

Jones the Flannel.

Some years ago David Sims was interviewed about the beginnings of his haberdashery shop in Beaufort Street, Brynmawr. The following information is taken from that interview.

Words in *italics* are additions.

In David Sims' shop there was an old remnant of how the itinerant traders would carry out their business years ago. *(The pack men were a very common sight in the area before shops became established. Many came from West Wales but there were also Scottish Packmen plying their trade, in fact the Scottish Packmen paid for the building of Bailey Street Chapel (now demolished) which stood on the corner of Bailey Street and Warwick Road, often called the Packman's Chapel).*

David's father, Phillip Sims worked for an old Welsh Flannel business run by William Jones. William came from Cardiganshire and he had walked all the way looking for an area where he could set up his business. He started a credit system covering Brynmawr, Nant y Glo, Clydach, Gilwern and other towns and villages nearby. Eventually he had quite a few men working for him travelling up and down the valley expanding the area of the business. They would take so much per week from their customers until the goods were paid for, an early form of H.P. This was Jones the Flannel as he was known by all. William Jones had two sons, William and John who also worked as Packmen and they were also known as Jones the Flannel.

They used to get their flannel shirts, socks et. From the mill at Llandysul which is now the National Woollen Museum of Wales. The original shop was quite small situated about six doors up from No 30; I believe it became Siddles shop in later years. The business moved to No 30 in Beaufort Street in 1930 when David was two years old. The property had been owned by the Quakers where they made and repaired shoes for the needy of the town. Apparently the floors and the stairs were covered in boot studs. Today the property is Greggs the Baker.

David's father had joined as a very young lad straight from school as often happened in those days. He was with the business for all his life and finally took over the business in 1935. Even though his surname was Sims he was still known as Jones the Flannel. On taking over the business one of the problems that David's father had was changing the business over from being a credit to a retail cash business. *(Changing from a credit to a cash business would have been difficult as the old credit customers had to be kept happy and during the depression of the 20s and 30s money was very hard to come by).*

David's father died aged 54 on 22nd June 1946 and David took over the business. Thankfully relics from the old days had been preserved as a permanent fixture in the shop. These were the original Packmen's rods used to carry their wares up and down the valley. They were often shown to interested people who came into the shop especially to visiting family

members from the U.S.A. and Canada. There was also a side panel as part of the awning above the entrance which has sadly disappeared.

The rods would have been held over each shoulder and as there were three, the third (*it's assumed*) would be across the back resting on the other two forming a triangle around the neck. Off the hooks at the end of the rods would hang the bundles of Welsh flannel shirts and miner's stockings and so on. It would be quite a feat to carry the three rods with maybe three or four bundles hanging off them. The Packmen would take advantage of any lift on a horse and cart but mostly they walked. *Many of the garments carried would be samples, orders taken and the next time the town was visited they would bring the goods ordered and some payment taken. Over the time more would be paid at each visit until the payment was completed.* The rods shown in the photographs below had the initials W.J carved on them so it is assumed they belonged to William Jones.



David continued buying his Welsh blankets etc from Llandysul and when he visited a few years ago they even found his records to show him.



(Additional information by Gwynneth Sims)

Eifion Lloyd Davies March 2018