

# FOUNTAIN ARCADE

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# FOUNTAIN ARCADE, DUDLEY



1958 Image of Fountain Arcade from market place, from Dudley Archives and Local History Centre

## DEVELOPMENT OF THE ARCADE

Tanfield already owned the property that became most of the Market Place end of the arcade. The ground floor housed Fountain Stationery Co. Ltd (a 'printing office' had occupied some of the building prior to this which was possibly the same company), the first floor was the offices for the Dudley & District Benefit Building Society, and the second floor Tanfield and Tanfield (Solicitors) and Mr E. Geo. Coslett (Architect, Surveyor and Valuer). For several years he had quietly acquired properties located at what is now the Tower Street end of the arcade including a substantial malt house, a private dwelling formerly used as the Telephone Exchange, and land which was originally gardens or yards. Both buildings were demolished to make way for the arcade.

Blocksidge's Almanac reported that with regard to the Market Place end "the proprietor is indebted to the London City and Midland Bank (now HSBC) directors for concessions of land which have enabled him to make some of the shops larger than would otherwise have been possible. The owners of property on the other side (Mrs Richardson, Chemist, and Messrs. Lesters Ltd) have also facilitated the formation of the arcade for which consideration the proprietor is grateful".

Blocksidge advises us that "the whole of the buildings are very substantial - reinforced concrete having been largely used in its construction, and this renders it less liable to damage by fire than if wooden floors etc had been provided" and at the Tower Street end "are excellent lavatories for both sexes, as well as storerooms for the caretaker's utensils". Eighteen "well lighted and ventilated" shops were opened in 1926 and from records it appears that leases were taken up very quickly, for terms of between five and 25 years.

The Fountain Arcade was Dudley's first shopping arcade and was the brainchild of local solicitor and Deputy Mayor, Alderman T W Tanfield JP. Local architect Mr E George Coslett was enlisted to design the arcade and two local builders, A.J. Crump & Sons Ltd and Mark Round & Sons Ltd, were appointed for the construction work.

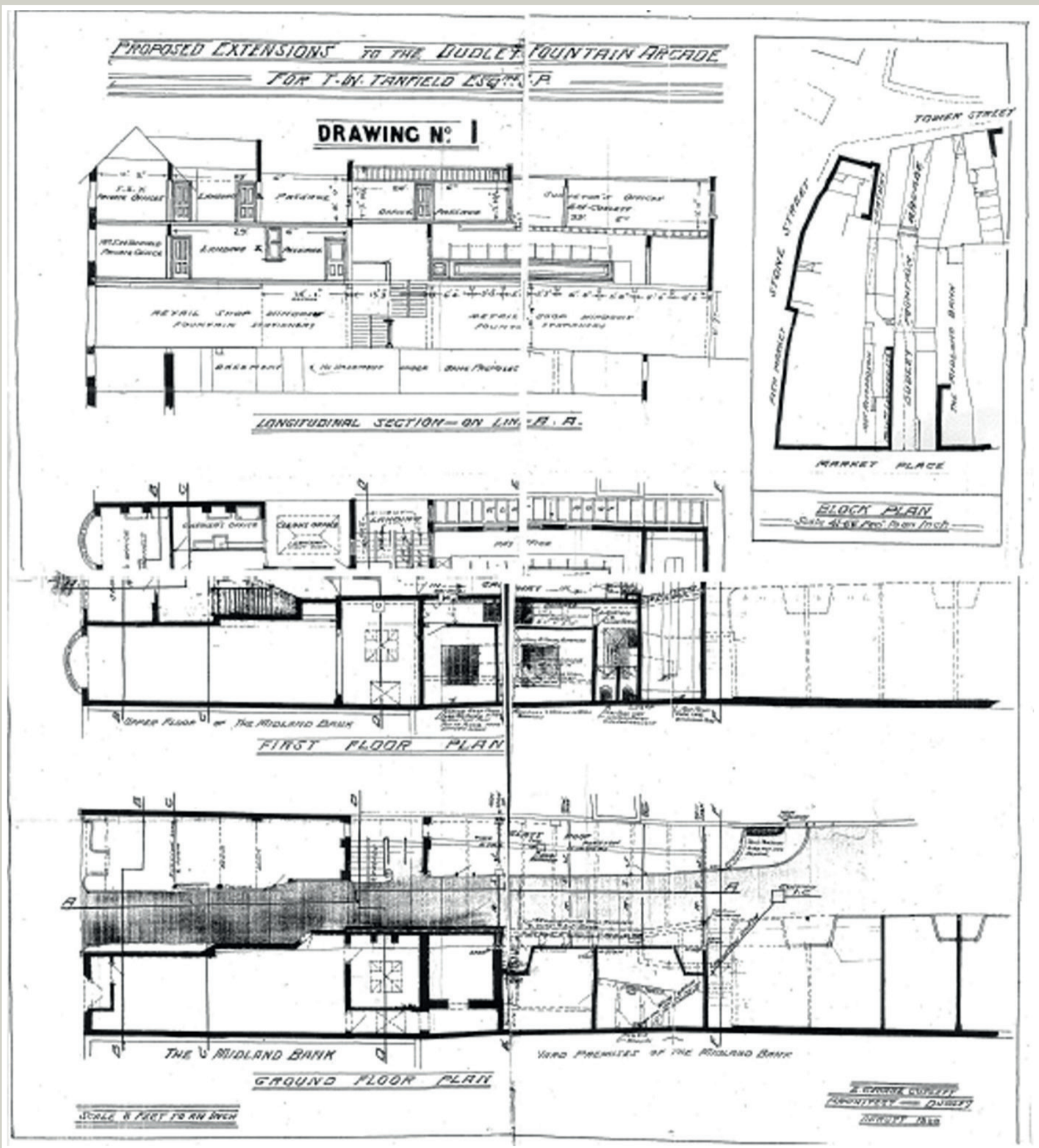
On the formal opening of this ambitious but still unfinished arcade on 25 March 1926, Blocksidge's Dudley Almanack reported "No trouble or expense will be spared to render this an attractive shopping centre, and the proprietor is to be congratulated on his enterprise and the confidence he evinces in the future of his native town".

Blocksidge later wrote "...enterprise which is evidently succeeding as the public crowd into the Arcade to do business and find it very convenient as a thoroughfare between Priors St, Stone St, Tower St and the Market Place". It continues today both as an arcade and a useful pedestrian link.

Ground Floor

MEMORIAL TOWER





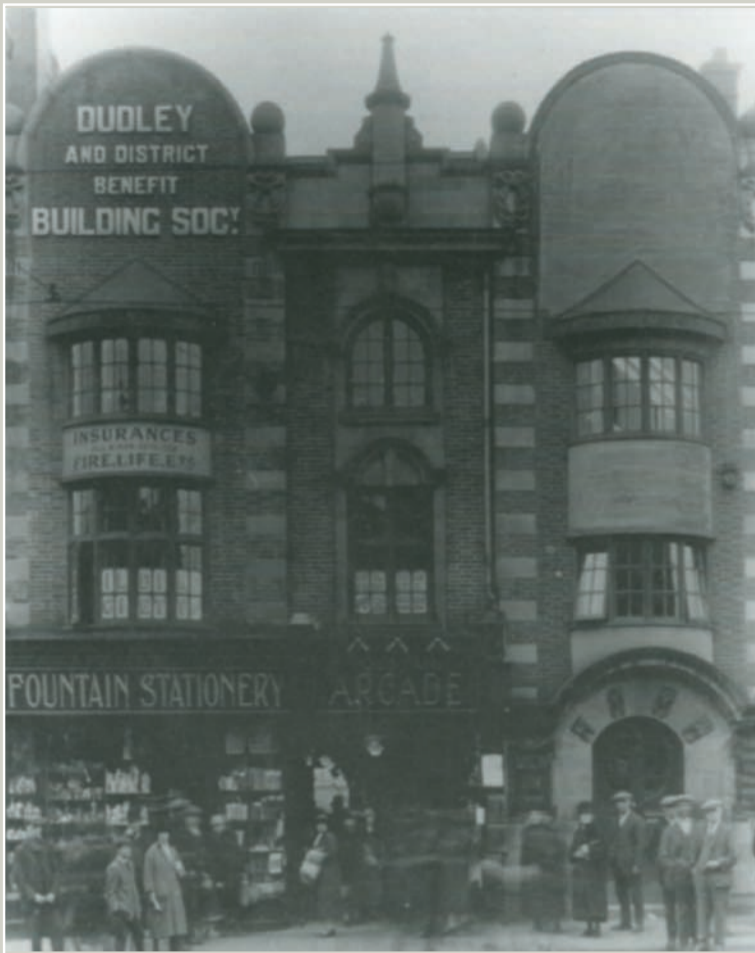
George Coslett plans of site and Arcade

After the initial opening, plans were approved for the widening of the central portion of the arcade which provided a further five shops. However, the Barclays Bank branch which fronted onto Market Place proved an initial stumbling block but eventually Tanfield bought the property, following Barclays' move to new premises in Union St. The top end of the arcade was then finally developed properly in 1929 as to begin with it had been simply a line of showcases.

In addition to the five new shops the new widened section added: "a large basement extending under all the new shops and suitable for manufacturing purposes or to be used as store rooms; two large rooms on the first floor above the new shops; and a caretaker's flat on the second floor". An emergency staircase and exit were also built. Blockside reported that "the recently added shops that have replaced the Barclays Bank branch premises have greatly increased the attractiveness of this excellent shopping centre".



# ARCHITECTURE



## Market Place entrance

The ground floor left-hand side and the current centrally positioned arcade entrance area were both the Fountain Stationery Ltd premises. Tanfield's existing building was cut through to create this end of the arcade.

The right side was the 1909 Barclays Bank Ltd branch whose first and second floor frontage Coslett copied almost identically on the left side.

In direct contrast to its Georgian neighbour this entrance exhibits the English free style of architecture, incorporating a pair of curved Flemish gables which provide interest to the skyline, with pairs of half-conical-roofed bow oriel windows on the upper floors, framing the entrance. The Georgian materials of red brick and stone were however maintained, in contrast to the equally decorative opposite end of the arcade. A rosette from the old tram system is still in place next to the central second floor window.

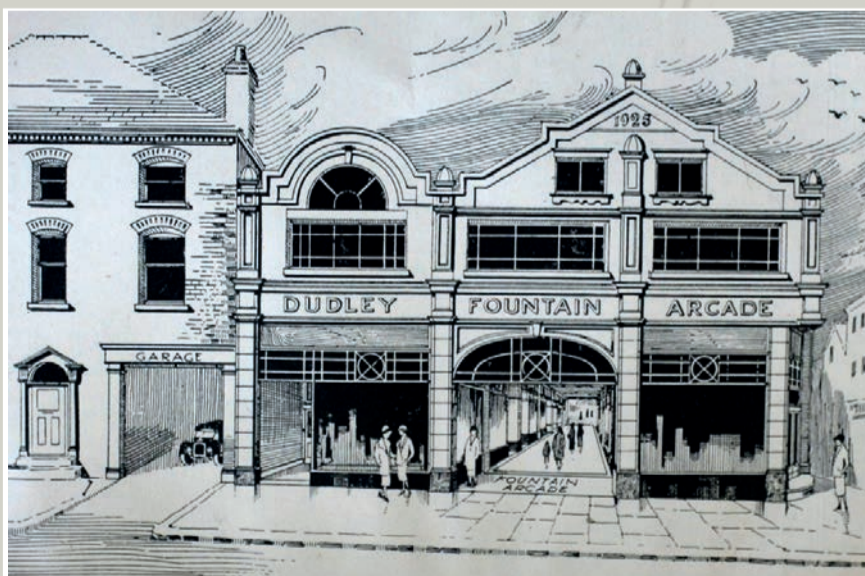
*Pre-1927 image of Fountain Arcade (Dudley Archives & Local History Centre)*

## Tower Street entrance

Described as an "eclectic entrance façade" it was constructed by way of a steel framework with a flat arched entrance and is faced with cream faience\* which gives an Art Deco\*\* feel. Like the Market Place entrance it has three bays: a central one forming the entrance which is flanked on both sides by shopfronts. The left bay is surmounted by a curved parapet with a half round window at first floor level, with a gable above the other two bays accommodating rectangular diamond-lead windows which at first floor level incorporate coats of arms. Four pilasters (artificial columns) with a granite effect rise through all floors capped by finials except the one below the gable which has a plain cap.



*1958 Image of Fountain Arcade from Tower Street, (Dudley Archives & Local History Centre)*



\*Faience originated in Italy in the 1400s and is a glazed terracotta or brick sometimes referred to as 'architectural ceramics'. It offered a modular, varied and relatively inexpensive approach to wall and floor construction and was very adaptable to vigorous and rich ornamental detailing. Variations in the colour and pattern of the glaze could make it look like granite or limestone, which helped make it attractive for architects.

*1926 Drawing of Tower Street end of Fountain Arcade, showing garages (Blockside's Dudley Almanac)*





*Image of interior at opening of arcade (Blocksidge's Dudley Almanac)*

\*\* The Art Deco aesthetic was borrowed from ancient cultures such as the Egyptians and Aztecs, as well as the Classical past and more recent art movements such as Cubism.

The overall design, particularly the tiles, make this façade look much newer than the façade at the opposite end of the arcade, although both have three bays, and the curved parapet at the Tower Street end is a nod to the pre-existing curved gables at the other end.

When the arcade was first built, as illustrated in the architect's drawing (above), on the left of the main building was the 'garage' entrance which provided several private garages for rent.

## Interior

The main portion of the arcade is 15 feet wide and the length from end to end is about 270 feet. The whole arcade slopes down from the Market Place end and was built with just steps towards the Tower Street end. It was covered with a substantial glass and slated roof, providing much natural light. The glass roof was built with a supporting steel truss with arched ties.

The floors of the shops and the pavement were originally covered in Italian terrazzo, ie mosaic, which at the time was described as "...in every way a sanitary footway receiving constant cleansing..." The Herald's 1969 feature added that "...During the actual construction, teams of Italian workmen invaded the town to lay the floor. People working in the nearby offices found the noise and the dust suddenly quite bearable as impassioned strains of Italian opera floated through the windows." However during the 1960s modernisation they "had to put up with pop from transistor radios!"

## Opening ceremony 25 March 1926

The Herald newspaper's two detailed reports on the official opening tell us:

"...formal opening took place on Thursday evening, when the company present included Alderman and Mrs T W Tanfield, Councillor & Mrs Doylah Tanfield, Mr & Mrs Reg Tanfield, Mr H Green JP (chairman of the Dudley and District Building Society), Aldermen W Bradford, H Preedy and J Edwards, Chief Constable Campbell, Mr E G Coslett (architect), Mr Round (builder), Mr Crump (builder), and a number of the shop tenants." Bouquets were presented to all the females present.

Mrs T W Tanfield said "...A few days ago she read that arcades were becoming exceedingly popular in London... arcades were very nice places, because they enabled people to do their shopping in comfort in any kind of weather, and free from the ordinary bustle and traffic of the streets. In that (Fountain) arcade purchasers would be able to buy chocolates, tobacco, boots and shoes, ladies' gowns, coats and costumes, and numerous other commodities. There would also be a hairdressing saloon, and those who felt a little tired after a promenade would soon be able to refresh themselves at a delightful café..."

Mr Green said "...It would be a great asset to the town, and greatly advance its amenities. It was quite evident that Dudley was not dead or decadent, but was rather renewing its youth and putting on its splendid garments...Councillor Preedy also agreed with him that Dudley was not decaying, but was rapidly rejuvenating itself. He had had a wide



experience of other towns, and he could assure them that he had not seen one he would rather live in than Dudley... Alderman Tanfield... said that it had sometimes been reproachfully stated that Dudley was behind some of its larger neighbours because they had no arcade, but now they could at least claim immunity from a reproach of that description, and he felt sure that those who ventured to take the shops and had determined to extend their business in Dudley would have no reason to regret it... he wanted to pay tribute to the contractors for the splendid way in which they had endeavoured to keep within the time limit. On occasions like that it was usual to show a little hospitality, but he regretted he could not invite them to any that evening, because the café was not ready, but he hoped to do it at a later date."

"...the provision of the Dudley Fountain Arcade, which this week has been open to public inspection, has elicited unstinted approbation... To the public generally the arcade will come as the fulfilment of a long felt want, and it will enable them to do their shopping with the utmost comfort even under the most unfavourable atmospheric conditions, as well as provide them with a convenient thoroughfare from the Market Place to the Vegetable Market..."

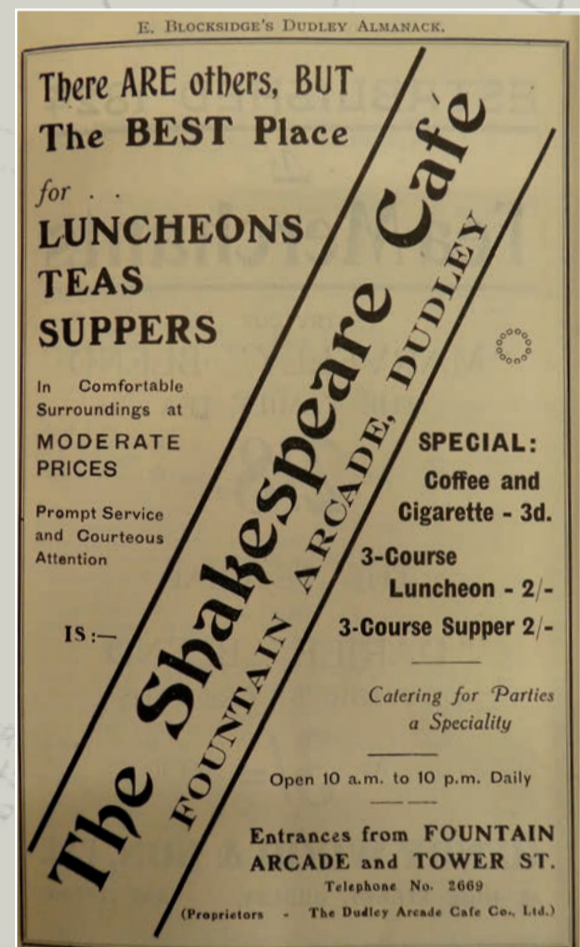
## Original shops

The Herald continues "Once the shops were near completion (1926), and under the somewhat sceptical eyes of the town, Mr Tanfield let it be known that he awaited tenants. And they came, not only to lease shops, also to rent the garages he had thoughtfully provided.

"...Mr R Freedman's new branch... constitutes a revelation in all that is charming in ladies' new day and evening gowns, coats, costumes, mantles, and sable, fox and stone marten furs. Fascinating colours adorn those materials which appeal to feminine taste, and these are being offered at remarkably low prices. The shop windows cannot fail to elicit the admiration of all who look upon them..."

"Mr W H Douglas, consulting optician... here will be found everything to suit the varied needs of those with defective vision..."

"The Shakespeare Café (located above the Tower Street entrance) under the direction of Mrs Frank Walford, will be artistically equipped, and the furnishing will harmonise with the Shakespeare period... luncheons, teas, and suppers will be provided. Private parties will also be catered for." Blocksidge later reports that "...the café... is steadily adding to its list of patrons for mid-day meals, teas and suppers, whilst an annex has been provided suitable for private dinners, dances or whist drives. Auction sales or meetings can be held here... it has blossomed into a meeting place for local businessmen."



Advert for The Shakespeare Café (from Blocksidge's Dudley Almanac)



Photo of Alex Harley & Sons butcher's shop (courtesy of John Green Butcher's)

The following were also some of the first businesses in the new Fountain Arcade: a butcher\*

- Mr Alex Harley - moved from the Market Place; Harpers florists; a toy shop opened by the Smith family, originally known as Woodworths, which became Harper & Caswell, and was called the Arcade Toy Shop at its closure in early 2022; Hedges for 'refined footwear'; and The Majestic Cycle Co. Coventry.

\* the same shop is still a butcher's and has the original terrazzo floor.



Blockside reports that a couple of years later "... two of the new shops and one workroom have been let on leases to Williams & Little children's outfitters, gents' clothiers etc, who are removing the business hitherto carried on by Mr Thos Williams at the corner of Wolverhampton St, Dudley."

T Bonser crockery shop traded in the arcade from 1927 until its closure in 1969. Additionally, Cohens fashion centre had previously traded from premises at the Market Place end that became Barclays Bank but took over the shop previously occupied by Freedman's. It was reported that little did most of the customers know but most of the dresses in Cohens had been hand-finished by women working at home in Gornal.

A 1969 Herald feature, following a four year modernisation programme, included adverts for: A Harley & Son Ltd butchers; Harpers florists; Douglas the Jeweller; Cohens fashion centre; Harper & Caswell toys; T Bonser china and glass; Preedy's confectionery and tobacco; Ted Farmer Sports; Ace Models; Miss Raymond hairdresser; Crown carpets; Westwood's wallpaper and paint; William Price & Sons Ltd bakers; Babycare; Taylors footwear; Heath & Heather health foods and herbal remedies; Jon Leonard menswear; Kendall rainwear; and ABC fashion warehouse.

Other past businesses listed in a Village Voice magazine from 2007 include: Winters, Dudley's first health food shop which could be found between Johnson's greengrocery and the ladies' clothes shop which was part of the Cohens chain; Woolfs, a father and son who sold furniture; the valeting service Dudley Laundry; and jewellery specialists Oakleys.

## MODERNISATIONS, RESTORATIONS AND RENOVATIONS

### 1969 modernisation

A four year project was completed in 1969 which included new lighting, a re-designed roof (although its Victorian feel survived), at least some of the steps were replaced by a non-slip ramp and each shop front received a facelift. Outside an area was set aside for deliveries and with storage capacity for a large quantity of goods.

Sometime after 1985 some of the Tower Street end windows were blocked up and render applied to the faience façade.

### 2014/15 restoration

The arcade was given a major revamp in 2014/15 as part of the Dudley Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI) with funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, Historic England and Dudley Council, which enabled the restoration of historic buildings around the town during a five year project. The arcade received a £200,000 grant for works which



Townscape Heritage Phase 1 - Fountain Arcade Tower Street end, before and after



aimed to recapture its 1920s art deco heyday. At the Tower Street end hidden architectural details were uncovered, repaired and reinstated, including blocked-up leaded windows and the elegant cream-coloured faience underneath the rendering. Stone detailing to the pediment on the gable and the two shop fronts were also reinstated.

## 2021-23 restoration

Phase Two of the Dudley THI saw Dudley Council receive a further £1.5m of funding, including a further £1.2m from the National Lottery Heritage Fund. The arcade project has focused on the urgent repairs required to the Market Place elevation, including masonry repairs and repointing, repairs to the bay window half-conical-roofs, leadwork, and the overhaul of original windows or replacement where necessary. The project entailed substantial reinstatement of architectural features, including shopfronts at the Tower Street end and internal arcade frontage returns. It has also included revealing and repairing the historic decorative fanlight of the original shopfront to John Green butcher's shop, which has long been hidden behind lightbox signage. The project complements other Townscape Heritage projects including the former Woolworth's, now Plaza Mall, on the other side of the market place, as well as other regeneration projects such as the repaired drinking fountain which won a Conservation Award from the Victorian Society. A bronze plaque has been installed above the shopfront as permanent acknowledgement of the funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund and Dudley Council towards the Townscape Heritage programme



Townscape Heritage Phase 2 - Fountain Arcade Market Place end, before and after

Julie A Clarke, Dudley Heritage Volunteer

January 2023

### Acknowledgments:

*Dudley Archive & Local History Centre.*

*Birmingham and the Black Country by Foster, Pevsner and Wedgwood*

*Shop in the Black Country by Ned Williams*

