

End Of An Era For A Local Retail Business

—Peter Sherred—

For the discerning Doverian, mention of the name John Angell would no doubt conjure up two distinct images. Firstly, the retail shop premises in Biggin Street being the base of a jewellery and watch retail business for decades and, secondly, the familiar face of the man who ran the business from 1973 to the date of its closure in September 2023.



John Angell

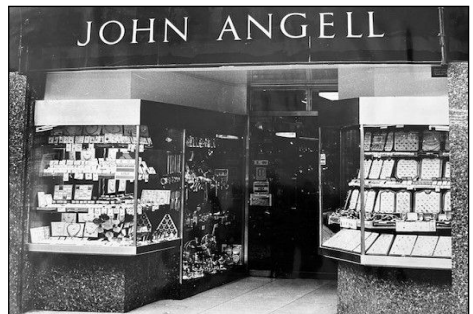
But the business was not confined to Dover. It had its origins in Bromley when the founder, John Angell, the current John Angell's grandfather, started business on a door-to-door basis. He branched out, having spent some time operating from a sales kiosk (which were so familiar in London and its suburbs in the early years of the 20th century) and in 1910 he purchased an established business at 110 - 114 High Street, Tonbridge. He lived above the shop, until redevelopment caused the premises to be demolished in the 1960s. The business moved to another shop unit at 64 High Street. Where John Angell was a sole trader. During the First World War he served in the Army as a Corporal but rose to be a Lieutenant. He fought at the Battle of Ypres in Belgium.

In 1927, his son, who was also named John Angell, established the firm in Maidstone, the county town of Kent, firstly in Mill Street but then in High Street and later at Gabriel's Hill. It was this John Angell who made the move to Dover, establishing a shop in the town in 1934. He was to remain in the trade in Dover until his death in 1973 when his son, yet another John Angell, took over the running of the business.

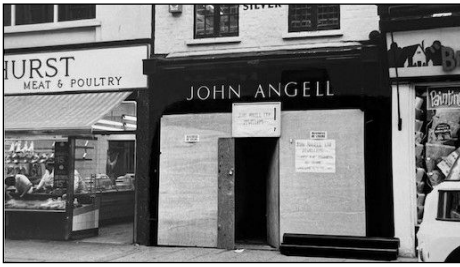
Other retail units along the south coast were opened in Folkestone (subsequently sold in 2015) and, for a short spell, in Deal from 1935. This latter unit was closed during the Second World War and did not reopen after the cessation of hostilities. The current John Angell became the Managing Director of the John Angell Group and moved the head office from Tonbridge to Dover. John finally closed the

Dover shop on 23rd September 2023 having, in his words, "served my time" overseeing the pre-eminent jewellery outlet in Dover and 'The Kent County Jewellers'. It was indeed the end of an era.

Shopping frontages change with time over the years and, in the cycle of business profiles since the war, many family businesses and concerns have had to make way for the development of large retail units and chains. John Angell has traded through these times of significant change for retail business. Running an independent jewellery and property chain in the current day and age is a very difficult challenge indeed, but it is a matter



Biggin Street premises, Dover



Biggin Street premises boarded up

of regret that a name that has graced the shop premises in Biggin Street for decades has come to the end of the road and ceased trading.

John recounts that over the years there have been memorable incidents which have affected his family run business. In the 1970s a car ran off the road (Biggin Street was a two-way street until the pedestrian centre was created in Dover) and crashed into the front of his shop unit. Consequently, this resulted in the facade of the shop being boarded up. The driver of the car in question died.

Jewellery and other shops selling high value goods have, over the years, proved to be an attraction to robbers and John Angell was no exception to this. In the 1980's an attempt at robbery was made by someone accessing the building through the roof. Fortunately, the offender was captured. On another occasion a gang broke their way in from adjoining retail premises but, having set up their explosives on all the firm's safes, those responsible for the break-in were caught – just in time by the looks of it! Responding to the various attempts to rob the business, John Angell is very philosophical, summarising the various incidents that affected his business as “annoying” before adding that “fortunately the business did not sustain any really big losses and no staff were injured.” Nevertheless, such episodes must have

been urgent reminders to John Angell and all his shop staff of their vulnerability in the face of determined robbers.

John Angell has not only run his own business, but he has also been very active in many roles within the Dover community. He was at one time a member of the Dover Chamber of Commerce and has been a long-time member of the Rotary Club of Dover. In addition, he has given much time as Chairman of the Dover Town Team. The modernisation of the Market Square necessitated engagement with the Coastal Community Fund and Dover District Council. He is currently Co-Chair of Dover Big Local Charity. John Angell was accorded the signal honour of being made an Honorary Freeman of the town of Dover in 2022.

On a personal note, John has been married to Anne since 1977. Anne had originally been an employee of the business, but then followed her own career as the Director of Operations for a national training company. Anne and John married at St Paul's Roman Catholic Church in Maison Dieu Road. They have three adult children, John, Katherine and Tommy. John works at the Institute for Intelligence and Security in Vienna, Austria. Katherine is an Associate Professor at Hult International Business School in London. Tommy is the founder of *Offshore Network* an international media organisation based in London. Anne and John have four grandchildren. Anne retired eight years ago and John has now joined her in the retirement world where he indicates he keeps up with Dover Big Local. John is also a “determined” gardener. I am sure members of The Dover Society would want to wish John and Anne a long life in retirement together which must be especially enjoyable for them after all the years of service to their business and especially to the community of Dover.