

The Travelling Salesmen of Newman Brothers

A Profile of Mr Arthur Allen



Arthur Allen worked as a travelling salesman for Newman Brothers between 1903 and 1939. His son recalls, "In 1903 he set off for Newman Brothers in a frock coat, bowler hat and rolled-up umbrella. And he said "I feel like a real commercial traveller".

Between 1915 and 1919 he served in the Army Service Corps, as a driver, making use of the skills he had gained as a travelling salesman for Newman Brothers. When he returned to work in 1919, he spent a lot of his time in Ireland selling goods all over the country. He travelled on his Triumph motorcycle, which had a wickerwork sidecar, into which he put his sample bags. It was while he was in Ireland, around 1921 to 1922 during 'The Troubles',

that he had a frightening experience with the IRA that went down in family history. His son, Anthony, recalls

'He was in Dublin during The Troubles, staying at St Andrews Hotel, in bed, asleep, and he heard the door open and he saw somebody with a candle, and the shadow of a revolver, and they said, "Get up! You're an English spy!" He kept saying, "I am a commercial traveller...get my sample bags." They said "it's ammunition" and brought it in, but the first bag that was opened had a great crucifix on top and that did it.'

The IRA men, being Catholics, let him go after that, and it was said in the family that the crucifix had saved his life.

Newman Brothers' travelling salesmen continued to sell to Irish funeral directors and wholesale manufacturers throughout the 20th century. With the Troubles growing more intense throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Newmans began to use 'middle-men' to sell their goods in Northern Ireland. One such company, who also had shares in Newman Brothers was the Duggart family, who bought products from Newmans and then sold them on. This was a shrewd decision at a time when business could have been affected for them as a British company.

Travellers at Newman Brothers could be away from home for weeks at a time, selling wares and securing orders from Undertakers for the factory. Leaving early on a Monday morning and not returning until late on Friday evening left little time to see the family and for socialising.

A profile of Mr Holford Pritchard Davies – known as ‘Dai’ Davies



Mr Taylor, a Funeral Director who was a customer of Newman Brothers recounts: “...the traveller from Newmans’ was so nice, Mr Davies.Yes, he was a proper gentleman; he used to stand up when you used came into the office. It was a real pleasure to see him, you know, it’s not like a lot of travellers, who you don’t really want to see, but he was always a pleasure to see Mr Davies.”

“Mr Davies used to come in his Peugeot and he had his keypad on the floor, you know security thing, and he used to have it for his date of birth and I always used to remember, something, something, something, something 1917 and that was in 1997. You think, ‘he’s eighty!’. He’s still coming as a traveller, you know, sort of, and we used to see him in Stratford occasionally as well, because he used to live near Stratford. But he was so nice, he always used to be our traveller from Newman Brothers you know, and he knew my parents before they were married,

which was rather nice really.”

The personal approach seeming to be an endearing feature of business in years gone by.

What we know about Dai Davies

“Dai” was born on 5th April 1916 and his birth was registered in Cardiff. He was baptised in the same year at the Anglican Church of St Teilo, Cathays, Cardiff (now called St Andrew and St Teilo). During his childhood he lived at number 5 Pen Y-Wain Road in Cathays with his parents - Brinley Pritchard Davies (born 1873 in Swansea) who was a Bank Accountant and his mother Edith (nee Knight).

Holford married a Wilma Lindsell Grimes (nee Warburton) in 1946 and the marriage was registered at Stratford, Warwickshire. We have only found one child from this marriage - a son named Brian Peter J Davies, born 1949 (his birth was registered in Stratford, Warwickshire) who appears to have pre-deceased his father, dying at the age of 52 in 2002. Wilma died in 1999.



Holford's death was registered in July 2004 in Coventry and old electoral rolls show that he was living at 8 Marshall Avenue, Shipston on Stour at the time of his death. Old phone directories show he was at this same address from at least 1980.