



Ditchling village bakers and tearoom in 1920

# 500 years in the making

Generations in Sussex have enjoyed bread, cakes and sandwiches provided by one family of bakers and millers. The Cutress family began milling around 500 years ago. And they are just celebrating 75 years at the helm of well-known bakers Forfars. Simon Irwin met the MD Tim Cutress

**I**F IT were possible, Tim Cutress would have been baked rather than born. For his family have been millers and later bakers for at least the past 500 years.

One of his family's more recent business acquisitions was the purchase of Forfars Bakers in 1937 by his grandfather Charles.

Forfars was founded in 1900 in Hove by a Scottish family which had moved to the area.

At the time the Cutress family had bakers shops under their own name in Ditchling and Brighton.

Fast forward 75 years and Forfars has 19 shops, seven snack vans and a thriving wholesale business run from its

bakery and head office on Home Farm Road in Brighton.

Charles' grandson Tim is Managing Director. He lives and breathes the business that he has known since birth. Brother Matt is Production Director.

During their lives, the company moved from its bakery in Whippingham Street, set up in 1949, to Home Farm and went mobile with its snack vans.

Charles' two sons John and Tony joined the business after the end of the Second World War. Tony concentrated on the bakery side of the business and John on the outside catering and hospitality. Among its properties, the company owned a pub and a hotel, the Courtlands Hotel in Hove where Brian

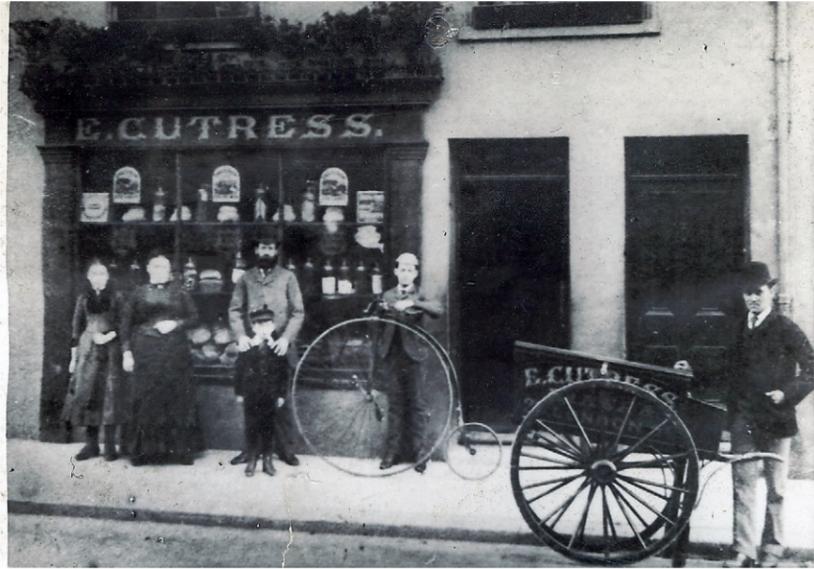
Clough used to stay during his short time as manager of Brighton and Hove Albion in the 1970s.

On Charles' death in 1975 the company was restructured and the two halves of the business separated.

This separation is nothing new for the Cutress family, or should that really be Cuttress?

"Two Ts were the brewers and one T is the millers. They split about 200 years ago. The millers wanted to differentiate from the brewers so we took a T out of our name. We were strictly nonconformist and didn't drink. We've changed our habits now!" said Tim.

"The Cuttress brewery used to be based at Poynings, where my parents



Edward Cutress' shop in London Street



A bag for Tower Mill bakery, printed by J Beal and Sons Paper Bag Makers, of East Street, Brighton – see below



Tony Cutress stands to attention as the Mayor and Princess Elizabeth pass by on her visit to Hove



John, Tony and Charles Cutress with Alderman Clark, the Mayor of Hove, another baker, he owned Clarks of Hove



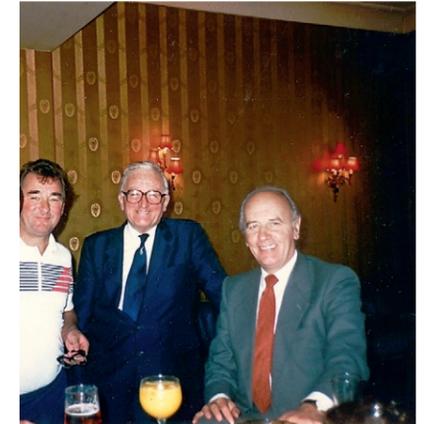
The shop at 4 Dyke Road, Brighton, in 1890



Tower Mill with baker's shop in Belton Road, Brighton in 1880



Home Farm bakery today



Brian Clough, John Cutress and Brian Moore at the Courtlands Hotel, Hove



Matt, Tony and Tim Cutress in the 1980s



The Forfars bakery in Whippingham Street, Brighton, in 1949

lived all their married lives. The last Mr Cuttress died when they moved in there in 1949. I used to dig up bottles in the garden with Cuttress brewery with two T's on them."

Now the business is very different to the Forfars business that Charles bought 75 years ago although it remains in family hands.

"In the late 1950s there were 300 bakers shop in Brighton of which we had 6.

"Now, in greater Brighton, going round to Newhaven and Shoreham, there are about 30 bakers shops, of which we have 12.

"It just shows how the High Street has changed, the greengrocer, the fishmonger, the baker have all disappeared and because we changed, we are still there," said Tim.

The modern challenges to a local retail bakers like Forfars are the big chains, the supermarkets and the coffee shops who all produce some or all of what it has to offer.

A striking example of this is that bread, once 35 per cent of the trade in the shops is now just 8 per cent.

Most of Forfars' revenue, around 75 per cent comes from its shops. The majority, 10 of them, are in Brighton and Hove where the business started but the most popular is the branch in High Street, Lewes.

Tim is continually looking for ways to improve and sustain the business in the face of increasing competition and a harsh economic climate.

"We have to be very selective with shops when the rents are always going up and people aren't buying food

because of the competition.

"We have to be very cautious. A lot of my time now is spent around property management. Shop selection and what you do in those shops are very important."

One idea he would like to promote more is the company's buffet service for in-office corporate events.

"We do a bakers' buffet which we do on gold trays. We have a room producing sandwiches and the vans are all done by half past seven so we can do more of that. And we can do corporate cakes with their logos too."

Whatever happens, he hopes that the business will continue for another 75 years and will still be owned by his family.

[www.forfarsfresh.co.uk](http://www.forfarsfresh.co.uk)