

TENBY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

THE GOLDSMITH'S OF TENBY

THE TRUSCOTT FAMILY

By Neil Westerman

Prior to the Great War a young couple planning their wedding in Tenby could have done no better than to head for the jeweller's shop owned by the leading goldsmith in Tenby – James Truscott. A speciality of his was manufacturing wedding rings using the betrothed couple's own gold. James Truscott's wedding rings graced the third finger of numerous pre war Tenby brides. James Truscott was not of course the only jeweller established in Tenby. A town the size of Tenby was able to support three or four jewellers at any one time. Most of these were small family run concerns with only one outlet. However a couple of them were successful enough to expand into other towns. This article is the first in a series telling the story of the principal jewellery businesses that served the people of Tenby from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. The articles will look at both the individual businesses and the people who operated them and the contribution these people made to the town of Tenby. Tenby has seen a number of jewellers come and go including John Jenkins, Jacob Morgenstern, Carl Johannesburg Hoffman, Charles Batten, Henry Zahradka, along with members of the Howells and Truscott families. This first article examines the Truscott family, in particular Alfred Fox Truscott and James Truscott.

Alfred Fox Truscott, watchmaker, jeweller and optician ran his business from Cheltenham House, Tudor Square. He was born about 1818 in Mevagissey, Cornwall. His wife Elizabeth was born in Pembroke which may account for his move to Pembrokeshire. Advertisements in the local press state that the business was established in 1840. Fifty years later he was still trading. Following the death of his wife he left Tenby in the mid 1890's to reside with his daughter in Scarborough where he died on the 16th April 1904.

James Truscott was also a Cornishman, born at St. Stephen's near St. Austell in 1847. He was left an orphan when his father died while visiting Pembrokeshire and after being cared for by relatives in Pembroke he was apprenticed to the watchmaking trade with an uncle who kept a jewellers and opticians at Narberth. He later spent a short time as an assistant to another relative, Alfred Truscott, at Cheltenham House, Tudor Square. In 1870 he established his own business in Tudor Square subsequently moving to a shop opposite the Cobourg Hotel in the High Street. In 1874 he moved to a shop next door to the Sun public house (now incorporated into the Sun) and finally in 1883 he moved to new premises at 13 High Street on the corner of St. Nicholas Lane (now the Abbey bank). Truscott continued to trade from these premises until the business closed in 1937.

As well as the Tenby business James Truscott also operated a jewellery business in Gloucester. This was located at 142 Westgate Street and was established prior to 1889.

James Truscott was proud of his Cornish roots and was fond of telling interesting tales of the prowess displayed in smuggling by his ancestors. Smuggling then was not regarded as a crime but was rather looked upon as a contest of brains

between the bootlegger and the coastguards with popular sympathy coming down strongly in favour of the smugglers!

He was a strong Anglican Churchman and held the position of people's Churchwarden at St. Mary's Parish Church for forty years. Joining the choir of St. Mary's soon after settling in Tenby James Truscott was a chorister for nearly sixty years and acted as treasurer. Indeed his life's interest seemed to lie in the church from the town clock down to the hassocks in the pews.

James Truscott also served his adopted town as a town councillor and as a trustee of the Tenby Charities. He promoted the first fishing competitions on the Royal Victoria Pier and was a member of the Tenby Lodge of Freemasons. His son Reginald James Truscott qualified as an ophthalmic optician and practised from premises above the jeweller's shop. The Truscott family also acted as meteorological observers for the corporation for over twenty years. James' children Reginald, Mildred and Dorothy Truscott all undertook this duty at various times.

As a craftsman James Truscott was a particularly good jeweller. He designed and patented the famous 'Tenby Hot Water Jug'. Made from English hand-hammered pewter the jugs were 'regarded in Pembrokeshire as the bringer of good luck'. The jug was designed with a special handle that was cool to hold together with a simple hinged lid that could be opened while still holding the jug. Over the years the jugs were manufactured by a number of different companies including Dixon's of Sheffield and W.W.H & Co. A range of different sizes were available including one pint, one and a half pints and two pints.

In 1916 approaching 70 years of age James Truscott retired. The Truscott business continued under the guidance of his son in law Charles Victor Solomon (husband of Mildred Truscott). Following his retirement James Truscott continued to reside in Tenby until the death of his wife, Fanny, in 1925. He subsequently moved to Pembroke where he resided with his daughter Beatrice and son in law Percy Yeomans. On July 11, 1937 James Truscott died aged 90. Truscott the goldsmith ceased trading the same year. Between them Alfred Fox Truscott and James Truscott had served the people of Tenby as goldsmiths for a period of almost one hundred years.

Originally published in the 'Tenby Times' newspaper December 2008.