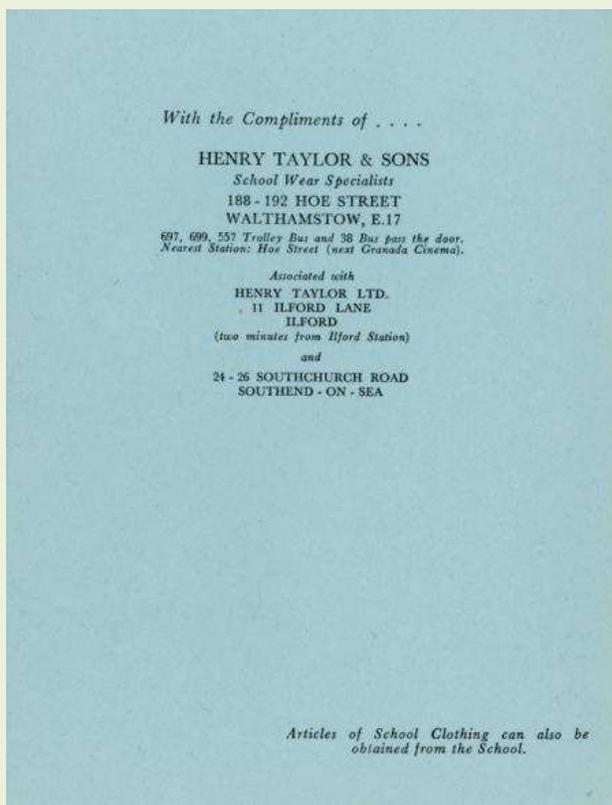


# Henry Taylor, The School Outfitters

In 1903, *Henry Taylor*, age 32 years married his wife *Edith neé Rolfe*, who was 25 years old. Both of them had been involved previously in the drapery trade and they opened a Gentleman's Outfitters shop in Hoe Street, Walthamstow. They hoped to take advantage of the increasing number of commuters who travelled into the City. It wasn't long before they added a school wear and a tailoring service. The business remained largely unchanged until 1978, when they decided to focus entirely on school uniforms.

Since then, for over a hundred years, many generations of Walthamstow children have worn school uniforms that their parents bought for them from *Henry Taylor's* Walthamstow shops.



Sadly, the shops have been closed but the business, which has a large prestigious client list run by Melanie Powell, a grand-daughter of Henry and Edith Taylor, is now operating as an on-line shopping business.

## A History

The earliest record that I can find of the business enterprise is in 1906, when the shop was in a terrace of properties adjacent to the Granada Cinema at 188, Hoes Street

Taylor Henry, clothier, 188 Hoe street

(From - *Kelly's Directory 1906*, unfortunately there are not any directories available to me between 1902-1906)



As trade expanded the business expanded and occupied premises at 188-194 Hoe Street.

| Taylor Henry, clothier, 188, 190, 192 & 194 Hoe street

(From Kelly's Directory 1929)

She also tells us that .sometime in the early 1960's, Ronald and John Taylor built a large property at 188-194 Hoe Street

**Above: The original Hoe Street premises with superimposed portraits of Ronald and Henry Taylor**

*Melanie tells us; "Dad used this photo and added cameos of himself and Grand-dad to celebrate the centenary, so I've included that too."*



**Above: Left, the Henry Taylor property at 188-194 Hoe Street with, on the right, the present day HSBC bank that now occupies the site adjacent to the parade of shops beside Grenada Cinema.**

The family lived above the shop and there were seven children who were: *John, Winifred, Connie, George, Arthur & Dorothy (Twins) and Ronald (Melanie Powell's father)*

*Melanie Powell says, "I've sent a copy of the shop at 188-194, taken when the family still lived 'over the shop', the children had great fun riding their bikes the length of the hall, needless to say this was only done when the parents were out!! The picture of the 'new' premises was taken in 1977, when we transferred across the road, rather a sad looking picture and I'm sure we must have some others, taken when Dad did his wonderful window dressing"*

Melanie enjoyed helping in the shop and says, “I remember being allowed to help by selecting the correct price tags.(I was probably about 9 or 10, this was a treat as Dad always did the windows after tea, which meant I was allowed to stay up until after 9pm, no doubt this was only during the school holidays). I was never allowed to go into the window- strictly out of bounds!! Dad had a special pair of slippers that he wore in the window, to protect the cloth that was used to cover the floor and backdrop”.

## The Sons

Henry Taylor set three of his sons up in similar men’s outfitting shops. John, Arthur and Ron each had a shop – John, in Walthamstow, Arthur, in Southend and Ron in Ilford. However, son George didn’t want a career as a clothier and trained to be a doctor and finally ended up as Medical Officer of Health for Warwickshire.

## The Daughters

Melanie Powell advises that:

“The girls were all encouraged in education. Winifred went to Oxford and I remember seeing her name on the university boards in the hall of Walthamstow Grammar school when I was there. She then trained as a missionary and spent some years in India, returning in the 1960s.

Connie trained as a nurse, went to the Gold Coast and was there during the war, but was sent back on a troop ship when she caught malaria. She then opened a nursing home in Berkhamstead which she ran until well into her 80s!!!

Dorothy trained as a pharmacist married a fellow student and worked in his family chemists and then at Lewisham Hospital.”

## The Business Moves

### Across The Road

The company survived the turmoil of two world wars and the economic depression of the 1920’s. However, by the 1970’s, the demand for tailored menswear had



declined dramatically and many dedicated menswear shops closed. Casual clothes were now normal wear and much of these could be bought cheaply from market stalls and chain stores. *Henry Taylor's* response was to specialize and concentrated on school wear and in the 70s, they moved across the road to 119-121, Hoe Street.

## *Buying A School Uniform*

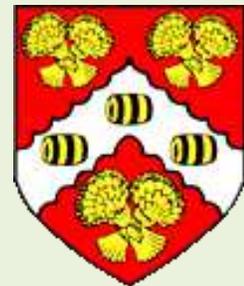


Although 'posh' schools, like *Forest, George Monoux, the Walthamstow School for Girls* and a number of small fee paying schools, traditionally had their own distinctive school uniforms, from the 1960's onwards, increasing numbers of 'ordinary' schools adopted uniforms.

## *Uniformity Of Dress*

The predominant reason for this was the desire to create a situation where children could feel equal to each other at school and couldn't be identified as 'different' by their clothing and the way to do that was to make school

uniforms compulsory. (By and large it worked but in my school in the 50's you could still tell the children of more affluent families by them wearing blazers made from 'Barathea' instead of 'Serge')



For many children the process involved with buying of school uniform, was one of the 'rites of passage' that marked their transition from being small children into a more 'grown up' world.

## *The Importance of Education For Boys & Girls*

In the 50'a-60's, the whole process of buying a school uniform seemed to be part of a complicated strange mystique. Your parents received a list of the necessary items to be worn for all occasions. For children who had worn the same clothes at home as at school, this was a revelation. Neither they, nor their parents had realised how much special clothing was involved and the cost of providing it. At this point, some parents opted out. This was

particularly true for the parents of girls whose fathers didn't see the value of education for older girls.

My mother in law, was an intelligent young woman who passed the exam that would allow her to attend the local (Green) school. However, her father would not pay for the cost of her new school uniform. It wasn't because he couldn't afford it but because he didn't see why he should spend that amount of money on a girl who would leave school and get married!



Particularly puzzling to ordinary working class people was the amount of sports clothes that needed to be bought. Parents understood the need for a school uniform and for PE plimsolls and shorts. However, the extensive list of other sports clothing seemed to be excessive and costly.

Up until that time, children had worn their ordinary clothes to play sports. At best, a boy may have had a pair of football boots to play football. Boys and girls both had plimsolls and, at that time, most boys wore short trousers while young girls often tucked their skirts into their navy blue knickers. Now they were faced with a bewildering array of necessary expensive sports items. (See the boys list above)

## School Clothing Lists

CLOTHES LIST	
<u>General</u>	<u>Winter Term</u>
School Blazer	Football Shirt (School colours)
Grey Flannel Trousers or Shorts	Football Shirt (white)
Navy Raincoat	Football Shorts (Navy blue)
School Pullover or Slipover	Football Boots
School Cap	Football Stockings
School Tie	School Scarf (optional)
Plimsolls (white)	<u>Summer Term</u>
Gym Vest	Cricket Shirts
Gym Shorts (white)	White Socks
School Stockings (for juniors)	White Flannels (long) for boys in 1st and 2nd XI
	Cricket Boots (boys over 12)
	Bathing Trunks

Above: The school clothing requirements for Harlow College

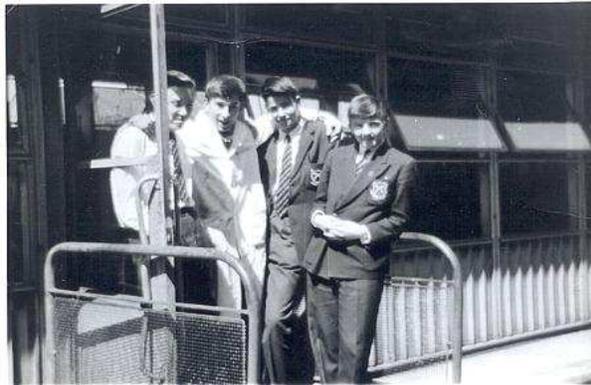
Mick Gilbey tells us; <http://micksmuses.com/category/memories/walthamstow/walthamstow-4/> 'Just before the Granada complex was the school uniform supplier named Henry Taylor which had quite a large shop frontage.....The uniforms of several schools were display on dressed dummies in the window including my own. Each uniform was in pristine

*condition without a mark on it. It seemed strange each day seeing the uniform that I was never destined to wear due to its cost. ‘*

Local author, Robert Barltrop wrote in the Old Monovian magazine

<http://www.oldmonovians.com/old-monovians/memories/robert-barltrop-s-memories.html?showall=&start=2>

*“Other Grandma bought my Monoux School uniform for me. We were sent a list of the things obtainable only from Henry Taylor’s. The whole lot - blazer with the school crest embroidered on its pocket cap which also had the crest, grey short trousers, knee length black socks with red rings round the tops, and black and red tie - cost just under 27s. The most expensive item was the Melton cloth blazer; that was 14s. There were other things which my father had to get: a new white shirt, football jersey, plimsolls and shorts for PT. The list said a white singlet for PT as well, and he forgot that; on the first day my mother rushed to a shop and bought one (1s.6d, and then it was not required after all)”*



John Newell writes:

[http://www.walthamstowmemories.net/pdfs/John%20Newell Bio.pdf](http://www.walthamstowmemories.net/pdfs/John%20Newell%20Bio.pdf)

*“I was put into Ling house and had to make a trip to Henry Taylor’s the school outfitters in the row of shops on the bend opposite the Granada in Hoe Street.*

*The houses were Ling (red) Lister (green) Curie (yellow) and Howard (blue) Membership of these houses was applied at sports events to encourage competition but had otherwise no real meaning during the normal course of lessons. I still have the list of clothing required for boys and girls comprising everything for a complete school uniform. Henry Taylors seemed to have the local monopoly for all schools (The Girls High school was nearby) and must have done very well out of it.*

*I went straight into the second stream. The streams were indicated by the letters of the school name WMTS so I was in ‘M’. It was a mixed school, boys wore short or long grey trousers and a white shirt and maroon and blue striped tie, blue blazer and cap (which were never worn, except in the case of a few softies!) the girls wore check blue and white skirts, white blouses, some wore ties and blue jumpers or blazers. The school badge was two of the Essex type scimitar crossed swords and underneath was the Latin motto ‘Respice Finem’. Look to the end.”*

Dylansaunty writing about the shop said:

<http://www.mumsnet.com/Talk/primary/372548-private-school-uniforms-from-the-outfitters-or-the-supermarkets/AllOnOnePage>

*'I think the old man who works there is so old he could be the original Henry Taylor! They still have those little pods on rails that go whizzing round and a proper cashier's office....'*

## Gone But Not Forgotten

When they learned of the shop's closure the local *Guardian* newspaper reported these comments:

[http://www.guardianseries.co.uk/news/10031944.Sadness\\_at\\_closure\\_of\\_school\\_uniform\\_shop/](http://www.guardianseries.co.uk/news/10031944.Sadness_at_closure_of_school_uniform_shop/)

*'LakeBreeze'* said: "For nostalgic reasons, I find this closing quite sad. I remember me and my mum going to Henry Taylor's in readiness for secondary school; first time we'd been held to a super-strict uniform that could only be bought from there. It was weird and exciting and scary all at the same time!"

*'IsayThat'* added: "I went to school in Hackney and my uniform came from Henry Taylor. It was a day out for my mum and I to get my uniform [But] Henry Taylor has not gone, they are trading online, which seems a far more economical and sensible way today's market."



*'Helen'* from Walthamstow said: "This is quite sad. It is common to buy stuff online, of course, but with growing children it is useful to try clothes on, especially blazers which are expensive."

## Miscellanea

Right: a recent item for sale on Ebay price £32

### Vintage Boater Summer Hat Henry Taylor & Sons – Essential Wear for Henley

Man's vintage boater Fits a large size – no size marked. Made by Henry Taylor & Sons of Walthamstow. Has a dark (nearly black) navy blue grosgrain hat band, with woven oak leaf motif at the front. Lovely quality straw in an intricate weave pattern. Lined with silk at the top, netting around the edge and finished with a leather band. In good vintage condition.

*Melanie Powell* says "The panama hat band looks like a Forest School emblem and they of course did wear boaters.....I have found a receipt dated 1915, for a gents suit, gloves, tie and hatband - grand total of £1. 17. 9 1/2. The receipt is printed: Bought of Henry Taylor Clothier and Outfitter 188 & 190 Hoe Street and 30 & 32 High Street, Walthamstow."





Interestingly, this receipt tell us that, in 1915, there was also another Henry Taylor's shop at 30-32 High Street. These are two shops on the corner of Courtenay Place and the High Street toward the bottom (St James Street end) of the market. There isn't any reference to the shops in either the 1914 or 1917 Kelly's Directories.

## *Henry & Edith Taylor*



*Melanie* writes, "Finally the picture of Gran & Grand-dad celebrating their 25th wedding anniversary. This was taken in 1928 at 9 Prospect Hill. On the wall behind them on the left is a photo of all the family which I also have, not sure of the date, but dad looks about 9 or 10, so that would be around 1925.

Grand-dad died in 1947 and Gran moved across the road to 12 The Lindens, buying it from the Holstock family, who owned the bakeries locally"

## *Acknowledgement*

I am deeply indebted to *Melanie Powell*, who is *Henry Taylor's* granddaughter, for putting up with me pestering her, and for her kindness and help in supplying her recollections and family pictures. I sincerely hope that

she will see this article as a genuine tribute to her family who served and were part of the community of Walthamstow for over a century.

Bill Bayliss

July 2014