

## THE DEATH OF A SPECIALIST TOBACCONIST

# SHUTTING SHOP

by Jacques Cole

At the end of December, Fribourg & Treyer, the well-known Haymarket specialist tobacconist, closed its doors for the last time, after just over 260 years of trading at No 34.

The most important feature of the building is the shop front. Great care has always been taken to ensure its preservation and it is probably the finest example of its kind remaining in London (with the exception of Messrs Lock's in St James Street which has a slightly different style). Minor internal alterations have been made since 1720 and the original floor replaced before the turn of the century, but otherwise the shop has many of its original fittings.

The passing of such a shop is obviously mourned and the question 'Why?' is uppermost in many people's minds. Mr Ling, general manager for the past nine years, and who has been connected with F & T for some 25 years, told us that high increases in rents, rates and overheads bore a great responsibility, while the redevelopments going on around the shop were not conducive to attracting visitors and regular customers. Can we therefore deduce that this side of the Haymarket is changing its image and does not attract so much the traditional West End customer?

### SOMBRE MOOD

That F & T would be missed by the staff was shown by the sombre mood to be found in December and in particular with Jim Palmer, the shop manager with no less than 43 years service to the firm.

You sometimes find in the history of old firms that the names have been lost with time, but this one was founded by the Fribourg family, probably Swiss, and the name Treyer appears in 1780, having by all accounts taken over the business and trading under Fribourg & Treyer. The Treyers came from Amsterdam and married into the Evans family who had the business in this century.

The main business was originally snuffs, cigars and tobaccos being a minor part of the trade. Their clients were people of 'quality' and included George IV, Queen Charlotte and continental Royalty. In fact a list of customers between 1764 and 1819



John Arlott, who wrote a biography of Fribourg & Treyer called *The Snuff Shop*, seen behind the counter.

reads like an extract from Burke's Peerage or Debrett. Another interesting list is one from 1798 with nearly 100 French names, no doubt refugees from the Revolution.

Cigars started taking more space early in the 19th Century, cigarettes around 1852 and tobacco (pipe) later in the century. Briar pipes made their appearance around 1859.

Although the snuff business has decreased a great deal this century F & T were one of the best known suppliers, their snuffs being still in demand.

One consolation perhaps is that stocks of Fribourg & Treyer's snuffs, tobaccos and other F & T branded merchandise are now being carried by the House of Bewlay in Piccadilly. Let us hope that while a landmark has gone, the identity of Fribourg & Treyer will be preserved. Will a 'shop within a shop' be a new feature for F & T? Who knows, but 260 years represent over half the time of the tobacco industry in this country. A sad reflection on our times but optimistically the start of a new era?

Another disappearance some months ago was the closing down of the Wix shop at the corner of Piccadilly and the Circus. Although not established as long as F & T, and known in earlier times as Peter Jackson, there must be very few smokers who can recall when it was not there! Well known for its Barbic brand of pipes, also used on some other goods, appreciated by the

connoisseur of good quality pipes, it was hard for visitors to London to miss the shop at Piccadilly Circus.

We recall that Barbic had innovated a number of shapes, one, if we remember correctly, was a pot which was commonly known in the trade as a 'barbic'. Perhaps some 'old timers' remember it.

### EXPENSIVE TO RUN

The closing was a question of viability from which we can surmise that it was getting expensive to run. That has unfortunately been the story of a number of specialists over the past years. However, there is still a Wix shop in Piccadilly next to the Piccadilly Hotel and the Principals had no doubt been wise some years back to acquire Weingott in Fleet Street, which is now the centre for Barbic pipes in London.

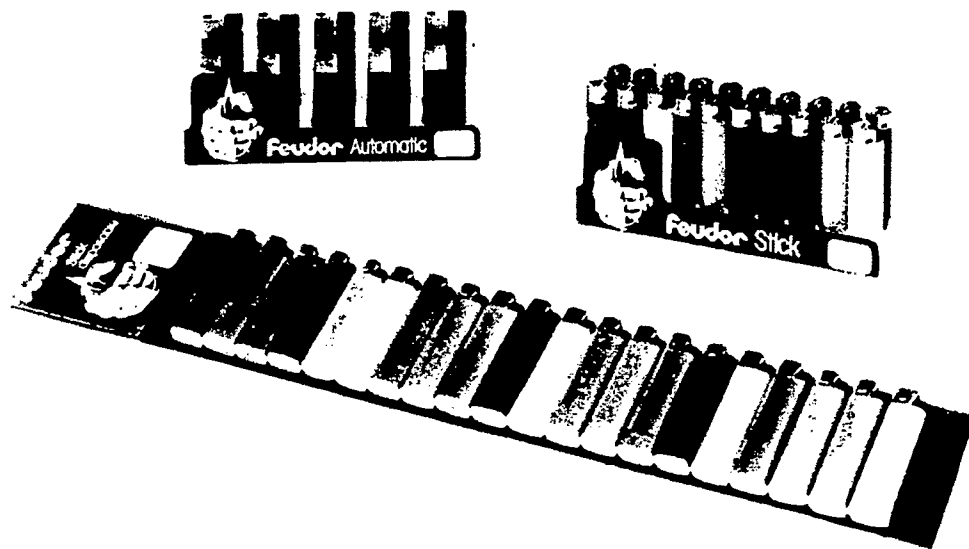
These closings had created rumours that a number of other well-known London specialists were about to suffer the same fate, but our inquiries show that these rumours were fortunately unfounded. One we questioned laughed: 'I get offers for my shop all the time!'

We can only hope that 1982 will not bring any more 'shock closures' and that business will find its level without them.

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