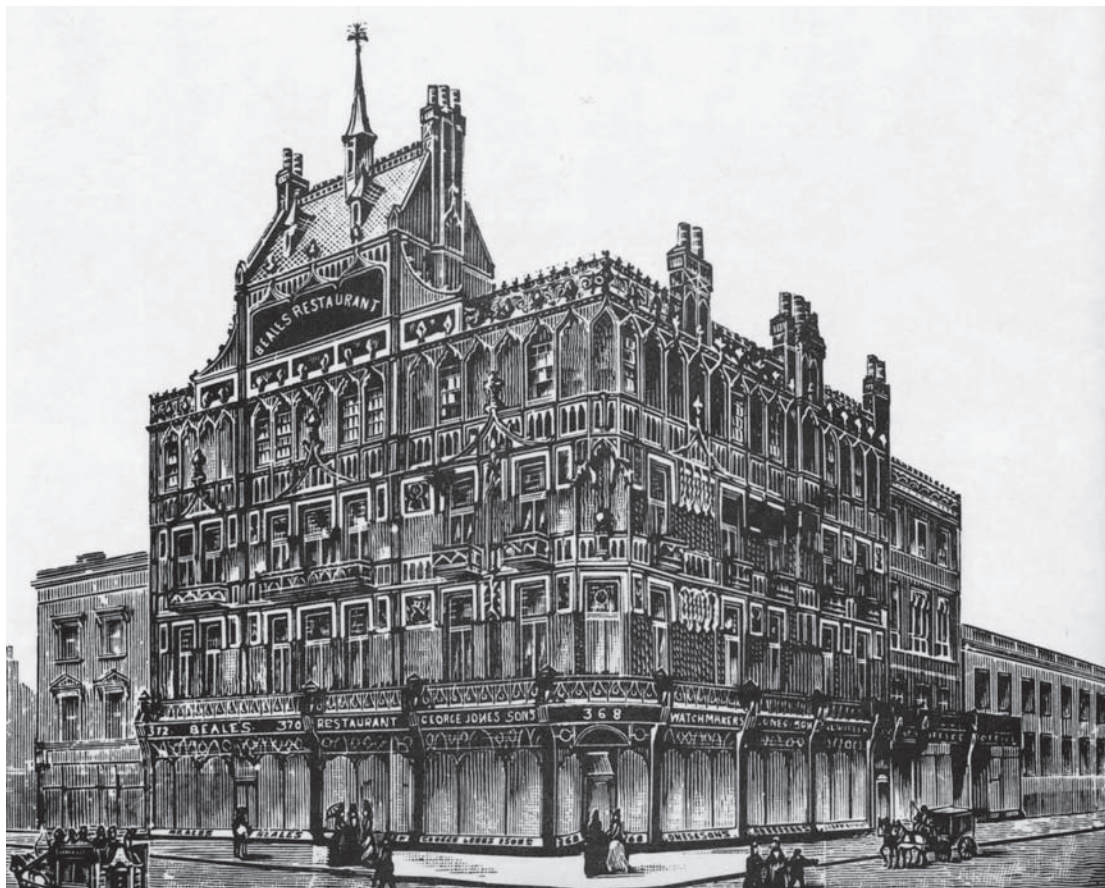


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The retail palace of Holloway

The tale of Beale's emporium, from humble beginnings to Victorian splendour

Memories of Dame Alice Owen's School at Angel in the 1950s ● Caroline Chisholm, the emigrants' friend
● Canal transport in Regency times ● Regency lives uncovered via household insurance ● New galleries at the Museum of the Order of St John ● Your local history questions answered ● News and events

Beale's store of Holloway Road

Beale's store was a landmark in one of London's most fashionable shopping parades. Its origins are traced from a small bakery in Upper Holloway, in an extract from the store's history by the founder's grandson John Beale

1 861 was the year in which Grandpa William Beale descended without warning upon the defenceless inhabitants of Highgate.

In 1852, at the age of 18, William had left Buntingford to be apprenticed to his uncle Edward, a baker of Popham Street in Islington.

In an interview given to the *Caterer* magazine in 1897 he is quoted as saying, "I learned the trade of baker and confectioner from my uncle, Edward Beale, at his shop in Popham Street, Islington. In 1861 I commenced business in a very small way in Highgate Hill. I was twenty-three at the time and had only a capital of £50 of my own. With this, and £200 which I borrowed, I started. Business prospered, and in 1866 I secured a lease in Holloway Road, at a rent of £110 per year."

It was indeed in "a very small way" that William started up in the poverty-stricken little shop at No 6 Whittington Terrace, Highgate Hill, Upper Holloway, though we still have an early photograph that he was proud enough to have taken of it. It hardly looks worth the £250 that our young hopeful paid for it in terms of 1861 money values.

For the time being it was a hard slog for William and his wife Christina. The heavy

bread dough would be mixed and moulded all by hand – back-breaking work carried out in the heat, dust, steam and coal fumes of the traditional London basement bakehouse of the time.

William was strong and tough. When morning came he would set out with his horse and van, and deliver his own bread, hot from the oven, to the surrounding district. And Christina would mind the shop, as bakers' wives had done for centuries before her. In addition she found time to produce the first two of her seven children. William Edward was the first of the family to be awarded the honour of two Christian names. Baby Thomas Henderson arrived just as they were preparing to move to Lower Holloway in 1866. Meanwhile the business had grown and some substantial outbuildings had been erected at the rear of the premises.

Grandfather had been studying the possibilities of trade in Lower Holloway. Prosperous City merchants were moving out from the inner suburbs to the new dormitory area of Islington, followed by the more humble Pooters they employed. Holloway Road, the "Hollow Way" from Highbury to Highgate, part of the ancient highway from London to the north, lay ripe and ready for development.

Never a man to shilly-shally, William took the plunge and moved his little business and his little family in time to get in just before the rush. Almost outside his shop on Highgate Hill there

lay the famous stone where Richard Whittington rested and heard the bells of London calling him to return and become Lord Mayor of London. Grandfather must surely have been similarly inspired as he set out for fame and fortune in the same direction.

First Holloway lease

In 1866 Grandfather secured his first beach-head in Lower Holloway with the lease of No 368 Holloway Road – "formerly Vine Cottage but now known as Holloway House... abutting at the rear a field called Sibell". The cobbled sunken highway lay three or four steps down from the wide pavement. It might have been from here, in earlier days, that a man on horseback rode daily to the City, crying "Holloway Cheesecakes" round the streets.

But rural Islington was disappearing fast. Soon horse-drawn buses would start to ply from Camden Town to Finsbury Park, crossing Holloway Road at the Nag's Head. Others would leave Beale's corner for King's Cross down the Caledonian Road. Holloway Road from our corner to the Nag's Head became one of the best shopping parades in London outside the West End.

To the corner opposite us, across Tollington Road, came the brothers William and John Jones one year later, to start up as drapers in the small shop at No 2 Peartree Terrace, with one assistant and an errand boy, and the first day's sales recorded as being £3-7-0. From these beginnings grew the department store known as Jones Brothers,

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later acquired by Selfridges, and later still by the John Lewis Partnership. The two families of Beale and Jones built up their respective empires with some rivalry and a little jealousy, as we shall see.

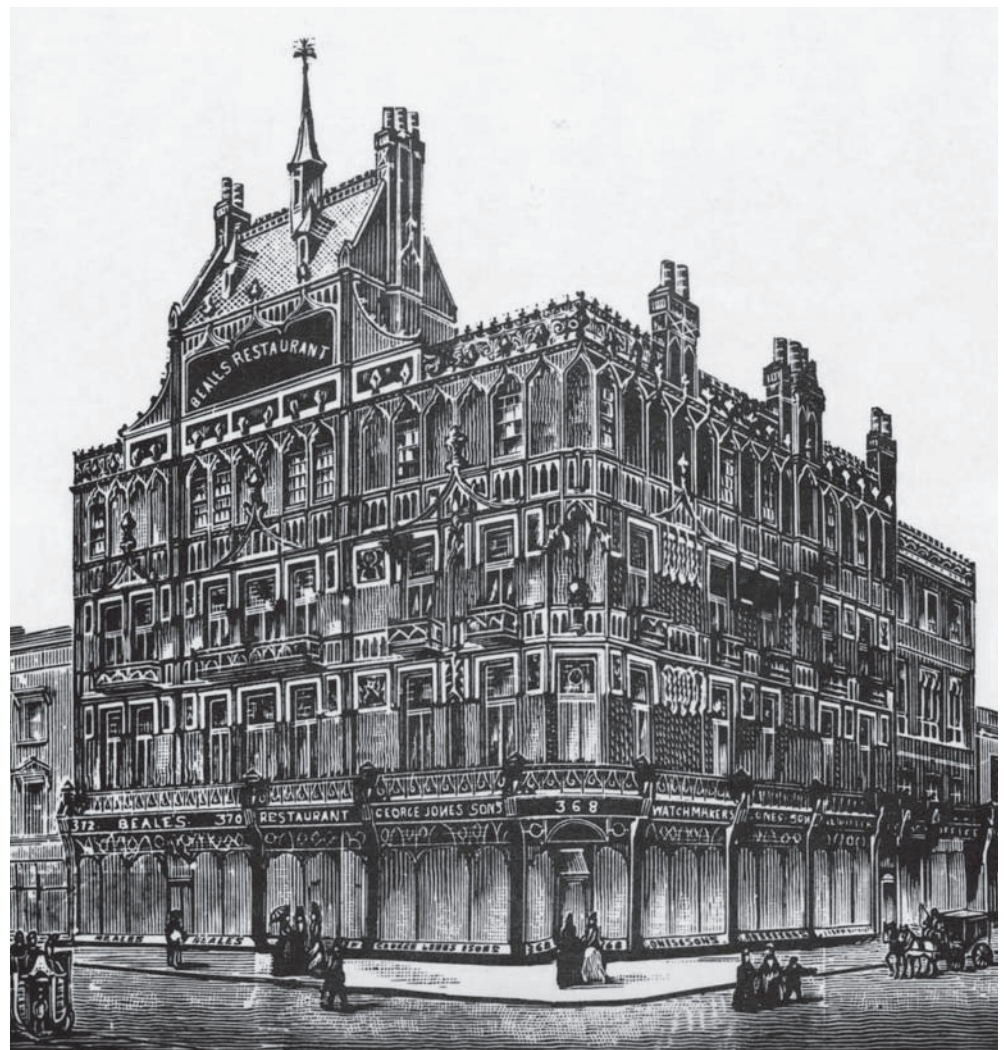
William's new shop was an appreciable jump in size and standing from the down-at-heel mini-bakery on Highgate Hill. He was aiming at the top end of the much varied population of the new urban Islington. He would deliver daily and twice daily if required to the imposing houses springing up in Tufnell Park, Finsbury Park, Camden Road and Highbury – houses for well-to-do families and their servants.

The plain fare of Highgate Hill was toned up considerably. Meals in good-class society were elaborate affairs and the services of a good-quality baker and confectioner were in demand. William extended his range to include a selection of top-quality groceries and provisions. He opened a small cafe at the rear of the shop, where Mrs Beale held court for the fashionable ladies of the district. There they would sip their glass of port and nibble a biscuit after their shopping, while their carriages awaited them outside.

Expansion – and a grand store

For the next 24 years both William's person and William's business continued to extend. He let No 368 at a profit and took over Nos 370 and 372, together with houses and gardens down Tollington Road at the side and rear. It was all part of a site leased in 1793 for 961 years at a fixed rent of £6-0-0 per year – the possibility of inflation not occurring to the landlord at the time. William built a bakery at the rear of No 376, and took on another shop at No 464 temporarily, pending the large-scale rebuilding he was now contemplating.

From Grandma Beale's back parlour cafe, there developed an outdoor catering department that became the largest in north



Beale's of Holloway, completed in 1889, on the corner of Tollington Road. It included banqueting rooms, bakeries, a department food store and its own power station

London. It was hard work for the family. An entry in the banquet diary for 1887, of our catering for 800 persons at the old Holborn Town Hall, reminds me that my father could never pass the place later without groaning at the back-breaking work it had involved, shifting the heavy crates of china and cutlery up and down the stairs.

William was making money. His ambition grew with his success. He borrowed £28,000 from the bank and set about the complete rebuilding of his site. The planning and erection of the new Beale's was Grandfather's most remarkable achievement. The new premises included a department food store, large restaurants, banqueting rooms, bakeries, and an electric power station in the basement. The main building, completed in

1889, could stand muster with many of the fine shops that men like Selfridge, Whiteley, and Gamage were building in the West End and the City. It was to be the pride and joy of the family for many years to come. ■

Many thanks to Andrew Beale – William's great-great grandson – for allowing us to reproduce this extract from *Minding Our Own Business*, his history of Beale's of Holloway

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