

EAST BELFAST HISTORICAL SOCIETY



HORATIO TODD (1878 – 1973)

Horatio Todd was more than just a chemist; not only did he become the first President of the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland, but his shop at 72 Holywood Road also dispensed perfumes and veterinary prescriptions. The always immaculately dressed Horatio was also an OBE recipient, a Justice of the Peace, a member of the Ornithological Society, President of East Belfast Ulster Unionist Association and a member of Belmont Presbyterian Church.

Although born in Ballymena in 1878, he spent most of his long life in East Belfast where he lived at Sandown Road, and after qualifying as a pharmaceutical chemist, he opened his own shop near the Holywood Arches in 1906. In those pre-NHS days, when chemists could make up their own remedies, he produced his own range of pills, cough mixtures, stomach powders, ointments, conditioners and tonics as well as perfumes and animal remedies! In honour of his famous namesake, Admiral Lord Nelson, he named his shop the Trafalgar Medical Hall and two of his products were called “Victory” headache powders and “Victory” corn cures. He also sold Todd’s Own Marshmallow Linctus for colds, asthma and bronchitis, Todd’s Laxative Emulsion for haemorrhoids, Todd’s Own Trixol Hair Lotion for dandruff and Todd’s Hand Lotion as well as many other lotions and potions!

Not only was Horatio a bird watcher who kept a parrot in his shop, he was also an animal lover who kept a pet pony and a St. Bernard dog, and his worming powders for dogs as well as other animal cures became famous. In addition to all this, he also produced his own range of perfumes called “Flowers of Ulster” from favourite locally grown flowers. His products were popular with ladies moving in upper class and wealthy social circles, including royalty such as Queen Mary, to whom he sent a range of his perfumes in 1925, also to the Duchess of Abercorn, Lady Londonderry and the Lady Mayoress of Belfast. Horatio Todd liked to think of himself as a professional who went to great lengths to assure the public that his products were “the best that money can buy”. He continued to work in the shop until he was in his 90s and since his death in 1973 the premises on the Holywood Road have continued to be a pharmacy, which is currently part of the Boots chain.

HIDDEN GEMS AND FORGOTTEN PEOPLE

Although Horatio Todd became a legend during his own lifetime in East Belfast, all that remains to remind us of him is a bar/restaurant named after him at Ballyhackamore, about a mile from his former premises. “Horatio Todd’s” keeps his name alive by celebrating his memory with a collection of old memorabilia that includes medicine bottles and marketing materials because, as the current owner of the bar/restaurant says, “he was an extraordinary businessman for his time”.

Wesley Thompson

(Thanks to Aidan Campbell & Tom McClure for photographs)