

W E LAWLESS & SONS, 21 CHURCH STREET

Heather Powling

Frodsham's oldest baker's shop, W E Lawless and Sons, 21 Church Street, closed in September 2017. The business had been in existence on the same site for more than 100 years. It was one of several shops owned by the Lawless family in Frodsham. The first of these was the grocer's at the corner of Main Street and Fountain Lane opened in the 1880s by William Edward Lawless's father, Edward.

Edward Lawless and his wife Sarah were born in Lancashire and began their working lives as cotton weavers. They moved to Frodsham in the 1880s, possibly because of hard times in the cotton industry in the late 1870s and 1880s. Cotton riots in 1878 and a strike in 1883-84 in Darwen would have made life difficult for families like the Lawless's.

William Edward Lawless, eldest son of Edward and Sarah, was born in 1878 whilst the family lived in Darwen, and the 1881 census shows that he and his parents lived at 27 Gillebrand Brow. Ten years later, at the time of the 1891 census, the family had moved to Frodsham and opened the grocery business in Main Street (photographs of the early 1900s show that this was also a bakery and confectionery). William worked for his father and is described as 'grocer's assistant' on both the 1891 and 1901 censuses. He then married farmer's daughter, Nessie Booth in 1902 and they had acquired the shop in Church Street by 1906 (Kelly's Trade Directory of 1906). They were also living there at the time of the 1911 census. By then the couple had two children, Percy and Kathleen. William still gave his occupation as 'grocer' at this point.

<p>PLAN of PROPERTY. Church Street, FRODSHAM.</p> <p>Lot 1. 468 Sq. Yds. - 2 469 . . . - 3 1534 . . . Total 1337 Sq. Yds.</p> <p>Sale 11.10.1888</p>	<p>PARTICULARS.</p> <p>LOT 1. ALL THOSE TWO WELL-AND- SUBSTANTIALLY-BUILT HOUSES AND SHOPS, WITH OUT-OFFICES, Situate on the East side of Church Street, one being in the occupation of Mr. James Hough, and the other unoccupied, containing, with the Yard and Outbuildings, 488 Square Yards of Land. This Lot has a frontage to Church Street of upwards of 62 feet, and is a very desirable property, being recently built, and is in a good position for business purposes.</p> <p>LOT 2.—All those FOUR COTTAGES AND SMALL SHOP, in the occupation of W. Pells and others, adjoining Lot 1, with a frontage to Church Street of upwards of 69 feet. The purchaser of this Lot to have the use of Road from A to B on Plan. Contents 409 Square Yards.</p> <p>LOT 3.—All that newly-erected BEER-HOUSE, CALLED "DROVERS' ARMS," AND TWO COTTAGES, with Cowhouses and Outbuildings, in the occupation of James Hancock and others. Frontage, with road to Church Street, upwards of 31 feet. Contents 434 Square Yards.</p> <p>Lot 2 and 3 will be offered in the first instance as One Lot, and if not sold together will then be offered separately.</p> <p>The boundary between Lots 2 and 3 to be marked out from Plan by Messrs. H. LEWIS AND SONS.</p>
<p>Lot 1 on the 1888 plan had been acquired by William Edward Lawless by 1906</p>	<p>1888 Sale Particulars</p>

On the Sale Particulars the premises at 21 Church Street are described as two houses, shops, yard and outbuildings. Part of the property was unoccupied at the time of the sale and the other part occupied by painter and decorator James Hough. From information in the 1891 and 1901 censuses, we believe that the shop which was to become William Lawless's bakery was leased or owned until then by John Roberts, a greengrocer and cab proprietor. John Roberts lived further up Church Street in 1881, and by 1911 had retired to Chester with his unmarried daughter.

From 1911 onwards, W E Lawless and Son(s) are listed in various trade directories, including Kelly's Directories of 1928 and 1939. Later guides such as the Official Frodsham Guide of 1960 include advertisements for the bakery.

	
<p>An original shop sign dating from before the birth of William Lawless's second son Kenneth in 1921, which was still hanging in the shop when it closed.</p>	<p>FD00976 The shop as it looked in the 1940s</p>

After William's death in 1946, the business passed to his two sons, Percy and Kenneth. When Kenneth died it was handed down to his sons, John and David, who have owned the shop until now.



FDN2521 Lawless's with blind c.1990s

2017 marks not only the closure of a much-loved and long established bakery, but also the centenary of the death of William Edward Lawless's younger brother, Isaac Thomas. Isaac was the fifth child of Edward and Sarah, and also a baker. He originally enlisted in the 1/7th Battalion (Cyclist) Welsh Regiment in 1915 but then

transferred to the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve in June 1917. He was drafted to the British Expeditionary Force on 9th July of that year and joined the Anson Battalion on 2nd September. Able Seaman Lawless died seven weeks later, on 26 October 1917, in the Second Battle of Passchendaele - killed (drowned) in a shell-hole as a direct result of enemy action. He is named on the memorial at Tyne Cot, Zonnebeke, West Flanders, Belgium.



Group from Manor House School pointing to Isaac Lawless's name, Tyne Cot – photograph by kind permission of the school

When the service to commemorate the Battle of Passchendaele was broadcast from Tyne Cot in July 2017, part of the programme was recorded in front of the panel which bears Isaac's name. It is fitting that we are able to pay tribute to him, together with the other eleven young men from Frodsham who gave their lives in one of the worst periods of the First World War.

Albert, the youngest Lawless brother, died in France eleven months later. He was killed by a shell whilst returning with a carrying party on 27th September 1918. Before the outbreak of WW1, he had worked at the Maypole in Warrington, though in earlier years he also worked for his father. Albert was originally in the Grenadier Guards, but by 1918 was a Corporal in the 1st Battalion, The Welsh Guards. He is buried at the Louverval Military Cemetery, Nor-Pas-de Calais. Both are remembered on the family grave in St Laurence graveyard (**OGC/11/09**).



Right: the Lawless family grave, St Laurence graveyard, Frodsham