Rhos Road.

Rangiora is a town of 15,000 people on the South Island of New Zealand. It is on the East Coast, north of Christchurch and quixotically, east of Oxford. The present owner of the Berry Garage business, Dave, had a customer who had lived in New Zealand and was able to pass on much information about the town.

The house is so-called simply because the original owner had visited Rangiora on holiday and had enjoyed his time there.

## A Post Office Addendum

In the last edition of this Journal there was an article regarding local Post Offices. However, forgetfully, I left out any reference to the Abergele Road Post Office in the East End of the town on the corner of Erskine Road and Abergele Road. The Road is named after the prominent Erskine family who made their home in Colwyn Bay in the 19th century.

This Post Office served a large community around Belgrave, Erskine, Park etc Roads. In days gone by it was, in some senses, the social hub of the area. Lorraine Jones (always known by her maiden name, Miss Rowlands, by the customers) well remembers, every Thursday morning arriving at work at 8.30am and finding a long que outside the door with the same faces always at the front of the line. They were queuing for their pensions of course, also, the opportunity of meeting their friends.

The Post Office is now closed, and the site is currently occupied by Alex Websters Emporium antiques renovation business and next-door-but-one is The Sun Shop where you can get a fake tan, an idea which would have surprised the first managers of the Abergele Road Post Office. After the last Post Office managers, Christopher and Janet Davies, decided to retire, the Post Office hierarchy decided to rationalize the business and close-down this particular branch. Mr and Mrs Davies ran the Post Office in a tip-top fashion and were very efficient and friendly; the local residents must have been mortified when they decided to leave. The only remaining evidence that the Post Office was ever there is the small letter box on a slender pole, show casing the ascendancy of the email, on the corner of the pavement.

Before Christopher and Janet Davies, a married Italian couple, Harold and Ceirolo, ran the Abergele Road Post Office, but for some reason, almost overnight, their tenure came to an end. Before the Italians,



*Abergele Rost Office building.*

Bob and Joan Gledhill ran the business. Bob was an enormously tall guy and used to literally look down on his customers. Oddly, the Gledhills forsook the Post Office customers of the East End of the town and bought and ran, very efficiently and caringly, a nursing home, Merlewood, on Abbey Road in Rhos-on-Sea. I remember them well at both the Post Office and the nursing home; they were always ready with a smile and a helping hand. The Gledhill's nursing home and the Rhos Priory Nursing Home next door, have both been demolished to make way for the Adlington House apartment block.

All these people, the Davies, the Italians, and the Gledhills were helped enormously by ladies of three generations of the same family. As I have mentioned Mr and Mrs Davies were helped by Lorraine (Miss Rowlands); before Lorraine, her mother Ann Rowlands had helped behind the

counter, and before Ann, her mother (Lorraine's grandmother), Kitty Jones, known by all the customers simply as Kitty, had been employed behind the same counter. These three ladies formed a long and enduring association with the Abergele Road Post Office serving for longer than the Post Masters and Mistresses themselves.

The cat's cradle of local post offices, manned and run by efficient and kindly souls, is now slowly being dismantled in a world that is getting used to doing its business 'on line' and sending emails instead of letters. The Abergele Road Post Office and the people who ran it over the years served the community well and with diligence.

The very latest Post Office closure will be the Rhos-on-Sea Post Office. It is to be sold and will moved away from the centre of the village.

# The Telephone Exchanges



*Allanson Road Telephone Exchange.*

There are three more or less redundant Telephone Exchanges in Colwyn Bay. One in Old Colwyn on Albert Road, one in Rhos-on-Sea on Allanson Road, entirely surrounded and enclosed by the houses on Crossley, St George's, Whitehall and Allanson Roads, and the largest, on the corner of Gregory Avenue and Conwy Road opposite the old Braid's Garage.

Today everyone, seemingly, has a mobile telephone tucked into the back pocket of their trousers or if they happen to use one as they are walking along on the street, being in danger of it being grabbed and stolen. People are now having their 'land lines' taken out of their homes and are relying solely on their mobile 'phones. This telephone revolution has taken place in the last few years and would have seemed fanciful to my mother who worked as a young telephone operator on the second floor of the old Post Office on Princess Avenue. (NB Civic Society Journal: December 2023: Post Offices). How was it possible to organise, eighty years ago, the D Day Landings on the Normandy beaches without mobile telephones?

At the start of the 2nd World War my 17 year old mother, along with other young ladies, were telephone operators sat in front of a huge wall covered in holes representing land lines all over the country into which, when they were called over their head-sets, by subscribing

local private telephone users, they would plug the requested number into the wall and thus join up the 'caller' and their 'requested number'. These young ladies were keenly watched over by Tom Tilling, their supervisor. Mr Tilling was an extraordinarily large heavy man with a booming voice who lived in St John's Close in Old Colwyn. Mother always maintained that he would come up too close behind her and her comrades and lean over them unnecessarily too furtively to explain to them what he thought they were doing incorrectly. That was 85 years ago.

Where my mother worked on Princes Drive was the first Telephone Exchange in the area. On the ground floor, as many of our members will recall, was the Post Office; on the first floor was a very early, crude, Telephone Exchange, where John Linton was in charge and on the second floor, behind the eyelet windows in the roof was the original Manuel Board which in due course was superseded by the Exchange.

When I was young, in the late 1940s, we had no telephone in the house until one day with much excitement we had a 'party line' installed. This meant that we were sharing the telephone with another household unknown to us and we would sometimes lift the receiver to make a call and hear our unknown party person already on the line; a call we

could vicariously listen into. Party lines were necessary because the Exchanges did not have sufficient infrastructure to accommodate everyone's needs.

The oldest Telephone Exchange in the area was in what is now a terraced house in a cul-de-sac in Llandudno Junction! This exchange and the one on Princes Drive in Colwyn Bay were so sited because they were close to the railway stations.

Eventually, with the growing desire of households to have their very own telephones, more Exchanges had to be built. Thus, it was in the 1950s the Exchanges on Albert Road in Old Colwyn and Allanson Road in Rhos-on-Sea had to be built to cater for the growing demand. There was also a small one on the main road in Penryn Bay that has now been adapted as a library.

The Albert Road Exchange is now looking very dowdy and down at heel, while the Rhos-on-Sea Exchange, which was better built and designed, is still looking good. I suspect that the Allanson Road Exchange was designed by the same person, C.P. Wilkinson from the Office of Works, who designed the Princess Drive Post Office as they are very similar in style even up to the eyelet windows in the roof.

It was considered a telephone exchange revolution when in 1962 the Tandem (Technical District Manned Exchange)



*Albert Road Telephone Exchange.*

was built on the corner of Gregory Avenue and Conway Road. It was built in a very utilitarian and functional style; it is not a thing of beauty. Local residents tell me that the flat roof has now become home to hundreds of seagulls. Before it was built all callers had to go through their local exchange. All calls to Old Colwyn began with the number 5, those to Deganwy with the number 8, those to Rhos-on-Sea with the number 4, those to Llandudno with the number 7 and those to Colwyn Bay with the numbers 2 and 3. When the Tandem Exchange was built, all of a sudden, subscribers could lift the receiver and dial direct to whomever they wished. All calls were channeled overhead along what were called 'drop copper wires' from the top of poles. There were three categories of pole, stout, medium and light. The only ones left today are the light ones.

The new system was known as STD; Subscription Trunk Dialing. The new equipment installed in the Tandem was called Strowger, which was switching system equipment that worked without the input of a human being. It was named after an undertaker from Kansas City in the United States of America.

Mr Strowger had long felt that his wife was passing on business information, via the local telephone system, to a rival and had therefore, in 1889, invented a system that worked without the aid of his wife or anyone else for that matter.

If you walk around the Penrhyn Beach Estate or Liddle Park in Llandudno, you will see no telephone poles. The whole system was laid underground in armoured cables; copper cables shielded with metal wiring. However, these hundreds of extra

telephone lines could not be accommodated in the Penryn Bay Exchange and so were 'parented' into the Allanson Road Exchange.

My mother, in the 1940s, in the roof of the Post Office on Princes Drive, was helping to work a crude and laborious system of telephone exchanges. Now, eighty-five years later, we are a year away from when the telephone system stops using copper cable and changes to fiber; all the local exchanges, Albert Road, Allanson Road and Conwy Road and the telephone poles, will be redundant and we will all rely on the green metal boxes sited on our local pavements. We will have to wait to see to what use our telephone exchanges will be put.

I am indebted to Mr Wyn Jones who arrived in Colwyn Bay in 1963 and joined what became British Telecom. He was initially an apprentice and was part of the 'Youths in Training' known by their initials, the YITs. He eventually became a Zone Manager and has passed on much of the information in this article.

Mr Strowger, from Kansas City, would no doubt be amazed, 135 years later, that his unsuspecting wife would now be able to dial her confidant from a gadget that she would keep in her back trouser pocket.



*Conwy Road Telephone Exchange.*

## The Christmas my Father saw Buffalo Bill

Thirty years ago, in the springtime, my family and I stood on Lookout Mountain, high above the plains of middle America, looking out over Denver in the distance, and to the Rockies on the horizon. Beside us was the grave of Buffalo Bill.

Buffalo Bill's real name was William Frederick Cody, and he was born in 1846 in Iowa and died in Chicago in 1917. He worked at one time as a messenger of the Pony Express but became famous as a soldier fighting the Indians and killing buffalo to feed the workmen building the Kansas Pacific Railway.

At the turn of the century, he started to tour the USA and Europe with his Wild West Show and took along Annie Oakley

and Chief Sitting Bull. The most popular turn was a realistic staging of a fight between Indians and Palefaces.

Every Christmas is important as a festival of remembrance and celebrations of the birth of Christ. For a child, however, the lasting satisfaction lies in the family traditions and the social happiness associated with that time of year. Children yearn for the familiarity of Aunty Nora coming for tea, of the Christmas tree being placed in exactly the same place from year to year, the same decorations being hung from the tree, of pulling crackers and Dad cutting the turkey; a walk after lunch and of not opening the present until your Mum tells you that you can. My Father always recalled Christmas Day with delight because it was his

birthday (his middle name was Noel), and because on Christmas Eve, when he was four years old, he was taken by his father to Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show at Belle Vue in Manchester. He saw Chief Sitting Bull sporting a magnificent head-dress (whom he always maintained did not do much for him!) and the awe-inspiring sight to a young child at the start of the 20th Century, of dozens of Indians charging around on horses, sweeping before him.

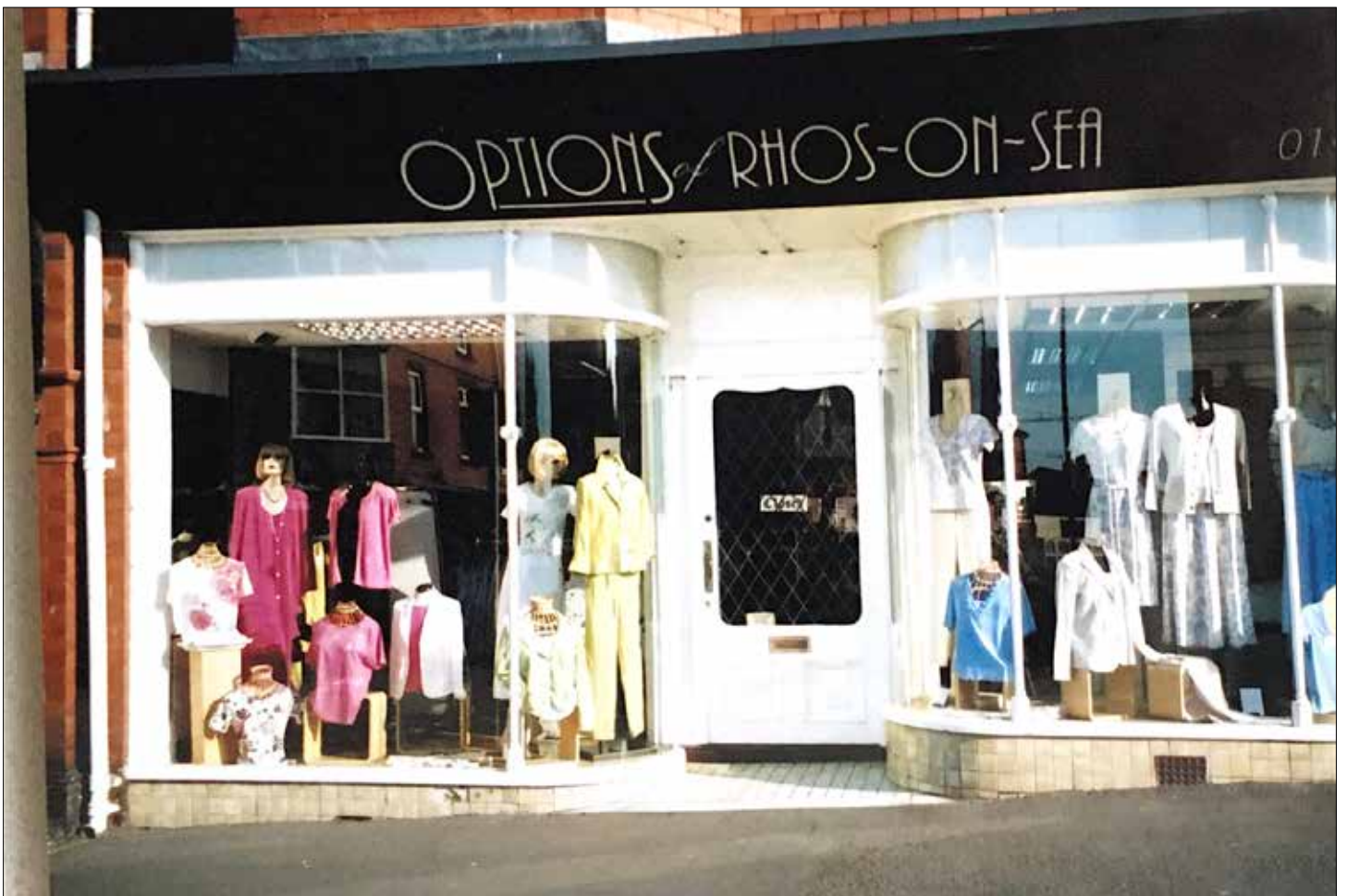
For my Father, Christmas meant his family and the delight in remembering the white bearded man with the cream Stetson at a jaunty angle on his head, beside whose grave I stood all those years ago in the spring sunshine with the Rockies glistening in the distance across the prairie.



*Abergele Road, Old Colwyn, in Sitting Bull's day.*



*The new building above replaces that shown on the back of the October 2021 Journal.*



*Another family business closes*