

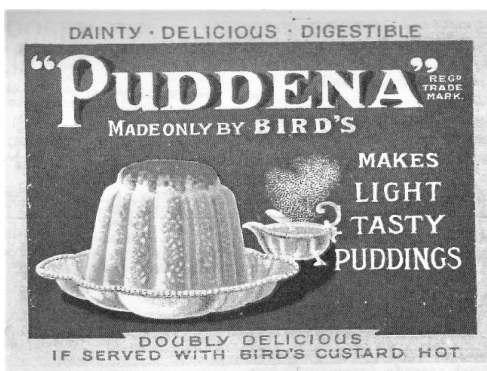


'Fast Food' more than one hundred years ago: Loosemore's Stores



The label 'fast food' is one that is overwhelmingly associated with the present century, although it plainly had its origins in the freezer revolution of the second half of the twentieth, as domestic kitchens increasingly acquired their own. However, there were species of fast foods served at table that had a far longer history. One that many today remain familiar with is Bird's Custard, invented in the 1830s and made available as a proprietary brand soon after. It dispensed with eggs as the thickening agent and used cornflour instead. It sold as a powder that was mixed with milk, the distinctive Bird's Custard tin becoming a brand icon.

Loosemore's grocery business on the west side of the junction between Trinity Road and Madeira Road had been established about 1889 and continued until 1921. It served the higher ends of the market, but this in no way excluded proprietary food brands like 'Bird's'. The 'Bovril' sign visible in the photograph of the shopfront plainly offers further illustration.



Sometime before 1914, Loosemore's took it upon themselves to market another Bird's food brand that went under the name of 'Puddena'. It was a ready-made pudding mix that could be flavoured as required. The firm began to send out typed invitations to customers, attached with the 'Puddena' trademark label, pointing out how the old lengthy process of making puddings could be done away with. Customers were advised that a lot of 'Puddena' was now being sold. A trial packet was offered to any customer interested.

Tom Harry Loosemore was born in Newport and his wife, Alice, in Ryde, so both were Islanders. He entered the grocery business in Ventnor at nearby Parker's corner by taking over the store run there by Mr. Amis. By the late 1880s, though, he had erected the handsome building seen in the photo above, located on the opposite side of the junction of Madeira and Trinity roads. The shop became local agent for Charles and Thomas Harris & Co. Ltd., the famous Wiltshire bacon curers. Another specialty was Midlothian Oatmeal, strongly recommended by the local medical men. Loosemore also operated a branch Post Office from the premises, as the photo reveals.

Tom Loosemore disposed of his Ventnor business in 1921 and died at Brighton in 1933, leaving a widow, son and two daughters. The shop would later become Farleigh's Stores, a name that older inhabitants will remember well. 'Puddena', however, does not appear to have had a lasting impact on cooks or housewives. Unlike Bird's custard, it now forms a culinary curiosity, lost in time, even if the packets and tins have become collectibles.

Ventnor & District Local History Society: Michael Freeman, from files in Ventnor Heritage Centre, especially the Local History Index compiled by the late Fay Brown.