

# ***Introduction to Sainsbury's History Pack***

This pack may be used either by individual pupils or by teachers in the classroom.

The factfiles cover the early history of the company and important influences on its later development, such as the impact of the two world wars and the introduction of self-service in the 1950s.

## ***This pack aims:***

The changing role of women in the company is highlighted throughout the factfiles.

There are six factfiles available:

- ♦ ***To tell something of the history of Sainsbury's since 1869***
- ♦ ***To relate that story to the way people's lives have changed***
- ♦ ***To make archive material available and encourage research through primary sources***

### **Factfiles**

.....

**Factfile 1** Sainsbury's and the Provision Trade

**Factfile 2** History in the High Street

**Factfile 3** The First World War

**Factfile 4** The Second World War

**Factfile 5** Self-service

**Factfile 6** Working for Sainsbury's

Sainsbury's is happy to waive its copyright in this pack for individual study and classroom use. Please feel free to photocopy it.

# Introduction to Sainsbury's History Pack

## List of Resources

**The resources include a selection of postcards which were produced with this pack in mind; cut out models of Sainsbury's shops built between 1873 and 1925; and photocopies of press cuttings, advertisements, floor plans and other materials.**

### Factfile 1

#### Picture Resources:

Chapel Street, Islington, c 1895  
Romford branch, c 1905  
Guildford branch, c 1906  
Harry Webb, delivery lad, Enfield, c 1913

#### Photocopies:

Tributes to Mary Ann Sainsbury, *Evening Standard*, 1927  
Methods of cutting butter, 1914  
Poultry & provision depot, Balham, 1888  
Kelly's *Post Office Directory*, 1870

### Factfile 2

#### Picture Resources:

Four shops to cut out and make

#### Photocopy

Architectural plan for 392 Mare St, Hackney, 1929

### Factfile 3

#### Picture Resources:

Female delivery driver & assistant, c 1915

#### Photocopies:

Advertisement & newspaper cutting, 1914  
Advertisement for *Crellos* margarine, 1915  
Ration card & advertisement, 1919  
Staff engagement records, 1914

### Factfile 4

#### Picture Resources:

Emergency shop, second world war

#### Photocopies:

*The Manager at Sainsbury's*, 1940  
Ration book  
*Plan your points*, 1942  
Letter to Mrs Shepperd, 1941  
Letter to Miss Crouch, 1944  
VE Day letter to Sainsbury's staff on national service

### Factfile 5

#### Picture Resources:

Self-service, Croydon, 1950  
Self-service, Eastbourne, 1952  
Counter service, Catford, 1955

#### Photocopies:

*How to shop self-service*, 1955  
Sainsbury's 'Q-less' store, Croydon, 1950  
A modern floor plan, 1998

### Factfile 6

#### Picture Resources:

Street carnival, Enfield, c 1930

#### Photocopies:

Staff experience card (1937 - 1940)  
Recruitment advertisements:  
- Drury Lane, 1886  
- *A career for keen young men*, 1937  
- *A career in the food trade*, 1954

## Sainsbury's and the Provision Trade

### Factfile

# 1

Nowadays most people do most of their food shopping in supermarkets and even corner shops contain thousands of product, from cornflakes to ketchup, batteries to bin liners. In the nineteenth century it was very different. Shops carried far fewer product lines, and were divided into several clear types: grocers, dairies, butchers and greengrocers, as well as oil and colour merchants, corn and coal merchants.

#### Sainsbury's Founders

John James Sainsbury, the founder of the company, started work at 14. He worked in a grocer's shop in the New Cut near Waterloo Station, London. (Grocers sell dry goods: packets and cans of food.)

His next job was with an oil and colour merchant in Woolwich. This shop sold over 2,000 different articles - a lot for the 1860s - *'everything from chicory to gunpowder'*. The shop would have sold all sorts of oils, from petrol and lamp oil to cooking oil and linseed oil for artists' paints. It would also have sold blocks of solid colour from which the artists' paints were ground and mixed, as well as household goods, such as candles and soap and basic groceries, such as dried fruit and rice.

When he moved jobs to work for another oil and colour merchant in Strutton Ground, Victoria, he met his future wife, Mary Ann Staples, who worked in a dairy down the street. Mary Ann's father, Benjamin Staples, had his own small chain of dairy shops in North London. Mary Ann must have worked in her father's shop and

this probably helped John James and her to decide to open a dairy shop themselves.

#### The First Sainsbury's Shop

John James and Mary Ann got married in 1869 and opened a dairy in Drury Lane. The rent was around £128 a year and the rates were 9 guineas (£9.45) a quarter. They would have had to buy weights and scales, churns and measures for the milk and a block on which to pat the butter.

The story is that they had saved up £100 to start the business. (That is about £6,000 in today's money). While that was a lot of money at the time, it shows that becoming a small shopkeeper was one way that working class people who were able to work hard could set up in their own business and join the middle classes.

John James and Mary Ann specialised in butter and eggs, but they also sold milk. Mary Ann was the first woman to work behind the counter at Sainsbury's. She ran the first shop by herself while her husband worked out his notice with his previous employer, George Gillett, an oil and colour merchant. Sarah Pullen who worked in the shop in the early days said that the couple wanted to have *'the best butter in London'* and that Mary Ann *'... was always up very early in the morning and took great pride in the cleanliness of the shop'*.

She was also said to be *'very keen on serving behind the butter counter'*. Sarah herself ran the Drury Lane shop after the Sainsburys moved to a new house

# **Sainsbury's and the Provision Trade**

**As Sainsbury's grew larger it employed boys and young men from the time they left school. Some were as young as ten. Often they came up to London from the country and so they lived above the shop.**

above their second shop in Kentish Town. When she married, her husband, James, took on the role of manager. Probably the wives of other early managers also worked in the shops. In the census these women are recorded as 'cheesemonger's wife', but in Sainsbury's records they are shown as '*manager's wife - housekeeper*'.

Although in the nineteenth century it was quite common for single women, particularly widows, to run small shops on their own, it was becoming an increasingly male profession which required a range of skills and an extended period of training or apprenticeship. As Sainsbury's women worked as office clerks in the shops and at head office. '*Lady clerks*' were said to make the stores run better: '*Managers are released from clerical work in order to undertake their real job of dealing with customers in the shops*'.

## **Housekeepers**

As Sainsbury's grew larger it employed boys and young men from the time they left school. Some were as young as ten. Often they came up to London from the country and so they lived above the shop. This meant that it was common for shops to have a resident housekeeper. Women also worked as maids and cooks.

## **Refrigeration**

From the 1890s Sainsbury's shops had been built with an ice-box in the basement. The plan for the Mare Street, Hackney, shop included in the Factfile 2 resources shows the cold store in the basement. Ice was delivered

twice a week by the North Pole Ice Company. At first this was the only refrigeration. A few Sainsbury's branches were later equipped with refrigerated bins called '*coffins*' to store frozen foods such as peas and ice-cream, but it was not until the development of self-service in the 1950s that refrigerated cabinets were actually introduced in the shop. Sainsbury's also developed and patented air-cooled counters so that perishable foods could be displayed under a simple curved Perspex canopy.

Sainsbury's has continued to invest in new refrigeration technologies. None of the refrigerators used today at Sainsbury's contains CFCs. Automatic monitoring equipment has been installed in all supermarkets to ensure that all foods are kept at the appropriate temperature at every stage of the '*cold chain*'. Since the early 1960s, lorries with refrigerated compartments have been used to make sure that foods are transported at the correct temperature and that the cold chain is maintained.

The development of canning and freezing helped to ensure that a wider choice of food was available all year round. More recently, chilled and vacuum packed foods have increased choice still further.

Modern transport systems also mean that food can be transported much more quickly than in the past. In 1894, *The Grocer's Manual* complained that '*English and Irish eggs are carried to the markets once a week or fortnight, and are liable to be two, three or four weeks old before they are actually eaten*'. Partly to help

# Sainsbury's and the Provision Trade

## Factfile 1 Resources

### Postcards:

Chapel Street Islington,  
c1895

Romford branch, c 1905

Guildford branch, c 1906

Harry Webb, delivery lad,  
Enfield, c 1913

### Photocopies:

Tributes to Sainsbury's  
Founders,  
*Evening Standard*, 1927

Methods of cutting butter,  
1914

Poultry & provision depot,  
Balham, 1888

Kelly's Post Office Directory,  
1870

overcome that problem. Frank Sainsbury, one of John James' sons, went into farming. His eggs came fresh to the shops and were so popular that he could not produce sufficient eggs to satisfy customers' demands. He therefore set up an egg collection system which guaranteed that eggs would be in the shops three days after they had been laid.

### Activities

1. Look at the postcard of Chapel Street. At the time this picture was taken, Sainsbury's set up stalls outside its shops. One of the first jobs young boys were given was to sell eggs outside on the market stall. Sainsbury's also ran the shop three doors along. Notice that the advertising slogans 'Quality Perfect, Prices Lower' is similar to the modern slogan 'Good Food Cost Less at Sainsbury's'. Note too the claim that Sainsbury's Shilling Butter is the 'Best Value in the World'. John James and Mary Ann had originally wanted to have the best butter in London. Sarah Pullen is quoted in the *Evening Standard* obituary as saying that Mrs Sainsbury took a special pride in her skill at weighing butter. The diagrams in the resources give you some idea of what a skilful job cutting butter was. Try making Plasticine models of the different types of butter and margarine, and marking them up as shown. How much did a wholesale block of Australian butter weigh?

The advertisement for the Balham branch (opened 1888) shows that from an early date Sainsbury's traded in the more affluent middle class suburbs, as well as in the working class areas like

Chapel Street in Islington. The term 'depot' was used to denote the larger size and grander status.

Have a look at the postcard of the Romford branch (c 1905). How many times can you see the word 'Sainsbury' repeated on the shop front? You can get a good idea of the range of foods sold by Sainsbury's at the time by looking at this postcard. To the left are hares, turkeys, bacon and cheeses; to the right a great variety of eggs. Some are sold at the rate of seven or eight for sixpence (2½p), others at 10d (about 4p), 1s 0d (5p) or 1s 6d (7½p) per dozen. You can also see the long aprons worn by members of staff. Mr Tupman, the manager, (in the centre of the picture), is wearing a black waistcoat. To his left, the butcher, Mr Gamble, is distinguished by his striped apron.

The third man in this central group is Mr Witchell, the first hand (assistant manager). Two years later the single-breasted white jackets were replaced by a double-breasted style jacket, which could be reversed to allow for two days' wear, as it would button either way. How old do you think the egg boy is? Notice also the delivery bicycle and the accommodation over the shop. Have a look at the plan of the Mare Street, Hackney, shop in Factfile 2 for an idea of how the shop would have been laid out. The postcard of the Guildford branch (1906) shows the house style of Sainsbury's shops which stayed the same until after the second world war. Notice the elaborate tiles (made specially for Sainsbury's by Minton Hollin's of Stoke-on-Trent) and the intricate mosaic patterned floor. Other

## ***Sainsbury's and the Provision Trade***

notable features include the bentwood chairs set by the Sicilian marble counters. In those days you would sit down to be served. It might take some time for the assistant to cut and weigh your purchases.

Very few foods were sold ready-packed. Goods displayed on the counter have the prices clearly marked. This was insisted upon by John James Sainsbury in order to help customers make their choices. It was not required by law. (The development of self-service in the 1950s made it important for all foods to be clearly labelled with their price.) The Guildford shop was one of the first branches to be lit by electricity, with 40 watt light bulbs suspended over the counters. The light well in the centre of the shop provides natural daylight. (you can see such a 'lantern light' well in the plan of the Mare Street, Hackney, shop in Factfile 2.) At the back of the shop you can see the cashier's office. (Shop assistants who cut and weighed fresh foods like bacon and cheese did not handle money.) You may also be able to make out the reflection of a customer being served outside the shop in the mirror to the right of the screen.

The postcard of Harry Webb shows another aspect of Sainsbury's early trade. It was quite usual for customers to have their orders delivered. You can see from the advertisement '*Bacon cheaper*', that boys like Harry could also collect orders but they were not supposed to make casual sales on a 'stop me and buy one' basis. How old do you think Harry is? He later progressed to become a porter or warehouseman.

2. Look at the entry from Kelly's *Post Office Directory* in the resources. What shops can you see in the directory? Which of these might you still find in your local high street? Which have disappeared?

3. Obtain a copy of the census from 1871, 1881 or 1891 for a local street, perhaps the street you live in. You will have to visit your local public library or archive department.

It is a good idea to telephone in advance to make an appointment and to check that they have the documents you need. You may find that they are available on microfilm.

Look at the jobs that people did, where they were born, how many children they had, whether houses were occupied by one family or more, whether there were any servants or boarders etc. How have things changed over the last hundred years?

In many parts of the country, street names may have changed or streets may have disappeared altogether when areas have been redeveloped. Old Ordnance Survey maps (many of which have been republished) will help you to compare the old street plan with the layout of a modern estate. You should be able to obtain census data and street directory entries for the area, even if you cannot get a complete match.

## History in the High Street

## Factfile

# 2

This factfile contains descriptions of four of Sainsbury's shops which opened between 1873 and 1925 and which are illustrated by cut-out models. The factfile describes the way that Sainsbury's expanded, both socially and geographically. From trading in working class areas in London, Sainsbury's expanded to the middle class suburbs of Croydon and then further afield to places such as Watford and Cambridge.

### **159 Queen's Crescent, Kentish Town, London**

This was Sainsbury's second shop, which opened in 1873. For a time John James and Mary Ann Sainsbury, founders of the company, lived above the shop with their young family.

Kentish Town was a rapidly growing suburb of north-west London. In 1861 there were just over 44,000 people living there. There were 68,000 in 1871. One reason for this growth was the new railway, which made it possible to travel daily to work in central London. Queen's Crescent was close to Haverstock Hill Station, which opened in 1868, and Kentish Town West, which opened in 1872.

Houses were often built before shops and other facilities. John Benjamin Sainsbury (the founders' son) used to recall how customers travelled to the Queen's Crescent branches from as far away as Hendon - six miles away.

Sainsbury's had branches in several other busy market streets like Queen's

Crescent where there were lots of potential customers. Outside these market street branches Sainsbury's had stalls selling eggs, and sometimes also bacon.

159 Queen's Crescent began as a dairy shop, selling butter milk, eggs and cheese. Customers could even buy milk when the shop was closed from a slot machine known as a 'mechanical cow' in the doorway. In 1875 John James Sainsbury opened a second shop on the same street, this time specialising in bacon and ham. A third branch in Queen's Crescent was added in 1885.

Small shops with a limited range of products were typical of London's market streets. Increasing the number of shops was a logical alternative to extending an existing shop, especially when rents were low and the street outside the shop was crowded with market shoppers. Each shop was very small, with only 2 or 3 assistants, including an egg lad whose job was to 'bark' his wares to passers-by and sell eggs from a stall outside the shop.

159 Queen's Crescent, Kentish Town traded until 1962.

### **Memories of Sainsbury's in Kentish Town.**

Hetty Scott kept a fruit and vegetable stall in Queen's Crescent opposite Sainsbury's shop. Her daughter, Mrs Sophie Jones, recalls market trading:

*'Sainsbury's second shop was 159 Queen's Crescent, Kentish Town, London NW5. Two others were opened later: number 98; the*

## History in the High Street

**“I would always have to make my mother a jug of tea, take it over to Sainsbury’s and ask them to put a farthing’s worth of milk in it”.**

*other number I can’t remember. All three were within 25 yards.*

*‘159 Queen’s Crescent was more of a dairy shop, selling eggs, butter, margarine which was Crelos (Sainsbury’s brand name) at a shilling (5p) a pound; if you bought 1lb (454 grams), you were given a gold metal revolving pencil. The cheaper margarine was 6d (2½p) a lb. Butter was patted up and weighed. You never bought more than ½lb (227 grams), and could even buy 2 ozs (56 grams). Sainsbury’s butter was always the best.*

*‘On the forecourt was the egg stall. The eggs were delivered in wooden crates about 7 ft long, 3 ft wide, 6 inches deep (approximately 210 x 90 x 15 centimetres). I remember Dutch and Chinese eggs delivered by a van and a pair of shire horses. There were several deliveries.*

*‘The price of eggs changed according to the time of year. At Easter time they were very cheap, 1d - an old penny - upwards. Farthings were used a lot in those days. (1d is less than half a modern penny, a farthing is a quarter of an old penny - about a tenth of a modern penny.)*

*‘Round about Easter time, the eggs were coloured and had little fluffy yellow chicks scattered about. Sainsbury’s stalls were divided into sections for different prices with a cane basket on each section. You picked out your own eggs and colours, put them in the cane basket, the assistant put them into a nice bag. There was always a basket of cracked eggs, this is where farthings came in.*

*‘I would always have to make my mother a jug tea, take it over to Sainsbury’s and ask them to put a farthing’s worth of milk in it. Being stall-holders my brother would go to the*

*baker’s. Get two rolls, take them to a grocer’s shop, they would butter them free, take them over to Sainsbury’s, and they would fill them up with ham off the bone, and all for sixpence.*

*As my brother said: “Give me back the bad old days”.’*

### 6 London Road, Croydon

John James Sainsbury’s first branch outside central London opened in 1882. The old market town of Croydon attracted wealthy middle class commuters after the opening of the London and Croydon Railway in 1839. Not surprisingly, the town called for a more prestigious style of food shop than the market streets in which Sainsbury’s earliest branches had been.

Sainsbury’s Croydon store was unusual in the lavishness of its decoration:

- colour patterned tiles on the walls and counter-fronts
- pictures of game birds in stained glass
- polished wooden office screen
- marble shop front with gilded lettering.

The shop was lit with special energy-saving gas lamps which preheated the gas before it was burned.

The Croydon store offered a wider range of food than any previous Sainsbury’s cheese from all over the world, cooked meats, including Sainsbury’s own brand pork pies, breakfast sausage and brawn; poultry and game of every description in season: ptarmigan,



## ***History in the High Street***

capercailzie, Bordeaux pigeons and Egyptian quails.

The smart customers in Croydon expected to have their purchases delivered. Sainsbury's delivery lads made two rounds daily, using bicycles or tricycles for short distances and horses and carts for the outlying districts. People had no fridges at home so they had to shop often for perishables such as cheese and meat, and few people had transport of their own to carry their purchases home.

In 1896 Sainsbury's added the shop next door (thus becoming 9-11 London since the street numbering had changed in 1890). In the 1950 the shop became the first Sainsbury's store to be converted to self-service. Even after it closed in 1969 the shop continued to make history, becoming a training centre for staff and customers to learn about decimal money, the first shop anywhere to use the new coinage.

### **5 The Parade, Watford**

Sainsbury's first opened a branch in Watford in 1898 in a new parade of shops in the fashionable upper end of the High Street. It was next door to Clement's, a family department store which is still there today.

The new Sainsbury's was typical of the kind of branch John James Sainsbury like to open in south-eastern country towns at the turn of the century. It was in the middle of the row. This had several advantages. First, it was well away from the dust thrown up by the wheels of horse vans as they turned the

corner. Second, a shop within a row was long and narrow with maximum space to display food along the counters and walls. Long narrow shops had fewer windows than corner shops and so were cooler in summer - important as there were no fridges in the stores. Also, with a central position, there was more chance of being able to take over the shop next door as trade grew. The Watford branch was extended in 1946.

With a staff of about twenty, including delivery lads, skilled butchers and poulterers, clerks and warehousemen, Watford was one of Sainsbury's larger branches. It sold a full range of provisions: bacon and hams, dairy produce, game and poultry.

The model shows it decorated with turkeys for Christmas: the night before Christmas Eve all the staff would participate in preparing the birds for display and would take turns to guard them around the clock once they were hung.

The branch at 5 The Parade, Watford, traded until 1965.

### **16-17 Sidney Street, Cambridge**

In the 1920s and 30s, many new shopping centres developed, especially in the suburbs of the big cities. Sainsbury's often took part in the development of a parade of shops in the London commuter belt. There might be a newsagent, a baker, a chemist, a greengrocer, a hardware shop and a clothes shop as well as Sainsbury's own branch.

***People had no fridges at home so they had to shop often for perishable foods, such as cheese and meat.***

***Few people had transport of their own to carry their purchases home.***

# ***History in the High Street***

## **Factfile 2 Resources**

### ***Postcards:***

Four shops to cut out and make

### ***Photocopies:***

Architectural plan for 392 Mare Street, Hackney, 1929

At that time Sainsbury's sold fresh and cooked meats, game, dairy produce, bacon and a small range of groceries. Generally, Sainsbury's branches were long and narrow (about 4m x 50m) with two or more storeys - including accommodation for staff - at the front of the building and a single storey behind, with skylights to bring daylight to the end of the shop.

Opening day (11 December 1925) at Sainsbury's first Cambridge branch was so busy that the company apologised after wards in the local press for the crush!

By 1925 Sainsbury's had 166 branches. It had moved beyond London to Norwich in the east, Bournemouth in the south and Oxford in the west. Cambridge, sixty miles from London, could easily be reached by road. Some branches had to rely upon the railway for supplies and such shops often complained about delays and missing parcels.

With a sales area of 2,400 sq ft (223m<sup>2</sup>) and a staff of over fifty, Cambridge was a big branch when it opened. It sold a wide range of lines, from everyday groceries such as tea and sugar to peat-smoked bacon, meat pies made in Sainsbury's own factory and exotic foreign cheeses such as Gorgonzola and Brie.

### **The Style of the Stores**

The green and cream wall tiles were similar to the those which had been used in all new Sainsbury branches since the turn of the century; the

counter tiles were known to the manufacturers as 'Sainsbury's Teapot Brown'.

The tiles, polished mahogany office screen, white Sicilian marble counter tops and the mosaic floor made Sainsbury's branches easy to recognise. The tiles, marble and mosaic were also easy to keep clean, and so they contributed to the hygiene standards of the stores.

Until after the second world war, Sainsbury's branches had no door, but were made secure at night with shutter and a padlocked gate. Above the door was a fascia board of black glass with Sainsbury's name in gilded lettering. At Cambridge the coats of arms of the university and the city added local flavour.

The shop at 16-17 Sidney Street, Cambridge, traded until 1972, when it was replaced by a modern supermarket.

### **Activities**

1. There are four models in the pack to cut out and assemble. These may be photocopied onto card and hand coloured if you want more than one copy. The models may be studied alongside the plan of the Mare Street store from 1929, included in the resources. Together they give a good idea of the design of traditional Sainsbury's counter service stores.

- a. 159 Queen's Crescent, Kentish Town, London.
- b. 6 London Road, Croydon.

## ***History in the High Street***

c. 5 The Parade, Watford.

d. 16/17 Sidney Street, Cambridge.

The frontages of the model shops are based closely on historical photographs and documents from Sainsbury's Archives.

NB: Construction hint: lightly scoring the folding lines will improve the appearance of the finished models.

2. Take a close look at the Mare Street shop plan. In the top right corner there is a side elevation of the building which shows the three storey construction at the front of the building, dropping back to a single storey at the rear. Now look at the first floor plan. you can see the three lantern lights which provided natural daylight to the rear of the shop (compare with the postcard of the Guildford branch in 1906).

On the ground floor plan, from left to right, notice the basement with its cold store. Also look at the second floor plan. Notice the accommodation over the shop.

3. Most high streets have a variety of shops which were built in different styles at different times. Sometimes a shop will not have changed very much to look at since it was built, but more often the shop front and the inside will have been altered considerably.

You can often guess the age of a building by looking at the upper storeys and roof. These are more likely to remain in their original form than the ground floor.

4. Study entries from old street directories. (There will be copies at your local library or archive department). Compare the uses of shops in the directory entry with shop usage now. These changes often reflect the way that society in general or a local neighbourhood in particular, have changed over the years.

5. Are there any obvious constraints on the retailers who occupy the shops today, such as parking and delivery restrictions, size or lack of room for expansion?

6. Make a list of the benefits and disadvantages of edge-of-town stores and town centre supermarket developments.

Think about the way modern technology - motor cars, refrigerators, freezers and microwaves - allows some people to shop less often than people used to. Think about the impact these technologies have on the environment.

## The First World War

## Factfile

# 3

In 1914, three-quarters of the butter, cheese, bacon and eggs that people ate in Britain came from abroad: from Ireland, Denmark, Holland and the United States. Grain came from the USA, beef from Argentina and lamb from New Zealand. Many people were very worried that a blockade could lead to starvation. Panic buying began. Sainsbury's warned against hoarding, but promised to keep its regular customers supplied.

### Rationing

Rationing was not finally introduced until after the U-boat crisis in 1917. People would start to queue outside a shop when they saw a delivery arrive. The staff invented a form of back-slang to hide from the public what had arrived: bacon became 'nocab' and sugar 'ragus'.

In October 1917, the public had to register with a shop in order to buy sugar. This was not true rationing because they were not guaranteed a supply. In January 1918 butter and margarine were added to the ration. Gradually other products were added. The amounts varied slightly according to availability, but they were generally:

- sugar: 8 oz per week (227 grams)
- butter or margarine: 5 oz per week (140 grams)
- jam: 4 oz per week (113 grams)
- tea: 2 oz per week (56 grams).

Fresh meat and bacon were rationed by value rather than by weight. The allowance bought about 1lb of meat

(454 grams) and 4-8 oz of bacon (113 to 227 grams).

The government wanted people to economise on coal, the main cooking fuel. Sainsbury's advertisements emphasised the savings that could be made by buying Sainsbury's prepared meats:

- cooked sliced ham 3s 0d lb (15p per 454 grams)
- breakfast sausage 2s 8d lb (13p per 454 grams)
- Oxford brawn 1s 8d lb (8p per 454 grams)

After the war, it took a while for life to return to normal. Although food prices returned to pre-war levels by the end of 1918, the pattern of foreign trade had been changed for ever. Food prices soon started to rise and rationing had to be reintroduced. Sugar did not finally come off the ration until September 1920. See the 1919 ration card and advertisement in the resources.

### Women at Sainsbury's

During the Great War (1914-1918) many of the men who worked for Sainsbury's joined the army. The photocopy from the engagement records shows men leaving 'to join Colours'. This gave women more chance of a good job in the shops.

An advertisement placed in the *Daily Mail* for 200 single women produced thousands of applications. The wages were £1 per week, with 2s 3d (11p) deducted for tea and washing of the

# Sainsbury's History Pack

## Factfile 3 Resources

### **Postcards:**

Female delivery driver and assistant, c 1915

### **Photocopies:**

Advertisement and newspaper cutting, 1914

Advertisement for *Crelos* margarine, 1915

Ration card and advertisement, 1919

Staff engagement records, 1914

overalls provided by the firm. (See the advertisement in the resources.)

Women were sent on a three week training course at the company's Blackfriars head office where they learned all the skills the boys had been taught:

- 'candling' eggs (checking for faults by holding eggs up to a light. See Factfile 6, page 3 for a description)
- using the bacon slicer.
- 'scaling' (balancing the scales to 6oz. Approximately 3.5 grams).
- dividing a barrel of butter into neat half pound packs using '*The Sainsbury Method of Wiring*'.

The importance of keeping everything spotlessly clean was also impressed on the new recruits.

During the first world war, some women soon became managers, usually of the smaller branches. In some places the entire staff consisted of women and boys too young to fight. To begin with some male managers refused to let women do the jobs they had been trained for. They tried to make them do cleaning and clerical work. This annoyed John Benjamin, the founders' son. '*This was not exactly what I had in mind*', he wrote.

After the war, the company kept its promise to give back their jobs to the men who had joined up to fight. Some women left their jobs. Others found work in the new grocery departments which were added to shops after 1920. A few stayed on in senior positions. Alice Hayes, who had been manager at 43 High Street, Islington was demoted

to saleswoman when a new male manager was appointed in December 1919. Three months later she was offered the manager's job at 159 Queen's Crescent, Kentish Town. She worked there until July 1941.

It was a strict rule that women could not work in the shops after they were married. (They were still able to work as housekeepers, maids and cooks.)

1. Look at the photograph of the female delivery driver and her assistant. She is sitting confidently on the bonnet of a Model T Ford truck. It has solid tyres and coach-style wheels. Her assistant is wearing the double breasted tunic jacket that was introduced in 1907. The driver, on the other hand is not wearing a uniform. Why do you think that that is? How old do you think the boy is?

2. Look at the photograph of the '*Food in Wartime*' *Crelos* margarine advertisement. *Crelos* was one of the earliest Sainsbury's brand names. It was good quality, but margarine was generally regarded as inferior to butter. Look at the appeal to patriotism in the advertisement: '*There is nothing against your using "Crelos" Margarine but sentiment, and sentiment in these days of war is poor argument.*' Notice too the boy's sailor suit.

# Sainsbury's History Pack

## The Second World War

### Factfile

# 4

At the outbreak of the second world war the government was better prepared for rationing thanks to the experience gained during the Great War. At the beginning of November 1939 families were told to register at a particular shop. Sainsbury's cleared part of its counters to help customer fill in their registration forms, but it did not tout for customers. As the instruction said: *'Efficient, polite service, "JS" standards of cleanliness and orderliness - an air of cheerfulness and willingness, the maintenance of the public's confidence will do far more for the registration than the slips of paper on the window panes of our competitors saying "Register Here" will achieve for them.'*

#### Rationing

The rationing system was complicated. Sugar, bacon, butter, cheese and cooking fat were rationed by weight; their coupons had to be cancelled in the ration book. 'Preserves' were treated as a group, so customers could choose whether to buy jam, marmalade or syrup or, at some points in the war, to swap the ration for sugar. Tea was rationed by weight with coupons that had to be cut out of the book by the shop assistant. Meat was rationed by value. Most types of groceries (biscuits, canned goods, cereals etc) were rationed by points. Customers had a fixed number of points to spend in each four week period.

The quantities allowed on the ration also changed as supplies became scarcer, and depended on the person's age and occupation. Rationing for different products was introduced at different times.

- March 1940: butter, bacon and sugar rationed.
- July 1940: tea, margarine and cooking fats rationed.
- May 1941: cheese rationed.
- December 1941: points rationing was introduced for groceries.
- July 1942: sweets rationed.

In May 1941 an adult's weekly ration consisted of:

- 3 pints of milk (2.7 litres)
- 2 oz tea (56g)
- 2 oz cooking fat (56g)
- 6 oz butter (168g)
- 8 oz jam (227g)
- 4 oz bacon (113g)
- 8 oz sugar (227g)
- 1 oz cheese (28g)
- 16 grocery points per four weeks
- 1s 0d worth of meat (5p)\*.

\* This would buy, for example, 1 lb (454 grams) of beef mince, 2 lbs (908 grams) scrag-end of mutton, or 6 oz (168 grams) of rump steak.

Children's ration were generally smaller, with 'priority' entitlement to milk, oranges and eggs etc.

#### The Black Market

Rationing was intended to make sure that everyone got fair shares. Thieves would sometimes steal food and other goods (such as ladies' stockings) that were in short supply and sell them on the 'black market'. The government tried to discourage people from buying black market goods with the slogan: *'It's not clever to get more than your share.'*

# Sainsbury's History Pack

**Doctor  
Carrot and  
Potato Pete  
encouraged  
people to eat  
more vegeta-  
bles, and all  
over the  
country  
parks and  
every other  
scrap of  
unused land  
were given  
over to  
growing  
vegetables.**

Sainsbury's supported this campaign with chatty advertisements of its own. See *The girl at Sainsbury's* and *The manager at Sainsbury's* in the resources.

Although it was illegal, some shopkeepers favoured their loyal customers by giving them extra from 'under the counter'. Sainsbury's gave strict instruction to its staff that they were not to do this and every branch employee had to sign a statement to say that they understood that if they broke the rationing regulations they would be sacked immediately. This declaration was headed 'Food is a Munition of War'. Six members of a butchers' department were sacked for overcharging and in July 1943 a manager was sacked for stealing rationed foods.

Some managers were not called up because the government realised that their experience was important in ensuring that rationing worked, and that people did get fair shares. Many men who worked as shop assistants and porters were of course called up and their places were taken by women.

## Healthy Eating

The government saw the chance to improve the nation's diet. The Ministry of Food made special arrangements for pregnant women, nursing mothers and young children. Many poor children with their free milk, cod-liver oil and orange juice, were better fed during the war than they would have been before it in the depression of the 1930s. 'Doctor Carrot' and 'Potato Pete' encouraged people to eat more vegetables, and, all over the country, parks

and every other scrap of unused land were given over to growing vegetables.

New recipes were invented to act as substitutes for food that was no longer available. Woolton Pie was one of the most famous of these dishes. It was named after Lord Woolton, the food minister and invented by the chef at the *Savoy Hotel*. One of the activities asks you to have a go at making Woolton Pie yourself.

Sainsbury's helped the war effort by printing its own recipes and wartime food tips. See Sainsbury's wartime food tips *Plan your points* in the resources.

## Air Raids

Rationing was not the only problem that shoppers and shop assistants faced during the war. Air raids threatened their lives. The German bombing raids on the London docks meant that the East End was badly blitzed.

William Guest described what happened to his branch in Watney Street when an unexploded bomb crashed through the wall of the Maypole Dairy next door and settled in the foundations of his shop: '*For several days we traded from another shop and stall up the street. A van from head office kept us supplied with a good selection of perishables and kept our customers reasonably happy. The van took away the surplus food at night and brought us fresh supplies each day.*'

There were casualties. Sainsbury's biggest tragedy was at its Marylebone branch where four staff were killed in a

# Sainsbury's History Pack

## Factfile 4 Resources

### Postcards:

Emergency shop,  
second world war

### Photocopies:

*The Manager at Sainsbury's*,  
1940

Ration Book

*Plan your points*, 1942

Letter to  
Mrs Shepperd, 1941

Letter to  
Miss Crouch, 1944

VE Day letter to Sains-  
bury's staff on National  
Service

direct hit on the shop during the night of 19 November 1940.

In Norwich there were heavy raids during the first week of May 1942 and six members of staff were made homeless. Such was their sense of duty that they turned up at work as normal.

At East Grinstead the Sainsbury branch was bombed twice. The shop was impossible to repair, and so Sainsbury's set up shop in a disused Wesleyan Chapel nearby.

One of the electricians who helped to wire the chapel to act as a shop put up a notice which read: '*a prayer and a smile makes JS business worthwhile*' - an example of the cocky wartime humour which helped to see people through difficult days.

### Women At Sainsbury's

When the second world war broke out in 1939, there were many experienced women who could come back to work at Sainsbury's. This was because while single women were allowed to work in the shops, they were required to give up work once they were married. Many of these women were married to branch staff, and they formed a reserve of trained labour. They were much more skilled than the women who had come to work at Sainsbury's at the beginning of the Great War.

As the war went on, women did many jobs which people thought of as men's work. Some women became butchers, some porters and some managers. The letter to Mrs Shepperd (1941) in the resources is typical of those sent to

women who had been selected to train as managers. The 1944 letter to Miss Crouch sets out the company's appreciation of the work undertaken by women managers during the war.

At the end of the first world war, most women gave up their jobs, but many stayed at work after the second world war. This was partly because national service continued, and partly because there was plenty of work for everyone, rebuilding the country after the war.

### Activities

1. As you can see from the emergency shop photograph, Sainsbury's had converted two vans to become mobile shops when stores were bombed. These vans were equipped with a standard supply of foods to ensure that customers were kept supplied with their rations. You can probably make out meat paste, jams and tea in the photograph.

2. Look at *The manager at Sainsbury's*. This advertisement was designed to help the war effort. Notice how *The Manager at Sainsbury's* emphasises Sainsbury's core values: '*standards of cleanliness and value and fair dealing*'. He uses these to help appeal to the customer's patriotism '*...we can't and we won't serve extra meat or butter or bacon or sugar outside the ration ... It's downright unpatriotic*'. Can you see why getting over the ration would have '*unpatriotic*'?

3. Imagine that you were Mrs Shepperd or Miss Crouch and that you had been managing a store during the war - perhaps it had been bombed and you had to trade from a temporary



## ***Sainsbury's History Pack***

shop like the van in the postcard - how would you feel about giving up your job? How would you argue for keeping it?

Look at John Benjamin Sainsbury's VE Day letter to Sainsbury's staff on national service. If you had gone to fight in the war, how would you argue for getting your old job back?

4. Make up the ration book in the resources. Look at Sainsbury's *Plan your points* advice. (In 1942 the points allocation was 24 per four week period).

Ten shillings (10s) is 50p in today's money. You might like to work out the 'Points for 4-in-Family' or 'Points for a Man on his Own' in today's money.

1 lb is 454 grams. A 16 oz tin is also 454 grams; half a pound ( $\frac{1}{2}$  lb) is 227 grams; a quarter pound ( $\frac{1}{4}$  lb) is 113 grams.

Perhaps you could collect together the foods on the points and think about how you would feed a family of four on these.

Imagine you have an adult's ration for 1941 and two types of vegetable which you have grown yourself - perhaps potatoes, carrots, onions or cabbage in winter, and lettuce and tomatoes in summer. You have no fresh eggs, but you have got some dried eggs, some flour, a tin of corned beef and a tin of *Spam*. Can you plan your menus for a week? How will you stop yourself getting bored?

Remember that you would also have rations for tea, milk, fat and meat (see above) and perhaps some vegetables grown in your garden. You might consider making Woolton Pie.

5. Woolton Pie: Have a go at making Woolton Pie. Make sure that you ask an adult first. You will need about:

500 grams potatoes  
500 grams cauliflower  
500 grams swedes  
500 grams carrots  
500 grams onions  
1 teaspoon vegetable extract  
1 tablespoon oatmeal  
chopped parsley  
wheatmeal pastry or mashed potatoes for the crust.

(Exact quantities of vegetables are unimportant. You'd use what was available.)

Chop the vegetables small and cook with the vegetable extract, oatmeal and a little water for 10 minutes. Stir occasionally to prevent sticking.

Carefully put the mixture into a pie dish, sprinkle with parsley and cover with the pastry or mashed potato. Bake in a moderate oven till brown. Serve hot with gravy.

## Self-service

## Factfile

# 5

Many town centres were badly damaged by air raids during the second world war, but parts of pre-war shopping streets survived in most older towns. After the war, the first New Towns were built to accommodate people who had lost their homes in the Blitz, and new shopping centres were needed to serve these development.

### The Introduction of Self-service

One of the biggest changes in the way people shop came about when self-service was introduced in the 1950s. This made it possible for shopkeepers to use more of their space for displaying and selling goods, and led to a much wider variety of goods being offered for sale. It seems surprising now, but in the early days Sainsbury's published advertisements to show customers 'How to shop self-service'. (See illustration in the resources.)

When the first self-service shops began to appear in the 1950s there were new opportunities for women to work part-time, for example, as shelf-fillers ('gondola girls'), packers and cashiers. The new supermarkets seemed smart and modern and so did the new women's uniforms. A light blue outfit for women in fashionable nylon was designed by Hardy Amies, the famous fashion designer, in 1963. It was worn by self-service staff only, because nylon did not provide enough protection for staff working behind the counter.

Men's uniforms had hardly changed since 1907. The traditional white apron, a clean one for each day, was the food retailer's badge of office. Clean hands, well groomed hair and highly-polished black shoes were also essential. A double-breasted tunic completed the outfit. The tunic could be worn for two days, buttoned

to the left one day and to the right the next so that a clean front was always presented to the customers.

### The Supermarket Develops

Since the introduction of self-service, shops have grown much larger. Most people now do most of their food shopping in one store, the supermarket, instead of shopping at different small shops for meat, bread, fruit and vegetables, household goods and groceries as used to be the pattern.

In the 1960s indoor shopping centres were built to provide more shopping space in town centres. As land got more expensive and parking more difficult, supermarkets started to look to edge-of-town sites. Larger stores meat supermarkets could sell more products.

Sainsbury's opened its first edge-of-town store at Coldham's Lane, near Cambridge in 1974. It was about twice the average size of store opened by Sainsbury's yet. Since then, the company has built supermarkets in many types of location, particularly in derelict urban areas.

There are other reasons for the growth of supermarkets. The growth in the ownership of motor cars means that many people can carry home a week or a fortnight's shopping a single trip. The increase in the ownership of motor cars means that many people can carry home a week or a fortnight's shopping in a single trip. The increase in the ownership of fridges and freezers means that most people no longer have to buy fresh meat and vegetables every day.

# Sainsbury's History Pack

## Factfile 5 Resources

### **Postcards:**

Self-service,  
Croydon, 1950

Self-service,  
Eastbourne, 1952

Counter service,  
Catford, 1955

### **Photocopies:**

*How to shop self-service*,  
1955

Sainsbury's 'Q-less'  
store, Croydon 1940

A modern floor plan,  
1998

### **Activities**

1. Look at the photograph of Croydon (1950). The manager, Mr Fowler, still wears a traditional apron similar to the one worn by the manager in the photograph in Factfile 1 (Romford, c1905). Mr Fowler stayed on after he had reached retirement age to open the first self-service branch. Perhaps an older manager would help to reassure customers about a new way of shopping.

The shop has new fluorescent lighting and self-service shelves which were known as 'gondolas' at Sainsbury's. Notice how low these gondolas are. You can easily see over the top of them. They are supported on legs which raise them off the floor. (The legless gondolas were not introduced until 1969). There are modern geometric floor tiles, very different from the mosaic floor of the Guildford branch (1906). Notice that the ladies wear hats for going shopping.

2. The interior of the Eastbourne store (1952) is also very different from Guildford. The checkouts, where you pay for your shopping, are close to the exit in Eastbourne - and in all modern supermarkets - whereas at Guildford the cash desk is at the other end of the shop. The Eastbourne checkouts, however, are very different from modern ones. How many differences can you see from today?

For example, there are no scanners - each item has to be rung up on the till - so the checkout operator turns away from the customer, rather than facing her, as in a modern checkout; there is a wooden rake for pulling up purchases instead of a moving belt; there are very few cars in the street, suggesting that people probably still go shopping every day; there are sweets at the checkout (they disappeared from

Sainsbury's checkouts from the mid-70s); most customers bring their own shopping bags although carrier bags are for sale.

3. The photograph of Miss Cooper at Catford dates from 1955. It shows that counter service continued well after the introduction of self-service. The cash register was a new piece of equipment. There were no cash registers behind the counter before the introduction of self-service.

There is a refrigerated display for butter, margarine and cream in front of the counter and a perspex egg display behind the counter. You can probably see many familiar brands on display: Trex, Kellogg's, Prince's Ham, Nestle's Milk, Lyle's Golden Syrup, Robertson's Jam. Traditional tiles can be seen behind the display.

4. Look at the floor plan in the resources. Design a new store layout of your own. You might choose to make a layout for a special group of people, say parents with young children, perhaps in baby buggies and pushchairs, or for people in wheelchairs; or you might want to think about creating a special feel for your shop. For instance, you might want to make it feel more like a street market.

5. Shopping has changed a lot since John James and Mary Ann Sainsbury opened their first store. How do you think shopping will change in the future? What will people buy in a 100 years' time? Will they do their shopping by telephone, by video or over the internet - or will they still go out to the shops?

# Sainsbury's History Pack

## Working for Sainsbury's

### Factfile

# 6

This factfile contains brief accounts of working life at Sainsbury's at different periods. The accounts are presented as first person narratives:

#### Mr L J King, 1895

Mr L J King started at Sainsbury's in Balham in 1895 when he was a school-boy. He did a part-time job, working evenings and Saturdays. Even so, he clocked up 36 hours a week:

*'I saw the opening of the new branch at 147 Balham High Street in 1898. It had four flaring gas lamps outside to attract trade. There was no telephone. (There was one at London Road, Croydon.) There was no cashier, no slicing machine for bacon or cooked meat. All the slicing was done by hand by a salesman who put a great deal of showmanship into the knife-sharpening act. All the shop assistants were men. Women did not start working in shops until the first world war (1914-1918). Balham was one of the new suburban stores, so it did home deliveries. Orders to Mitcham, Colliers Wood and Wimbledon were sent by pony cart.*

*'Eggs from France were the best new-laid. Irish were next. Most of the eggs sold came from Denmark, Holland, Italy and Austria at 4d a dozen. These were small eggs. Best butter came from Normandy in two-pound rolls.'*

#### Albert Skinner, 1915

Nowadays, most people shop by car, and they may do a big shop only once a week or once a fortnight, but when John James and Mary Ann Sainsbury opened their first shop, most people walked to their local shops, and many

of them went shopping every day. They bought only what they could carry, or else they arranged for their shopping to be delivered for them.

After the opening of the Croydon branch in 1882, Sainsbury's started offering home deliveries for customers. The service continued until 1955. Delivery boys on bicycles set out from the branches for times a day to deliver to local customers. Horses and traps were used for greater distances and heavier loads and in 1915, Sainsbury's bought its first Model T Ford van. By 1928 there were thirty-seven Fords and eighty Morris vans.

Albert Skinner's account of his first few months at Sainsbury's describes a roundsman's life in 1915:

*'It was quite a change from life in a village to my first job, which was candling eggs in a darkened basement room, and I was pleased when the manager of the Tunbridge Wells branch asked me to take over a round, as the roundsman had been called up. This was early 1915, and men were leaving for the forces.*

*'It was quite a change from driving along dusty lanes and the steady pace of the country. The horse that was to be in my care was young and high spirited; and there was a lot more traffic on the roads. I was 16 and much the junior, and I remember being watched by the other roundsmen as I put the horse's collar on for the first time. You put it on upside down and then reversed after going over the head. At least I knew how that was done.*

*'I carried a whip, but I soon realised that "Nobby" was a fast mover, and the whip could be left behind. Some days the army were*

# Sainsbury's History Pack

**“A horse is very like a racing pigeon and knows the direction of home, and as the round turns for home the faster they go.”**

*after horses. I liked Nobby so we hid in side streets. At one large house we called at, Nobby and the cart were missing from the tradesman's entrance, and I found him on the front lawn enjoying the grass. Fortunately we left unobserved.*

*'A horse is very like a racing pigeon and knows the direction of home, and as the round turns for home the faster they go. The last mile was a straight road. Could that horse trot! The sparks flew from his shoes, and no other cart passed us.*

*'There was one thing that Nobby had an objection to, and that was traction engines. They were used for road mending, they were large, noisy and smoke and steam belched out. In fact we left the road and mounted the pavement. Back on the road, he was terrified. I just held him in, and waited for him to settle down.*

*'One day on arriving back at the shop, the manger said the RSPCA inspector had called about me. I had never used the whip on Nobby so I knew that wasn't the reason. Perhaps he had seen me on the last mile home and thought our speed was dangerous, but no, it was to congratulate me on my handling of the horse. He knew of the traction engine episodes, and I had calmed the horse by not using the whip.*

*'After a few months, a roundsman was found and I returned to the other shop. I looked out for Nobby one day. I was going out of the shop to meet him as the cart came towards the shop, and I saw the new roundsman with a whip in his hand. I had to turn away, I just didn't want to see.'*

Delivery vans were used only to supply regular customers who had accounts. The van driver was not allowed to

become a travelling salesman, as this 1920 letter to the manager of the Watford branch clearly shows:

*'It is understood that the roundsman is only to supply our regular customers with these extra goods, and not waste his time hawking goods from house to house.*

*'I should not encourage the cash trade at all on the rounds, rather give the roundsman an interest in opening weekly accounts for general orders.'*

These 'extra goods' were 'spare goods to supply your customers in an emergency', and Mr J B Sainsbury, the son of the founders, and writer of this letter, was apprehensive about allowing these spare goods to be carried at all. Home delivery ceased in 1955, partly because the growth in car ownership meant that there was less demand for it, and partly to keep down costs.

## **Ivor Barrett, 1934**

Ivor Barrett started at the training school on 29 January 1934, when aged 14:

*'The training school was an excellent introduction to Sainsbury's. Everything was spotlessly clean, nothing but the very best in butter patting, cheese wiring, and candling eggs was acceptable, and much emphasis was placed on politeness to customers. We used to talk about "service with efficiency and politeness".'*

In counter service stores, salesmen had to learn a number of skills, which have now disappeared. Knocking up butter was the art of dividing a barrel of butter into neat half-pound packs using a wire, a wooden slice and a beater pat.

## Sainsbury's History Pack

Accuracy was very important. The butter had to be presented in a half-pound block. Cheese wiring was the approved method for dividing a block of cheese.

In order to check for freshness, eggs were held against a light. This would show whether the yolk remained in good condition. Ivor Barrett describes an egg candling lamp when he wrote about his first day at work:

*'One or two other boys arrived at the training school as I waited with my father to see Mr Seagrove (the instructor). He soon assured father that I would be well taken care of at the school and that all the boys stayed overnight at a hostel called Dormy House which was over the branch shop at Holloway. We travelled by bus and for most of us it was our first sight of London.*

*'There were about twenty boys - no girls worked behind the counter in those days - from various parts of the country at the training school. We spent a fortnight learning to use butter pats, candle eggs and wire cut cheese, before being told which branch we would be placed in.*

*'Work in those days was very long and hard, from 8.30 am to 6.00 pm with late nights on Friday and Saturday often to 9.00 pm.*

### **First day at work:**

*'On my first day at East Ham, the manager put me under the care of Mr Hendersby on the butter counter where we also made up and sold margarine, lard and a limited number of associated products. Next to it, there was a cooked meat counter. On the other side of the shop was the long bacon and poultry counter with a small grocery section adjoining.*

*Customers doing their weekly shopping had to queue at each counter during busy periods.*

*'The manager had already shown me around the cellar to which warehouse deliveries were made. There was everything from New Zealand and Dutch butters in bulk, to deep frozen Australian rabbits in large crates, cooked meats and preserves. And there was a large refrigerator for the perishables.*

*'A large bench was the domain of the poulterer whose full-time job it was to prepare rabbits and poultry for display and sale. He used to amuse the staff by hacking the crates away from the frozen Australian rabbits, so they formed a screen about five feet high around his bench, saying that this kept out the cold draught?*

*'Another table in the cellar supported the egg candling lamp which was a metal cylinder with a hole on either side, just smaller than the average egg. It contained an electric light bulb which when lit, and one egg held either side, would show up any imperfection. Can you imagine how many eggs a day had to be candled? The cheapest eggs were imported in large crates, only straw-packed, for their journey from Poland. Needless to say quite a few did not survive the journey and opening those crates and removing the straw was not an enjoyable task after a good breakfast!*

*'However I enjoyed those first few days at the butter counter and occasionally acted as a wrapper-up for the fleet-handed assistants who could often pat up the butter to the exact half-pound in seconds. A spare butter "block" was used for some advance weighing and wrapping for weekends.*

*'After a few days, I took over on the pavement egg stall. I spend my time scrubbing trestle tables, candling eggs, carrying boxes of eggs the*

**“The poulterer used to amuse the staff by hacking the crates away from the frozen Australian rabbits, which they formed a five feet high screen around his bench. He said it kept out the cold draught!”**

# Sainsbury's History Pack

**“The cheapest eggs were imported in large, straw packed crates, for their journey from Poland. As quite a few eggs did not survive the journey removing the straw from the crates was not an enjoyable task after a good breakfast”**

*length of the shop to the stall and standing out in the February cold, occasionally flicking the carefully stacked eggs with a feather duster to remove street dust, and “barking” my wares. However, at 9d (about 4p) a dozen for fresh farm eggs, you didn't have to bark very loudly.*

*‘We lived over the shop and meals were prepared by the housekeeper. I started at 25 shillings a week (£1.15), from which were deducted 15 shillings (75p) for board and lodging. Another 8d (about 8p) covered insurance and income tax, leaving 8s 4d’ (or 42p in today's money).*

## **Howard Bell, 1936**

The following prize-winning essay was written in 1936 by Howard Bell. He had joined Sainsbury's in August, just before his 14th birthday. The manager, Mr Turner, had offered his lads a prize of 5s 0d for the best essay on ‘My first Christmas at Sainsbury's’,

### **My First Christmas at Sainsbury's**

*‘My first Christmas at Sainsbury's was an extraordinary experience for me. Christmas was only a week ahead and everywhere and was getting busy.*

*‘Being my first Christmas in business, I had no idea what Christmas was like at work, but I soon found that the work was mingled with enjoyment, and everyone was so happy.*

*‘First of all, fancy goods and crackers started arriving. Then cases and cases of turkeys. The speed and system of the poultry department in drawing and trussing these birds amazed me, as every employee was out every night by midnight, whereas outside shops were working until one and two in the morning. I now know what a Christmas rush is, but I*

*will always look forward to Christmas on the firm.*

*‘The part I like was that everybody helped in the rush. Everyone did their share, as we all realised that teamwork was the only thing that would get the work done.*

*‘As the days of the Christmas week passed, many things opened my eyes, one thing, that our employer gave his employees a Christmas box of double their weekly sum. The Christmas orders are something else which I think is wonderful. All the hundreds and hundreds of orders we had, and hardly any customer was disappointed or let down.*

*‘The time worked its way on and before we knew it we had but one day to go. That day we were not quite so busy as the past few as everybody I think purchased early. There was another surprise in store yet. We were all at work when our manager came through the warehouse and read a telegram from Mr Sainsbury, telling us to keep a stout heart through the last lap, which we all thought was very nice.*

*‘My work throughout this busy period was to cut the giblets out of each bird. Also during the day helping to pluck them. Sometimes I would give a helping hand on eggs and butter, when they were busy and crowded.*

*‘After the shop was closed and all the counters scrubbed and tidied, all available assistants went to the poultry department to do what they could. Work continued throughout the evening until we were told that supper would be upstairs in the house at nine-thirty. We all went upstairs to supper and had nice hot soup, after which we had sausage and mash.*

*‘On Christmas Eve we were not very busy and one member of the staff organised a raffle in*

# Sainsbury's History Pack

**“I was engaged as a manager’s runner at 30p per week plus my board and lodging. I was handed 29p in a small brown envelope following our closing on a Saturday evening, as 1p was deducted for my insurance stamp.”**

*which we had crackers and fancy goods. The time rolled on and eventually the shutters were pulled down. After scrubbing up our counters, we all drew our money and went home, everyone wishing each other a Happy Christmas.*

## **Howard Bell’s Work**

*‘Every fourth Saturday following closing, each shop undertook stocktaking. And that was after the normal, daily closing routine where all marble counters, tiled walls and counter fronts, floors etc were scrubbed. Polishing of tiles with ball whitening followed scrubbing, and weekly, all bacon rails had to be burnished and scoured with scouring paper, and leather/chain burnishing pads.*

*‘Egg baskets, brass scales, cheese boards etc were also scrubbed or polished weekly, as were the marble shelves at the rear of the counters. Butter blocks in the shops and the dairy preparation room were scrubbed daily in winter, twice daily in summer. Scrubbing of these was followed by pumice stoning, followed by covering with damp muslin overnight. Butter pat pails were changed as frequently as three or more times daily.*

*‘I was engaged as a manager’s runner at 6s 0d (30p) per week plus my board and lodging less 3d (about 1p) for my insurance stamp. Hence, I was handed following our closing on a Saturday evening, 5s 9d (29p) in a small brown envelope. This may not sound much now, but bear in mind, sweets were 2d (less than 1p) a quarter, and one could visit the cinema for 6d, (2.5p) plus 2d for an ice cream.’*

## **Maureen, a 1960s School Leaver**

This account is taken from a BBC schools television programme in the

Going to Work series, first broadcast in the 1960s.

*‘I work mainly behind the scenes. This morning I was on the conveyor belt pricing tins of fruit. Mr Hedges, my supervisor, cuts round the top of the boxes with a knife and marks the price on the lid for me. I put the prices on the tin using a “plonker”. There’s one for each price and the price is always shown clearly on the top. It works like a rubber stamp. Now that customers help themselves from the shelf. It’s important that each product is clearly marked with the price.*

*‘The morning is always busy so most mornings I’m on the belt. We cross the items off the order book as soon as we’ve “plonked” them. You get to know the prices pretty soon, but you can always look them up in the order book if you’re not quite sure.*

*‘I can plonk a case load in about thirty seconds. You have to be quick in this job because the conveyor belt doesn’t wait for you. The cans go straight downstairs on the belt, ready to be stacked on the shelves.*

*‘I used to work on the “gondolas”, but I also I like working up here on the belt. It’s very friendly and you know everyone. Downstairs in the shop, you have to keep looking at your shelves all the time and you never seem to have any time to yourself.*

*‘I was nervous when I had my interviews. I had just turned 15 and I had left school at Easter. I dressed smartly for my interview and made sure that I was clean and tidy and that my hands and nails were presentable. I knew that was important for dealing with food.*

*‘I was asked some straightforward questions about why I wanted to work for Sainsbury’s and I had to take an aptitude test which*



# Sainsbury's History Pack

**“I was nervous when I had my interview. I had just turned 15 and I had left school at Easter. I dressed smartly and made sure that my hands and nails were presentable. I knew that was important for dealing with food.”**

*involved moving coloured blocks around in a box. It was quite easy but it is designed to show if you are good with your hands. That's important, especially when you are working upstairs.*

## Training, Skills and Play

*'I then went on a basic training course where I learned how to prepare slabs of butter. That really is an art. I've never had to do it in a shop myself though, because most butter comes ready prepared nowadays. It was good though to learn how important it is to give correct weight. It is the grocer's profit and the customer's satisfaction as they used to say at the training school.*

*'I had another example of that this afternoon when I was packing bacon. Mr Green, who is in charge of bacon preparation, cuts the gammon rashers and places them between strips of cardboard to keep them firm. I wrap them in transparent paper which is sealed by touching to the hot plate. You have to be careful not to burn your fingers. Then I stick a label on so the customer can see what kind of bacon it is.*

*'Mrs Pleasance weighs the bacon and writes in the weight and the price. We add the same amount of packaging to the other side of the scales so that only the bacon is weighted. A quick glance at the ready reckoner lets Mrs Pleasance price the pack without having to work it out herself.*

*'The minimum rate for shop work is £3.5.0d (three pounds five shillings or £3.25p in today's money), but Sainsbury's pays £4.10.0d per week (£4.50).*

*'But even more important than the wages are the promotion prospects. Sainsbury's believes in promoting from the shop floor and many of*

*the top people in the company started at the bottom. I get a full day off every week to go to technical college, and I get my fares and my fees paid for me.'*

## Workers at Sainsbury's Today

Women now work at every level in Sainsbury's from the boardroom to the checkout. The director of finance is a woman, and there are women working as branch managers, as buyers and in specialist areas from transport to computing, accountancy to scientific services.

### Anne Garnes, 1998

*'I work part-time at a small Sainsbury's branch. For students like me, it's convenient that the busiest parts of the trading week happen to be at times when I'm not at college. I've worked there since I was sixteen, and have gradually been given more responsibility.*

*'When I arrive on a Saturday morning at just before 8.00 am, there will already be several other staff about - putting out the produce (that's fruit and vegetables) and the bakery goods (most goods will have been replenished overnight). The store manager will be on the shop floor, checking that everything is ready for the day's work ahead.*

*'This morning I'm start on the checkouts and spend the afternoon in the beers, wines and spirits department (we call it 'BWS'). Operating a scanning checkout is harder than it looks. The easiest items to scan come in boxes, which you just pass smoothly over the checkout. 'To scan a flexible pack like a bag of peas, you need to shake the contents down to make sure the scanner can 'read' the barcodes.*

## Sainsbury's History Pack

**“I’ve worked part-time at a small Sainsbury’s branch since I was sixteen, and have gradually been given more responsibility. For students like me, it’s convenient that the busiest parts of the trading week happen to be at times when I’m not at college,”**

*‘Produce is weighed at the checkout, so you’ve got to be able to identify the different exotic fruits, varieties of potatoes and new lines which come your way. (We have accuracy tests, and there’s a ‘spot the difference’ board with samples in the staff restaurant).*

*‘You also need to take care in handling people’s shopping. Fresh and cooked meats are put into separate bags, to avoid any risk of cross-contamination: and glass bottles, produce and bread are put on the metal panel at the side of the conveyor belt so they don’t get damaged.*

*‘You need to be sensitive about offering carrier bags. People are much more conscious of the environment nowadays, so bags are available for anyone who wants them, but we encourage customers to be environmentally friendly by offering a penny back for every bag they bring to reuse.*

*‘The trick is to work smoothly and steadily. People want to get through as quickly as possible, but it’s no good zapping everything through and leaving them to sort out the jumble at the end. When everything’s checked out, I press the subtotal button, and the two displays show the amount; you then have to say aloud how much it is and ask the customer how they’d like to pay - by cash, cheque, debit or credit card and whether they have a Reward Card and if they would like to claim any outstanding Reward vouchers.*

*‘After lunch it’s time for me to go off to beers, wines and spirits (BWS). You have to be over 18 to work in this department. I enjoy working here because you get a lot of customer contact.*

*‘My job is to keep the displays up to scratch, respond to customer queries - I don’t know much about wine, but there’s quite a lot of information on the back labels of the bottles,*

*and I can point out special offers as well as journalists’ recommendations: there’s generally several Multibuys in this department. Security is an issue too, because it’s a high value product range.*

*‘Today, a boy of about eleven knocks off a litre of red wine with the corner of a fully-loaded trolley. His mum is furious, and it makes a dreadful mess - you wouldn’t believe how far you can spread a litre of wine! My first job is to cover the mess with an empty trolley and send for a cleaner.*

*‘Then I reassure the customer, in order to minimise her embarrassment - and his! I help her find what she wants, and then help to clear up the glass. Within five minutes we’ve got back to how it should be.*

*‘It’s coming up to closing time, and the deputy manager asks me to go and tidy up the health and beauty department; that’s the cosmetics, toiletries and pharmaceuticals. Even after the store closes at six o’clock, there are still quite a few customers about and we keep four check-outs open for them.*

*‘It is now six-thirty and it’s time to go home. I clock out, pick up my coat and bag from the locker and it’s off to catch the bus - I shall be pretty glad to put my feet up when I get home!.*

*‘I enjoy the variety and pace of work at Sainsbury’s, and the store manager has suggested that I consider applying for a management training programme when I leave college. I haven’t decided yet, but I know several of the trainee managers and although it’s a demanding programme, the prospects seem to be pretty good. At least I’ve got a good idea what I’d be letting myself in for!*

# Sainsbury's History Pack

## Factfile 6 Resources

**Photocopies:**  
Staff experience card  
(1937-1940)

Recruitment  
advertisements:

### Activities

1. Look at the recruitment advertisements. What changes do these advertisements record? For example, in 1886 Sainsbury's was still a small firm advertising in the classified section of the press. In 1937 hostel accommodation was offered and holidays with pay and pensions at 60 were the 'perks' of the job.

The 1954 advertisement is clearly addressed to men. It was published in a magazine called '*Blighty*' which was published for national servicemen. (See also the 1914 newspaper cutting '*Women's Grocers*' in Factfile 3 and *The manager at Sainsbury's* in Factfile 4.

2. Look at the employment records included in the resources. They give a good idea of the range of work undertaken in counter service shops and of the way salesmen progressed from department to department. The reverse side of the cards shows the questions that managers had to answer about their staff. As you can see, most of these questions are about personal qualities and attitudes. Opposite are set out the range of practical skills which had to be acquired for promotion.

3. Choose one of these advertisements and write a letter of application for the advertised job. Remember that in Victorian times most people left school at 12 or 13, so the 18 year old in 1886 would be likely to have had considerable work experience. If you are applying for a job with training in 1954, you might mention your

experiences in the armed forces on national service.

4. How has shop work changed over the last 100 years? List some of the different skills described in these extracts. Identify which skills have disappeared? Why?

5. Compare the life and ambitions of a 14 year old boy in 1936 and that of a boy or girl of the same age today.

6. Talk to your own family and friends about the work they do. You may have grandparents or may know elderly people who did jobs that have now disappeared. Use a tape recorder to make your own oral history recordings. Use them to make a radio programme or a 'talking book' for people with sight impairment.