

BANG GOES A VILLAGE BAKERY

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During his 19 years in Birchington Fred Norris has baked more than 1,833,000 loaves of bread. But tomorrow his last loaf goes into the oven.

His bakery, Frederick's, at Station Road, is to be closed and demolished to make way for the road widening scheme.

But though residents are pleased the traffic problem will be eased they are sad to see the loss of the village's only family baker.

To buy bread baked on the premises they will have to go as far as Margate, St.Nicholas or Minster.

Fred and his wife, Daisy, came to Birchington to take over the bakery which was built more than a century before.

It is one of the only bakeries left in Kent that still has its original ovens. Each one is 15ft. long and is heated to 600 degrees. Heating takes up as much as one ton of coal every three weeks.

HIS LIFE

For Fred, baking has been his whole life. At the age of 12 he took his first bakery job. And at 14 he served a three year apprenticeship under German and Swedish instructors.

He then began hotel work. He was a pastry cook at the Dorchester Hotel when it opened in the 1930's.

He, like all his customers, is sad that his lifetime in the trade is coming to an end. "It has become more than just a job," he explained, "it's a way of life. The bakehouse is my home.

"A while ago when we first learnt we would have to go because of the road we were quite looking forward to it – we have worked hard all our lives.

"But three weeks ago when we were given the exact date on which we had to leave our feelings changed.

"We will take a holiday – it will be our first since 1945 – we need a good break. But after that I don't know what our next step will be.

"The council have found us somewhere to live in Birchington and my solicitor says we will receive good compensation, but I cannot visualise myself not working."

Fred gets up at three o'clock every morning to start the days bake. His wife starts work at 5am. And they both work seven days a week, including Christmas day.

Their retirement is something that will take a lot of adjusting to. But, as all their customers will tell, they deserve a rest.

Said Fred: "The customers are very upset. They do not want to see the bakery go any more than we do.

"Today's mass produced bread tastes really awful. It's just like plastic. But now the customers have no choice.

"Though I'm not sure what the next step will be, one thing is certain – I shall be baking our own bread!"