

James A. Gordon (1894-1982) entrepreneur

*I*n 2018, to the great regret of many in Alford and beyond, the iconic Alford store, Gordon's, closed its doors for the last time, after 95 years on Alford's main street.

James Adam Gordon was born in 1894 in Kennethmont. He served a four year apprenticeship with Russell's of Inch, famed for its Tweed Room and patronised by the then Queen, later Queen Mother. James eventually decided to establish his own business and set off, clad in tweed suit and cap, on a bicycle laden with textiles, on the twelve mile journey to Alford. There, on the main street, he saw just the building that would do for his future store – Wm. Coutts and Sons. James bought the shop and stock, but kept the name Coutts, with James A. Gordon underneath. Known as Coutts Gordon it opened on May 3rd 1923.

In 1924 James married Isabella, the daughter of his former employer, setting up home above the shop. After a fire in 1933 the business was rebuilt and expanded to include furniture as well as groceries and drapery goods. By 1936 Coutts Gordon had two vans supplying Donside and Deeside with groceries and drapery goods.

During the war James, a respected figure in the community, took on a range of responsible positions, such as Petrol Rationing Officer, Evacuation Officer, Country and District Councillor, even Superintendent of the Sunday School. Petrol shortages meant only one van could set off every Saturday to outlying crofts and farms, providing essential commodities ranging from paraffin to loaves of bread. They also delivered the mail, and collected and delivered orders to the egg packing station in Alford.

By the 1950s, ironmongery and painting and decorating departments had been added to the business, making Coutts Gordon the biggest employer in Alford with a staff of 29. All three sons, James, George and Robbie became involved and in 1957 the sign above the door was changed to James A. Gordon and Sons.

James passed his enterprising spirit and business acumen to his sons. His eldest son James expanded the business to the West Coast. From 1948 – 1979, 3 vans travelled from Rogart to Skye twice a year, where the arrival of Gordon's of Alford was a major event. Laden with furniture, ladies and gents drapery and whatever else was in demand, the vans made their way over single track roads to display their goods in village halls. In 1979 this part of the business ceased as more people had their own transport and could buy what they needed elsewhere.

In 1982 James A. Gordon died. His contribution to the economy and general well-being of Alford and beyond through enterprise, hard work and service to the community can not be overestimated. He left a thriving business in the hands of his sons and grandson, and long-serving staff. However, in 2018 Gordon's of Alford, like many high street shops and businesses in towns across the country today, fell victim to the forces of change and closed down.

