

H J Sowray's Butchers Shop, 67 Fulford Rd, Fishergate

Reminiscences by his granddaughter, Gillian Sowray



Sowray's Butcher's Shop in 1965, pictured during tree felling on land adjacent to the Priory Hotel.
Photograph from a Private Collection

My grandfather, Harry Jennings Sowray was born in the late 1800s in Rochdale, Lancashire. At some point in his life he arrived in Stillington North Yorkshire. In 1918 he married my grandmother Ada Gilleard who was from Crayke and they moved to York. (see the Marriage Certificate at the end of this article)

I don't know when he became a butcher, but prior to owning his own shop he worked in a butcher's shop on Clarence Street. At some point he either took over, or set up his own shop at 67 Fulford Road (above) and this is where my memories start.

My father and his sister were both born and brought up there. My father attended Fishergate School & then Bootham School.

My first memories of the shop, in the early 1960s, were going there on a Saturday to collect our Sunday joint. I can remember the sawdust on the floor, the smell of raw meat, the big horns hanging on the wall and my grandfather behind the counter cutting up meat.

He and his staff didn't touch cash, in the corner of the shop opposite the door was a small booth and either my grandma or her sister in law sat in there taking the money.



The shop also provided a delivery service having both a bike with the big basket on the front and a car (Ford Popular DN 650). My Uncle Henry (Grandma's brother) was the car delivery man.

At the start of my memories my grandparents no longer lived at the shop but in the road opposite, at 16 Grange Garth. Bert & Tilly Gilleard (another of Grandma's brothers and his wife) lived there. Bert eventually took over the business when my Grandfather retired.

Although my grandparents were very kind I did find them quite scary, especially my grandfather. However, knowing how I loved animals my grandfather often took me to the cattle market on a Monday (in school holidays). In those days it was held at the side of the city walls and on the site of the Barbican Centre when it was held at the market where he would bid for and buy cattle, pigs and lambs to be butchered and sell in the shop.

In those days there were two markets a week on a Monday and a Thursday. The Thursday market was the farmers' market where the farmers bought animals to live and breed on their farms.

There were a lot of butchers in York in those days and my grandfather knew a lot of them. There was a Butchers' Guild and he was the Master in 1949/50. He was also a Freemason being a member of the Minster Lodge. Another part of his life was his faith and he regularly attended York Minster on a Sunday morning where I believe he was also a sidesman.

H J Sowray's York Butcher's Association membership certificate





Members of Fishergate Ward Civil Defence Group
 Harold Sowray is second from left on the front row



Certificate of thanks from City of York Council commemorating Harold Sowray's service in the Fishergate Ward Civil Defence Group



Certificate of Marriage between Harold Jennings Sowray and Aa Gilleard at Crayke Church on 4 December 1918