

THE BEALE'S - BAKERS IN ROYSTON FOR 150 YEARS

The first record of the Beale family baking in Royston comes in the Land Tax Assessments for 1805, where Thomas Beale, baker, is mentioned. The records for 1803 and 1804 are missing, but in 1802 Thomas was not there, so it can be assumed that he set up in business some time between 1803 and 1805. Thomas married Sarah Cornhill in Royston in 1796, and they had five children, of whom only one son, Charles, survived infancy. Thomas is recorded at the bakery in High Street, which would have been the shop at the Cross, until 1845, and he died in 1851, aged 75.

Who were Thomas' parents? He cannot have been the Thomas son of John Beale and Sarah Holliman, born 1780, because this Thomas was recorded as being at home, aged 19, in the Barkway and Reed survey of parishioners in 1799, while Thomas the baker was by that time married and had a child. If his age of 75 on his death certificate in 1851 is correct, it would make his date of birth 1776. However, there is no recorded birth of a Thomas Beale in that year. It is more likely he was the Thomas born in 1779 to Edward Beale, farmer and churchwarden of Therfield, and his wife Margaret. This would make the age he opened his shop 26 (likely) and his age on marriage 17 (unlikely but not impossible). It is not uncommon for old people to be a little inaccurate about their age.

Thomas' son Charles for some reason did not take over his father's bakery, but is recorded as having gone back to Therfield in 1837.

However, another Beale was also running a bakery in Royston, John Beale, who was keeping a shop in Fish Hill from 1826. In 1845 he was described as John Beale senior, baker, while John Beale junior was described as a baker in High Street. John Beale junior was born in 1817 to John and Mary Beale, and John senior was the eldest son of John Beale and Sarah Holliman of Barkway, and himself the son of another John Beale, of Reed. Thomas Beale was some eight years older than his distant cousin John, but it seems that, although in competition for the Royston bakery trade, they must have been on good terms because after 1845 Thomas allowed his cousin's son, John junior, to run the shop in the High Street.

John junior married Martha and had six children, John, Ernest, Walter, Frank, Martha and Fanny. He was successful in business and was able to leave the bakery business to his eldest son John, to set up his son Frank in a building business in Andover, and to leave shops, cottages and other property to his other children when he died on June 7th 1883.

The third Beale to run the shop at the Cross, John, never married. He is remembered by Mr. Jack Beale as a kindly and generous man, rather dominated by his mother Martha. He died in 1912, and as he had no children, the shop was taken on by Leonard Beale, son of Walter Beale, John's second brother and manager of Barclay's Bank, Royston.

Leonard, however, had a comfortable and secure position as cashier of Phillips' brewery, so the day-to-day management of the business was carried on by his wife Flora. Older people in the area still remember calling in at the shop on market day for tea and refreshments in the cafe attached, when Flora Beale was in charge.

As Leonard and Flora's eldest son Jack had gone into the removal business, and their second son Alec had gone to Australia, it was their youngest son Don who extended the bakery, first as a partner with his mother, and later in sole charge. Don Beale developed the business beyond any of his predecessors, and after the end of World War II took over the Bull Hotel at the top of the High Street, which he ran until about a year before his death in 1953.

The old shop on the corner changed hands, but the new owners kept the name Beale and Son over the door until it was demolished in the early 1960s for road widening. A photograph taken in 1960 shows it essentially unchanged from an earlier photo taken about 1890, and probably even from the time of Thomas Beale in 1805, with its timber shop front, overhanging first floor of white plaster contrasting with black-framed sashes, and little dormer windows peeping out of the fine tiled roof, still in good shape after a hundred and fifty years of unbroken ownership in the hands of the Beale family.

Trevor Beale
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