

Worthing & Adur Chamber of Commerce

A HISTORY

Written by Chris Hare



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First printed in the UK, 2015

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Design and print
Panda Creative Ltd
T: 01903 531 531
E: james@pandacreativeltd.co.uk
www.pandacreativeltd.co.uk

Worthing & Adur Chamber of Commerce
17 Liverpool Gardens,
Worthing,
West Sussex,
BN11 1RY
T: 01903 203484
E: info@worthingandadurchamber.co.uk
www.worthingandadurchamber.co.uk

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Roy Bishop 1918–2013

Roy Bishop's Legacy

This booklet and accompanying DVD would never have come to fruition had it not been for the enthusiasm and resolve of past Chamber of Commerce President, Roy Bishop. It was Roy who began collecting archive material relating to the Chamber's history and ensured that the oldest surviving minute book was given over to the safe keeping of Worthing Museum. Roy sadly died in 2013 at the grand age of 94. He was active to the last, and had only recently completed working on the funding application to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) which made this project – the booklet and DVD - possible.

This history that you are about to read is a result of research that I have undertaken, using the Chamber's minute books and newspaper cuttings as my source. The final section is a personal memoir of the Chamber's recent history from 1995 – 2009,

written by the current Chamber President, Peter Bennett. I undertook the oral history interviews that appear on the accompanying DVD with a team of student volunteers from Worthing College. These interviews offer a personal insight into the business and social life of Worthing from the 1940s to the 1970s.

Worthing Chamber of Commerce officially came into being following a meeting held in the town in 1920, it is rather extraordinary to reflect that Roy Bishop first became a member in 1950 and remained actively involved in the life of the Chamber until his death 63 years later – no one else could claim such a longstanding involvement or could speak with such authority about its history.

Roy recalled that when he came to Worthing in 1950 to open a branch of Hector Powe the tailors, "Chapel Road seemed to have a village atmosphere." He remembered that in those days the town was dominated by family-run businesses and that "life was [lived] at a slower pace." Cars could park without restriction in Chapel Road and everyone took at least an hour for lunch!

However, Roy was not stuck in the past. As Chamber President in 1960, he established an annual business fair that brought all the latest technology and innovations to the businesses and people of Worthing. Writing just before his death, Roy celebrated the big increase in the number of businesses run by women. Indeed women now account for over half the membership, something that would have seemed implausible in 1950.

This booklet can only give a taste of the Chamber's eventful history, but hopefully it is one that will whet the appetite for more research in the future.

Chris Hare, History People UK

April 2015.



Worthing Herald cartoon from 1920 – a time of unemployment and recession

The 1920s

The Worthing Chamber of Commerce may have existed as an idea in the minds of local businessmen for some years, but a meeting to consider whether or not Worthing needed such an organisation was not held in the town until January 1920. The Great War had ended just over a year earlier. There was high inflation and organised labour, even in Worthing, was flexing its muscles. Local businesses needed an organisation to fight for its interests, both locally and nationally. The year had not got off to an auspicious start, with rain falling on 28 of the 31 days of the month, and the deadly Spanish Influenza continuing to inflict casualties on a population weakened by warfare, the effects of rationing and a general anxiety about the future. The Worthing Gazette



Worthing tomato growers – once a staple industry in the town.



Glasshouses at Tarring in the 1930s. The local horticulture industry went into terminal decline after the Second World War.

published an arresting cartoon of a labourer representing 'industry', being urged to work harder by an alluring, ethereal woman representing 'prosperity'. It seemed that four years of fighting had not yet delivered the promised 'Land fit for Heroes'.

On the other hand, the trustees of Worthing Provident and Relief Society, that ran the town's Soup Kitchen in Grafton Road, reported there was little call for its services, and that coal, bread, and soup had not been distributed in the town since 1916. It was suggested that the Society should be wound up as the poor in Worthing were a disappearing class.

The mayor, Alderman J. Farquharson Whyte, presided over the meeting at the Town Hall, called to discuss whether Worthing needed a Chamber of Commerce. Other towns already had a chamber of their own, including Bournemouth, which appears to have acted as a catalyst for those seeking a similar organisation in Worthing. Mr M. S. Plomer, Organising Secretary of the Bournemouth Chamber of Trade, told some 120 Worthing businessmen assembled at the Town Hall, what had been achieved in Bournemouth.

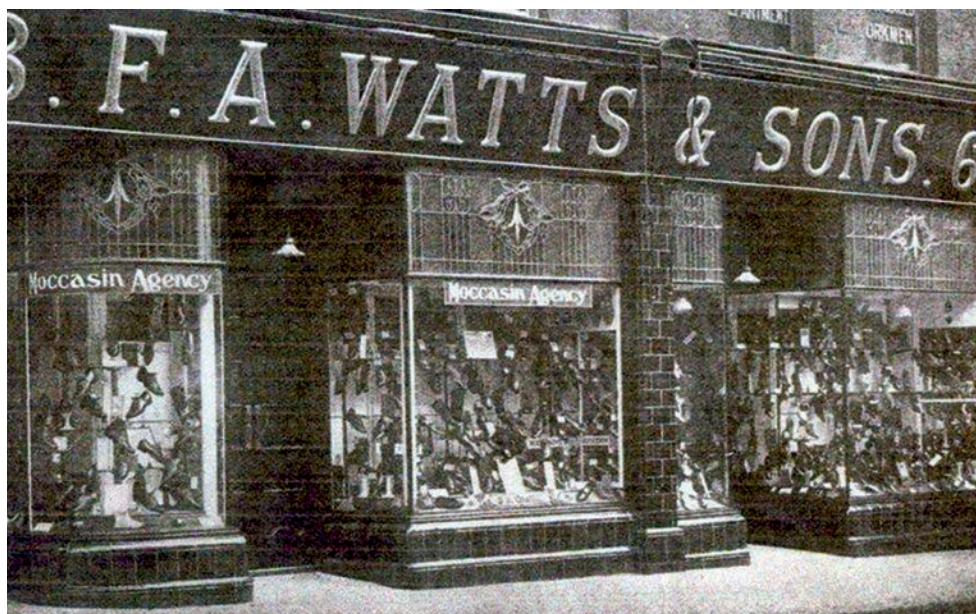
Plomer described how the once disparate trade organisations – one for bakers – one for drapers – one for confectioners etc. – had come together in one Chamber of Trade. There was, he told his audience, strength and influence in numbers. The Chamber was federated, and any trade with 12 or more representatives in the town could have their own section within the Chamber of Trade. Subscriptions were based on the size of the business, ranging in scale from an annual fee of 7s 6d to 25s a year. Even at the higher rate, Plummer assured his listeners, the business was paying less than the average workman paid for his trade union membership.

Plomer further advised his Worthing audience to affiliate to the National Federation as this would give them access to useful advice and information. His call did not go unheeded. Mr W. G. Tree, seconded by Mr W. E. Wenban Smith, proposed that Worthing should establish a local Chamber of Commerce. The only dissent was in the name – some present felt that ‘Chamber of Trade’ would be a more suitable title than ‘Chamber of Commerce’. However, the meeting decided on ‘Commerce,’ including the sceptical baker, Mr F. W. Mitchell, whose inclination had been in favour of ‘trade’ over ‘commerce,’ as he didn’t like ‘swank.’

The First Year

In its first year of operation, the Worthing Chamber of Commerce saw its membership increase from 160 to over 280. It gained a local success in that first year when it extracted a promise from Worthing Town Council that trade refuse would be collected fortnightly for a charge of 1s 6d. Members were angry that wartime restrictions, limiting the hours of trade, were still in place. Although the restrictions were lifted by the end of the year, the newly passed Early Closing Act, prevented shops staying open late, say till 10pm, as many had done before the war.

The Excess Profits Duty, also introduced in 1920, was seen as another penalty inflicted by government on business. Members felt that the influence of trade unions and socialist ideas were becoming too marked and that this trend was not good for commerce. Some members joined the Middle Classes Union, a



Watts shoe shop in Chapel Road – one of the town's family owned businesses.

national organisation, set up to oppose Labour candidates, who were contesting and winning seats in local elections – even in Worthing!

Worthing Chamber member, Commander Foxley, proprietor of the Warnes Hotel, inaugurated the annual dinner-dance and whist drive, which proved very popular. Tickets costs 6s 6d and remained at this price until 1935 when the cost was raised by a shilling. Even a popular event had to be moderately priced to ensure the support of members.

The 1930s

A Seaweed Sub-Committee was established to look into ways of ridding Worthing of its seaweed menace that, some believed, was driving visitors from the town in the summer season, when the dank smell of rotting weed hung over much of the town. Why could not the council sell the seaweed to commercial growers, thereby making a profit and alleviating the problem at the same time?

The Chamber of Commerce decided that it would support any member standing for election to the Town Council. An approved motion in 1937 declared, “We pledge ourselves to support [the candidate] in every way possible, provided he is approved by the Executive Committee.”

The Executive Committee called on the Council to erect more footbridges over the railway and construct more underpasses, so as to ease congestion at the town’s level crossings.

The Executive Committee expressed its dissatisfaction that the Chamber had not been invited to put in a tableau for the Coronation procession being organised by the Town Council.

A new constitution in 1938 formed the Chamber into a company limited by guarantee. It was also agreed that a Trade Protection and Debt Collection Scheme be established to actively assist members who found their businesses floundering due to unpaid debts.

The Chamber looked sympathetically on a suggestion from the Lord’s Day Observance Society that shop blinds should be closed on Sundays.

Members were very angry that official posters had been placed around the town announcing an outbreak of infantile paralysis in the town. Members thought the scale of the outbreak had been much exaggerated and that the posters would create unnecessary alarm. The Secretary of the Chamber was instructed to write to the Medical Officer of Health, informing him of their views. The Secretary was also to write to The Newspaper Retailers Association, pointing out the harm caused by the publication of such notices. The Worthing Chamber sent a letter of congratulations to the Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, on his



Businesses suffered during wartime, many closed through lack of trade, others were actually destroyed by enemy bombs!

return from meeting Adolf Hitler in Munich, praising the Prime Minister for “his untiring efforts to maintain peace in Europe...”.

The Chamber was less impressed with the conduct of Japanese foreign policy, particularly following its invasion of China. Members of the Chamber were urged to boycott Japanese goods in protest at the alleged atrocities committed by Japan in China.

During the 1930s, Worthing Council was the sole electricity provider in the town. So successful was this municipal endeavour that in 1939 it reported a profit of £2,000. The Worthing Chamber called on the Council to use this profit to subsidise the cost of electricity to local businesses.

The Chamber was pressing the Council to build a modern indoor swimming pool to replace the Victorian Baths in Heene Road.

The War Years

The Chamber agreed that shops would close by 6pm during the wartime blackout.

The war hit many businesses very badly. The threat of invasion, evacuation and wartime travel restrictions



Spell's greengrocery stall by Holders Corner during the summer of 1941.

all combined to reduce takings and the viability of businesses. Several members resigned from the Chamber at this time. Some resignations were accepted with equanimity, but others were much regretted. The Executive Committee asked the Secretary to write to Mr. Frampton, asking him to reconsider his decision. Mr. Frampton had been a longstanding member.

Wartime brought rationing, including that of paper, forcing the Chamber to discontinue publication of its Worthing Trade Digest. The editor of the Worthing Journal approached the Chamber, offering them a page for Chamber events – but the offer was declined. The Journal itself became a casualty of war – ceasing publication in June 1940.

The Chamber organised teams of 'firewatchers' to be on duty around the town during the night, watching out for fires, either as a result of enemy action or domestic accident. Any fire was a potential beacon to passing enemy aircraft.

On the motion of Mr Kitch, seconded by Mr Sidney Walter, the Chamber wrote to the National Chamber expressing their dismay that large quantities of goods were being warehoused in London, instead of being distributed around the country, and as a result were highly vulnerable to destruction as the result of German air raids on the capital.

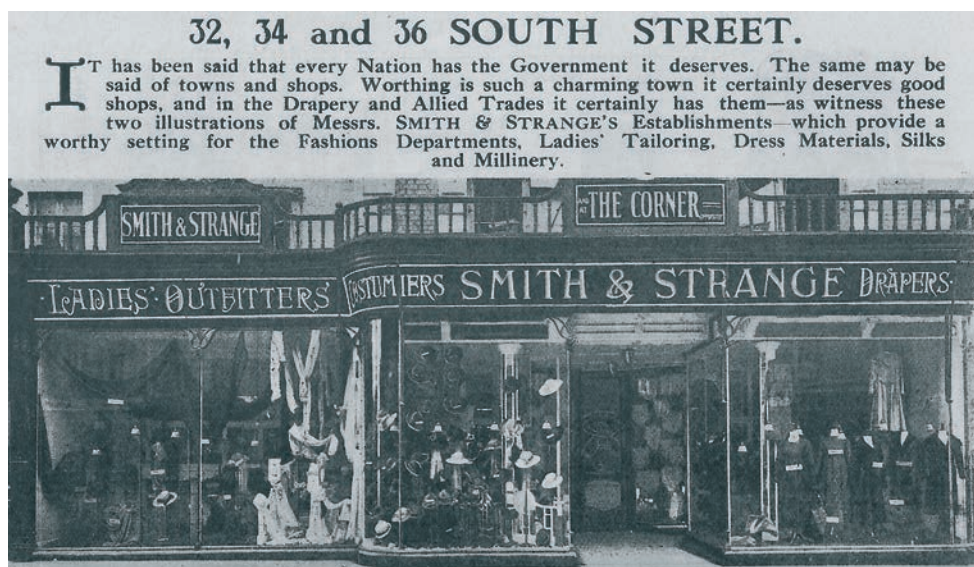
It was with regret, in 1940, that the Chamber accepted the resignation of their President, Mr B. C. Williams, who was being called up to serve in the Armed Forces. The Chamber unanimously agreed that it should remain President until his term expired in February 1941, even though he would not be present to undertake his duties. Mr C. S. Green was to deputise in the President's absence. Green was elected President in February and remained in post until 1944.

The Early Closing Association lobbied the Chamber, calling on it to endorse their campaign for the early closing of wartime to be continued once peace returned.

The pilfering of goods from shops became a pressing issue. The Executive discussed employing a female detective to patrol the premises of larger stores, although it was decided that these stores should bear the costs of such policing themselves.



Worthing volunteer fire crew drew many recruits from the business community during the war years.



Smith & Strange, Ladies outfitters and drapers – a much loved local store.

After the War: late 1940s

Concern was raised by Mr Storm of the Chamber's Executive Committee, who believed that young people were being exploited by Worthing Post Office. He told fellow members that young people aged 16 to 18 were working from 8am in the morning until 10pm at night and they even had to bring a packed lunch as no meals were provided. On looking into the matter it was found that boys were working from 8am till 8pm, and girls from 8am to 5pm, and that both had two hours off for meal breaks. It transpired that these occasional young workers were exempted from Factory Act regulations, and that their endeavours were regarded, "as a patriotic means of school children helping in an emergency".

A year after the end of the war in Europe, there was a distinct lack of enthusiasm to mark the anniversary, particularly on the part of ex-servicemen. Mr Lea thought that Worthing should be like other towns that had decided against a commemoration, however it was pointed out that Worthing Council had already committed itself to a local celebration and that it was too late to cancel the planned events. No commemoration was held in 1947 or in subsequent years.

The Executive Committee minute book for 1946 shows that Worthing's former Town Clerk tried to exert influence over the Chamber in a dispute with his former employer, Worthing Town Council. Mr K. Kennedy Allerton, Town Clerk of Worthing from 1913 to 1941, objected to plans to allow parking on Marine Parade, including outside his house, which was next to Marine Gardens. The committee, however, told Kennedy Allerton that, regrettably, they could not support his court action against the Council.

During the war, the government had established 'British Restaurants' around the country to provide cheap and wholesome meals. By 1943, there were 2,000 of these outlets and they were deemed to have significantly contributed to the health of the nation. Now the war was over, the Labour government proposed to make the scheme permanent by empowering local councils to run 'Civic Restaurants' across the country. However, the Worthing Chamber of Commerce was deeply opposed to the proposed Bill as it would disadvantage privately run restaurants that could not compete with council-run establishments benefiting from a public subsidy. Members agreed that "very urgent representations" should be made to government on this issue. Despite the protests, the Bill was passed into law the following year. The local Chamber did agree, however, that normal closing time should be 6pm rather than 7pm.

The Chamber was also concerned by the government's plans to nationalise the electricity generating industry. In Worthing, electricity was generated and delivered by Worthing Council, and the Chamber feared that a nationalised service would disadvantage businesses in Worthing that had negotiated favourable terms with the Council. Electricity was duly nationalised the following year.

In 1947, the Chamber joined in a national debate over the desirability of a five day week for shops and other businesses. Locally, members voted 55% against five-day opening, and 35% in favour, believing the change would be detrimental to turnover, and therefore profits. It was pointed out that closing on a Saturday would mean that shops would be closed all weekend, a time when most working class people traditionally did their shopping. Closing on a Monday raised issues of businesses selling perishable goods such as dairy products and cakes. The Worthing Chamber, in its representations to government, concluded that, "a five-day week for shops in retail is wholly impractical".

Some members were increasingly vexed by the proliferation of "loud speaker vans" to promote publicity for businesses and services, as they caused "abuse and annoyance" in the residential districts where they operated. However, the committee decided not to pursue the matter, as smaller businesses argued that loud speaker vans were an effective marketing tool.

A major fire at Hubbard's, one of the town's largest department stores, was a severe blow to its owner and senior Chamber member, Mr Ketton Hubbard. The shop was gutted in the blaze and did not reopen for four months. A local newspaper reported that the "first intimation" of the outbreak was reported by Miss O'Brien, a member of staff, who lived in the firm's hostel in Bedford Row, who was awakened by the sound of loud 'crackling.' About the same time, a policeman on patrol in South Street smelt smoke and went to investigate. The scale of the blaze can be gauged by the fact that twelve fire engines attended the fire, some coming from as far away as Chichester, Crawley, and Guildford.

There was great sadness amongst Chamber members in 1947, when their President-elect, Mr Stevens,

suddenly died. Former President, Mr Stent, stepped in to fill the role, until a new President could be elected. Later, Mr Lea was elected to the new role, but he became very ill and was rushed into hospital – again, Mr Stent took over as temporary President. The Executive Committee was very relieved when Mr Lea made a full recovery and resumed his duties.

Britain was suffering considerable deprivations during the winter of 1947-48, one of the coldest ever recorded. The severe weather added to the woes of a country still trying to recover from the effort of having waged war for six years. The Worthing Chamber of Commerce received a letter from the Port Hope Board of Trade in Canada, offering to send “monthly consignments of food to the needy people of Worthing.” The Worthing Chamber replied accepting the offer, and started to make plans with the Worthing Council of Social Service, to distribute the consignments. However, much to the embarrassment of all concerned, it transpired that the Canadians had written to eighteen communities in the South of England, offering similar assistance, and that they planned only to supply food parcels to the town they judged to be most needy. Eventually, Farnborough in Kent was chosen as the successful applicant.

Mr F.C. Norman had been one of the founding members of the Worthing Chamber of Commerce. Every year he was elected to serve on the Executive Committee. These elections were always contested. It was usual for Mr Bentall or Mr Hubbard to top the poll, with other prominent businessman, such as Mr Mitchell the baker, coming a close second. Some members, such as Mr Overington, the blacksmith, tried, year after year to be elected, but without success. Considerable kudos was attached to these elections and the position that members achieved in the poll. Mr Norman usually came in the middle ranks and never seemed in any danger of failing to be elected. However, in 1948 his vote collapsed and he came near the bottom of the poll, behind the persistent, but continually unsuccessful Alfred Overington.

This humiliation for Mr Norman was keenly felt by the Chairman and President of the Chamber, who proposed at the next meeting of the Executive Committee that he be co-opted to serve for the coming year. However, other members disagreed with the suggestion and, after discussion, “it was decided to take no action in the matter.” Six months later, Mr Norman resigned from the Chamber he had helped to create. The Secretary of the Chamber was instructed to write back to him, accepting his resignation “with regret and also thanks for past services.” One wonders what lay behind Norman’s fall from grace? The minute book gives no clues. In 1949, Alfred Overington was finally elected to the committee.

Flower-sellers in Montague Street were a bone of contention, not just with established florists in the town, but also with other businesses, who resented the ad-hoc nature of their trading. The Superintendent of Police was asked to take action on the matter. Unregulated flower-selling remained a live issue for many years, with the Council making attempts at various times to prohibit their activities. The last ‘flower seller’ only ceased working the Montague Street patch in recent years.

The 1950s



In 1950 the Chamber of Commerce “resolved unanimously” that it would not be support the Worthing Regatta. The previous year it had been lukewarm, suggesting only that members might support the Regatta “if they so desire”. The problem was that the Regatta committee had decided to hold their event on a Saturday when, the Chamber argued, they would be drawing away potential customers from the town centre shops. The Chamber instead suggested that the Regatta was held on a Wednesday when shops in the town closed at lunchtime.






Mr Issac Ashberg, a newsagent in Montague Street, led opposition to plans by Worthing Council to tackle traffic congestion in Montague Street by limiting it to one-way traffic only. Many small shop keepers, Ashberg argued, believed the change would be bad for business. Despite the protest, the change was implemented. Montague Street would be closed to all traffic in the 1970s and pedestrianised. In 1951 Mr Ashberg’s premises were raided by local police, who seized and destroyed ‘obscene books’ that he had in stock.

The Chamber continued to be concerned by the ‘shocking condition’ of the public baths in Heene Road, and called on the Council to reinstate its pre-war plans for a new indoor pool. It would be nearly twenty years before such a pool, ‘The Aquarena’ was finally built.

A series of unexplained gas explosions in Worthing in the early months of 1951 caused great concern in the town and were discussed on several occasions by the Executive Committee. One of the explosions, in South Street, killed Kaarina Burgess, who happened to be passing by at the time. The Chamber was very concerned that the explosions would deter people from visiting and shopping in the town centre. An explosion at the northern end of Downview Road, impacted on the shops in Tarring Road, as well as causing an electricity blackout in the area. Investigations later revealed that gas mains had been sunk into concrete, which allowed no elasticity to the mains, which needed to be able to expand and contract in response to gas pressure and changes in temperature.

In July 1950, the Chamber of Commerce – the Worthing and District Chamber of Trades and Professions Limited – to give it its full title at the time, met with the Worthing and District Hotel and Guest House Association to discuss the serious matter “of the falling off of business” in the town. It was agreed that government policy, the limited spending power of the public, and overseas competition where all to blame for the current predicament. The meeting also believed that Worthing Council could be doing far more to make the town attractive to visitors. The meeting agreed a number of initiatives that it hoped the Council would act upon, these included –

-  Improved marketing and publicity
-  Better lighting and illuminations

-  Open air public baths
-  Children's paddling pool to be improved as a children's play area
-  An improved seafront with greater floral displays
-  Protective covering to be put over bandstand
-  Prohibition of 'day-tripper' coaches setting down and picking up at The Steyne

Within a few years all these suggestions were implemented. In 1951, the Council's new Borough Publicity Officer was co-opted onto the Chamber's Executive Committee.

In September 1950 the Inland Revenue Staff Federation wrote to the Worthing Chamber, asking if shops in Goring Road, close to the Inland Revenue offices in Barrington Road, could be persuaded to stay open at lunchtime, so that their members could shop there during their lunch hour. The Chamber's Secretary contacted traders in Goring Road and found that many shops were prepared to comply with the request.

In October 1951, the Executive Committee debated what were deemed as "undesirable sales" that were becoming increasingly popular in the town. These sales of all types of produce were being held in public halls and hotels. Examples given were 'The Norfolk Hotel', 'The Ocean Hotel' and 'Goring Parish Hall'. The Chamber had been advised by the Inland Revenue that the Oddfellows Hall in Clifton Road was the only premises in the town licensed for such activities, all the other sales elsewhere in the town being illegal. The Factory Act Inspector had issued warnings to the management of the other establishments and he would continue to keep a "close watch" on the situation.

Social activities continued to be an important part of the Chamber's activities throughout the 1950s, with regular dinners/dances. Members meetings were often addressed by guest speakers. In November 1951, Mr M. E. Clifton Jones of Windsor Road spoke about his wartime work as General Montgomery's 'double,' a story that was later made into a popular cinema film. Mr Clifton Jones, the minutes recall, was paid two guineas (£2.10) for his talk.

In 1952, the Sunny South Laundry urged fellow Chamber members to adopt a campaign to keep business within Worthing that was passing to firms outside the town. The committee decided to support the proposal and that the details be reported in the Chamber's annual report.

One trade that suffered catastrophic decline in the 1950s was Worthing's horticulture industry, in particular the town's tomato growers. Foreign competition, particularly from Belgium, was proving hard to resist. Pre-packed tomatoes from overseas coincided, in 1954, with the failure of the local crop, which was described as being "the worst ever harvest". Many businesses failed, and at least one grower committed suicide. The town's MP, Brigadier Prior-Palmer, warned that the growers faced financial ruin. In 1955, nurseries started to employ cheaper, foreign labour, as a way of keeping down costs. But all innovations

appeared to be of no avail. Another bad harvest in 1959 led to what the press described as being the “worst year for tomato growers”. By the end of the following decade, nearly every nursery in the town had been closed and the land sold for housing.

However, as the 50s progressed, most other aspects of Worthing’s economic life improved. In 1954, wartime food rationing was ended and this was widely welcomed. A building boom swept the town, with new housing estates being built across the borough. Property prices began to soar and, with it, rateable values, which rose 60% in the ten years 1945-1955. Between 1945 and 1958, 10,000 new houses were built in Worthing. Only Solihull and Sutton Coldfield built more houses than Worthing in the same period. The decade ended with the demolition of the old Walter Brothers premises in South Street and a proposal to regulate parking in the town centre with the introduction of parking meters.



The grave of Francis Tate, whose Stonemason business was established in Worthing in 1868.

Mr T.A. Clifford, the Chamber’s Secretary for twelve years, retired in 1957. His replacement was the Assistant Secretary, Mr W.D. Anderson, who at 66 was much the same aged as Clifford himself. The new assistant, Mr C.G. Anderton, was aged 60. Although these were paid roles, they seem to have been suited to retired professionals. Both men were products of their times. Anderson had served in the Navy during the First World War and the Home Guard during the second; while Anderton had been wounded during the First World War on the Western Front and served as a Special Constable during the Second World War. Anderson worked in local government and Anderton in banking. It is worth considering that these men had spent a total of ten years of their adult life doing some form of war work, which must have shaped their character and outlook.

On his retirement, Clifford said that it had been a great honour to have been entrusted with the day-to-day running of the Chamber by the Executive Committee and he was grateful to have been able to have served the business community of Worthing. He also added that he was of the opinion that the Chamber existed to protect the public from “the unscrupulous trader” who gave a bad name to all those in business.

1960 and 70s

The 1960s saw new challenges for the Chamber, but also some new opportunities. The annual New Homes and Trades Exhibition allowed the Chamber to showcase new technology that was becoming part of the emerging consumer society. For several years the exhibition was held in the Assembly Hall and the Richmond Room, where ‘internal T.V.’ was set up, allowing visitors to see themselves on television monitors as they walked around the fifty or so stands run by local businesses. It was said that visitors came from far away as London and the event proved very lucrative.

However, Harold Wilson’s Labour government was not well regarded. In 1969, Chamber President, Mr W. B. Cheal, complained that members had just experienced “the most difficult trading year in the history of our Chamber” and that new legislation had added to their problems. The following year, the town’s Mayor, Mr P.H. Thomas, acknowledged that “new legislation have created difficulties for your members.” The election of a Conservative government in 1970 does not appear to have lifted the gloom. President, Mr C. P. Wall, warned that the small businessman was in danger of being “gobbled up by huge nationwide combines” and that many Worthing businesses simply could not make a profit when faced with “the colossal rise in overheads”. Three years later, Chamber President Tony Sadler warned that



Warwick Street in the 1960s before pedestrianisation.

“the future is abound with the problems of new legislation.” By 1975, Labour was in power again and inflation had reached a rate of over 24%. Mr I. M. Johnson had to admit that the term of his presidency coincided “with a year when the financial climate has never been more difficult.” He went on to extol the Chamber as a vital asset to the local community, but one that was facing unprecedented challenges. “When the wind is blowing hard,” he warned, “it is time to batten down the hatches and ride out the storm.”

In 1977, the Chamber’s first female President, Dorothy Peters, complained of the “unfair treatment” that all those engaged in ‘Free Enterprise’ were having to contend with at that time. It was left to the following year’s President, Mr D. A. Jull to deliver an almost biblical oration to the Chamber’s members on the merits of the business life of the town and of the country. There was no use, he said, for politicians calling for wealth distribution as “someone has to provide the cake before it can be cut up”. He said: “Free enterprise, in all its forms, must be given the conditions in which to flourish, ensuring that “the life blood of the nation will pulsate again, and provide a good life for all.”

In 1979, another Conservative government, this time led by Margaret Thatcher, was elected, and for the first time in a decade, a President of the Worthing Chamber, sounded a note of optimism. Mr A.G. Frost told members that :

“My period as President coincides with the first year in office of a new Government. Pressure exerted over many years has begun to bear fruit and the place of the smaller firm as pace setters, technical and commercial innovators and, collectively, as one of the major sources of employment is now publically acknowledged. I hope this Government will lose no time in the promotion of free enterprise for the benefit of the country and the community in which they serve.”

Locally, the Chamber gave a qualified welcome to the new pedestrian areas created in Montague Street and Warwick Street. Parking, both on-street and off, remained a contentious issue. At the end of the decade, the Chamber located to new premises at 7 Richmond Road, having been over thirty years at its old offices in Chapel Road.

1980s and 90s.

In 1980, the Chamber celebrated its Diamond Jubilee. Worthing’s Mayor, Arthur Bowles, praised the successes of the Chamber over the decades, telling members that: “Sixty years of service to the community is indeed a great record, and your Chamber has served the people of this town loyally and well over this long period.”

However, Jubilee Year President Mr R. A. Goodman, had to report continued economic woes: “It is



A happy scene at the 99 Ball in 1981. Dorothy Peters, the Chamber's first female Prersident is on the back row, second from left. The man on the tricycle is not the late Sir Patrick Moore, but Chamber member, Mr Esnor Walters.

unfortunate that in our sixtieth year we are dogged with the current economic troubles of high inflation, high interest rates; and high unemployment, which are taking their toll on our everyday life.”





Yet, by 1981, Brian Lynn, could report the first signs of “an improvement in trading”, which he believed within the year would ensure that “things will have become a good deal better for us all.” As if to emphasise a more hopeful economic climate, Harold Piggott, Worthing’s Mayor in 1982/3, declared that the theme for his term in office would be ‘Happiness in the Community’. Brian Lynn was re-elected for a second year as Chamber President – an unusual occurrence at that time – and declared that Worthing was “undergoing something of a renaissance”, with the re-opening of the Aquarena and the Pavilion.

In 1983, the town hosted the annual conference of the National Chamber of Trade and Commerce. Keynote speaker was Patrick Jenkin, Secretary of State for Industry, who said that small businesses were more likely to be part of Britain’s economic future than large-scale manufacturing industries. He felt that successive governments had let down small businesses, but this attitude must change for the future, as he explained to his appreciative audience:

“When a recession hits, small firms are better able to weather the storm because they are quicker on their feet. People who work for small firms are more adaptable , more ready to adopt change and perhaps more willing to tighten their belts rather than lose their jobs.”

The Chamber appears to have been pleased by the re-election of Margaret Thatcher’s government in 1983 and the continued “promotion of private enterprise”. In 1984, President Ian Hare was pleased to report a continuing rise in the membership of the Chamber and a drive to recruit more members from the industrial sector.

By 1991, the Chamber had over 400 members and, it stated in its annual report, was able “to speak with a much louder voice than we have been able to do in the past.” In order to improve the town centre and face off the challenge from out-of-town shopping centres at Lyons Farm and Holmbush, the Chamber called on the Council to work with them to deliver some simple but effective measures to improve the quality and attractiveness of the town centre:

-  Eradicate all graffiti as soon as it appears
-  Encourage the letting of all empty units and ensuring their good appearance whilst empty
-  Clean off-street car parks and particularly ensure that stairwells are kept in a hygienic condition
-  Ensure that more trees and plants are in public areas and the use of hanging baskets to create a softer and more welcoming environment for shoppers.

All these proposals were implemented and remain in force today.

The consequences of Britain's hasty exit from the European Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM) in September 1992, when interest rates rose to 15%, had a damaging effect on businesses. Yet by 1994, President Danny Cammiade was able to describe a Chamber that continued to see a rise in membership and one that, he believed, was making its mark in the town. He was particularly pleased by the appointment of a Town Centre Manager, dedicated to making Worthing "one of the most attractive shopping centres in the South of England."

Peter Bennett, the town's Mayor that year, echoed these optimistic sentiments, declaring that Worthing was "a delightful town in which to live," and one that could "look forward confidently to a prosperous and lively future."

The following year, in 1995, the Chamber elected its second female President, Brenda McCurdie, who pledged to continue the momentum built up by the Chamber in the town in recent years. This was also the year that former two-terms President of the Chamber, Brian Lynn, was elected mayor of Worthing. Parking and Sunday Trading were hot topics in Worthing during the mid-90s. The level of parking charges in Worthing – far higher than in other West Sussex towns, was a source of great annoyance to Chamber members. Past President, Dorothy Peters, spoke for many when she said:

"Unless we are careful we shall price ourselves out of existence. It will drive people out of Worthing. We have got the best shopping centre in Sussex and we ought to keep it that way."

The failure of the government to pass its Shops Bill in 1986, which would have repealed laws controlling the opening of shops on a Sunday, created a curious situation, where many traders chose to flout a law that they saw as anachronistic and bad for business. In 1992, one local councillor, Ian Stewart, called for the vigorous prosecution of all traders who disobeyed the law and opened for business on a Sunday.

The Council as a whole was reluctant to prosecute all the time a change in the law appeared likely. The uncertainty was resolved in 1994 by the passing of the Sunday Trading Act, which allowed small shops to open when they pleased, and large stores to open for up to six hours on a Sunday. Assurances that no shop worker would be compelled to work on a Sunday and that enhanced payment would be given to those who did, received short shrift from Father Richard Woods, the Vicar of Maybridge:

"We hear that stores are staffed by volunteers working for higher pay and that higher pay will continue when Sunday, as it rapidly will, becomes an ordinary working day for us all. Pull the other one - it has till-bells on it."



Peter Bennett, current President of Worthing & Adur Chamber of Commerce

1995 to present

A personal memoir by current Chamber President, Peter Bennet

As 1995 dawned, the prospects for Worthing and the local economy looked bright. Brian Lynn was Mayor. He himself had been President of the Chamber. Brenda McCurdie was fresh from running the Enterprise Centre. A local figure, she lived in High Street, Tarring.

In the retail sector, shops were struggling. Rumbelows closed its High Street stores and unemployment was steady at 2.5 million nationally. Daewoo had purchased the former automotive design centre at Lyons farm. The first Worthing designed motor-vehicle rolled off the assembly lines later in the year. This was a welcome investment in the local economy with the creation of 100 skilled jobs in automotive design. The Chamber extended a warm

welcome to the Korean management team. Korean food and drink became available in restaurants and Chinese takeaway shops. Nationally, Labour was leading in the opinion polls but John Major was still Prime Minister with a majority of only nine seats. Locally there was no overall control at West Sussex County Council; Liberal Democrats and Conservatives ran neck and neck in Worthing.

1996 saw the pace of change quicken. After a bitterly cold January and the announcement of the impending divorce of Princess Diana and the Prince of Wales there came the news that the Duke and Duchess of York were also divorcing. The economy, however, was picking up. Mayor Peter Green went on a (fully paid for) goodwill mission to Korea to encourage more investment into our local economy.

The A27 Trunk road improvement scheme was welcomed by the Chamber. Of the four attempts to improve the A27 this seemed the most hopeful. The government had bought up houses in 1977 and then sold them again in 1980 when the scheme was abandoned. The public enquiry for the new and revised routes lasted from September 1993 to August 1994. This was the longest ever road enquiry in south-east England. In February 1996 the Inspector finally submitted his report to the government that the "preferred" route be built-to save lives and time. On 26 November, 1996, Sir Terence Higgins telephoned the Town Hall excitedly from the House of Commons to announce that the scheme had been dropped on the day the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Ken Clarke, was announcing the spending plans for the future. The inspector's report was released later. He had, indeed, recommended that the scheme go-ahead. It would have been constructed at a cost of £120 million, including the flyovers. But now the Highways Agency began to sell the 200 properties it had bought. The question remains whether the Chamber had done

enough to push the business case in order to counter the well organised campaigns and huge numbers of residential objections.

1997 was another year of great change. A Labour landslide victory on May 2nd, put Tony Blair into Number Ten. Some 418 seats were won by Labour and 119 women MPs were now at Westminster. Only 4% of the population had Internet access. The Chamber Executive included stalwarts like Roy Bishop who had been President in the 1950s; Dorothy Peters who was the first Lady president; Alistair Vickers the accountant for the company; Chris Spratt the surveyor whose father had been a great supporter of the chamber; Tony Edwards from TEVB the solicitors; Jenny Bennett from the Steyne Bookshop; Gillian Grenfell and Brenda McCurdie from the Enterprise Centre; David Sessions from Bentalls and Tim Silverthorne from the long-established Worthing fishmongers and retailers.

1998 saw Worthing deemed to be “the most profitable town in the country” by Experian, the global credit agency. This was probably based on the number of financial services, banking, insurance and pension fund headquarters based in Worthing. BMW purchased Rolls-Royce and their new factory in West Sussex was started towards the end of the year.

Through 1999, things were getting better for the economy. Nationally, unemployment dropped to its lowest level for 20 years - down to 1.3 million. For Worthing and Adur, there was a new low for the number of unemployed. Lib Dem Mayor Brian McCluskie promised changes. Sandra Grant was the new President of the Chamber. The Executive Committee wanted members' views. “How will the sex shop in Tarring Road affect your trade?” “What about the stagnant A27?” The members were surveyed. There seemed to be an even split on the sex shop but agreement on the A27 with most traders remaining indifferent. But the nature of the Chamber was changing. By 1999, 20% of the population had internet access. Within five years that was 75%.of the population. The impact was massive. The Chamber was, as always, a barometer of national trends. Retailers had been totally dominant until now.

The years 1999 and 2000 saw the formation of a sub-committee under the leadership of local business man and chartered surveyor Chris Spratt and supported by accountant Alastair Vickers, hotelier Mike Clinch and solicitor Peter Bennett. Roger Green, audio and television retailer, was a vital member of the new group whose remit was to breathe life into the town centre. Pump primed by a £10,000 grant from Worthing Borough Council; the Town Centre Initiative formed itself into a separate independent limited company.

It bid - with the help of the WBC - for funds from the Regeneration Grants initiated by the government with EU Regional Funds.

Meanwhile at the Chamber, Gillian Grenfell's dynamic Presidency had been followed by Sandra Grant, an independent financial adviser who was excellent but had to resign at the end of 2001 when an opportunity to join a new Surrey company arose, thus taking her out of the area. By now, the members of the Executive Committee included Steve Bentley, who was with NatWest Bank; Kathy Lewis who was the manager of the Enterprise Centre; Tony Edwards who was a solicitor with Thomas Eggar; David Fraser, an investment manager; former Mayor Herbie Golds; Peter Hussey, an accountant with Spofforths at their Littlehampton office; Richard John, a prominent businessman and owner of hairdressing salons in the town; Richard Margarolli from the Ardington Hotel; Chris Spratt, Alistair Vickers and Roy Bishop. No retailers were on the committee except for Dorothy Peters from Chloe Antiques and David Sessions from Benthalls.



Tina Tilley, Chief Executive of the Chamber since 2003

Another sign of the changing times was the decision to abandon the 'Miss Chamber of Trade' beauty queen competition. This had been organised on the basis that contestants were invited to submit their age and vital statistics to the judging panel who would then award the winner on the basis of their physical attributes. This was no longer acceptable in the days of equality. The Chamber was changing in many ways. For example, its very name was changed from Chamber of Trade to the Chamber of Commerce and Industry. The new president in 2001/2002 was Richard Earle. His work commitments were demanding and often led to him not being able to attend meetings. In 2003, Peter Bennett having left Worthing Borough Council after 24 years, offered himself as President and was elected. Barbara Newham had left as had Sandy Ward. Sharon Clark, who was the Town Centre

Manager, acted as the Chief Administrator for the Chamber. Her commitments were almost too much for one person and it was felt better to appoint a new Chief Executive who would be solely responsible for the operations of the Chamber of Commerce. Tina Tilley, who had just sold her own business, filled all the criteria. She was an experienced networker, she had all the necessary IT and computer skills, had run her own business, had acquired the North American 'Can do' attitude during her years living in Oklahoma, where she chaired the New Settlers organization and was the perfect bubbly and enthusiastic Chief Executive with her communication skills honed to a fine point. She accepted the post.

2003/4 saw a gradual change as the old printed newsletters were replaced by e-mails. A brand-new website was launched with Members areas and the opportunity to sponsor events and banners.

Premises

The property at 7, Richmond Road Worthing had been purchased in 1980 with the help of members who loaned and gave money to the Chamber. In 2005, the Executive Committee took a decision that they would lease out premises at 7, Richmond Road and derive an income from the rent.

The property had housed the Town Centre Initiative as well as providing useful office space for the Chamber. However, a rental of £9,000 a year was achievable. Meetings were held at hotels and offices of members to start with. The chamber took temporary offices at 19, Warwick Street with Bennett Griffin LLP solicitors. In due course close relationships were built with Northbrook College who offered excellent office accommodation and the Chamber moved into them in 2007.

Events

Every year a full schedule of events, workshops, training seminars, meetings, networking breakfasts and lunches, joint initiatives with other chambers and talks, gatherings and social parties and dinners are arranged. They facilitate the doing of business with people who are known to each other and have built up trust in each other's products through experience of having dealt with them. They form the essence of the Chamber membership.

The Internet

The Chamber's reliance on leaflets, printed diaries, newsletters and circulars had disappeared by 2007/8. It was replaced by a totally digital offering. All events and news were circulated via members' emails. The Chamber had, in one sense, become a 'virtual chamber'. In another sense, it was growing from strength to strength. Attendances at events doubled and then doubled again. With Worthing and Adur Councils working closer together, it was clear that soon the Chamber must change to reflect the fact that local economies do not know or recognise local authority boundaries. The Chamber changed its name to Worthing and Adur Chamber of Commerce and Industry. This made recruitment much easier in Shoreham, Lancing and Portslade.

Finances

The Chamber has benefited enormously from making applications for grants and receiving training monies for running courses, providing mentoring and expertise. In recent times, the Chamber has become even more financially independent. There are now two paid employees who work almost full-time. In the case of the Chief Executive, she often works a 70 hour week. No direct grants are made by Worthing Borough Council or West Sussex County Council.

Links with Youth, Colleges and Schools

The Chamber is very aware of its heritage. Roy Bishop who started in business in Worthing in 1950 and

was President in 1960 spent most of his life working tirelessly to promote the chamber to all members of the community. Sadly he died in 2013 at the age of 94. The Chamber wants to maintain its links with schools, with the Youth Council and with the Sixth Form colleges in the area. This heritage project has drawn those strands together involving students and older members of the business community alike. The message to young people is that the local economy depends upon innovation and also upon young people taking the plunge as entrepreneurs and building new businesses upon which the future prosperity of the town and the whole area of Adur and Worthing depends. They have been involved in this project and have managed to gather the reminiscences and the memories of those who built the Chamber in its first hundred years.

The future

This project is about the history of Worthing and Adur Chamber of Commerce and Industry and with young people involved, there must be an eye on the future. The local economy was originally based on horticulture; it then became a seaside resort; a thriving hotel-based economy gave rise to a large retired population brought here by ease of transport, a mild and temperate climate, access to the sea and the South Downs as well as a flat and easy plain overlooking the Channel. After the Second World War Worthing became the biggest retail centre in Sussex. That has been slowly replaced by the financial sector, by pharmaceutical industries and above all by the growth of small and medium-sized creative media industries based on digital expertise and knowledge. The history of the chamber is a fascinating mirror of the history of an area. It's all about the economy. It always was.



The current Executive Committee: Suzy Bastable - A&WBC, Peter Webb - ETI, Sheryl Tipton - Sheryl Tipton Marketing, Tony Hedger - A&T Associates, Karen Simporis - Henry House, Peter Bennett - President, Tina Tilley - CEO, Alastair Vickers - Consultant, Tracie Davey - Operations Manager, Tony Candler - Anthony Candler Assoc, Tina Barker - A&WBC, Julian Cioffi - Fitzhugh Gates Solicitors.

Part of this project was to produce a digital record of the memories and we thank those who took part in the interviews to achieve this.

Barbara Shaw | Barry and Jenny Green | Brian Cheal | Charles Pressley
David Poland | Dorothy Peters | Eric Bunce | Nona Worle
Richard Howell | Wendy Green | And all others who contributed

With special thanks to Sophie Holmes | Bethy Mepham | Azaria Messingham
who undertook the interviews with such enthusiasm!

Filmed and edited by Paul Cudugon

The video can be viewed on www.worthinganadurchamber.co.uk/hlf



Worthing & Adur Chamber of Commerce
17 Liverpool Gardens, Worthing, West Sussex BN11 1RY
T: 01903 203484 E: info@worthingandadurchamber.co.uk
www.worthingandadurchamber.co.uk