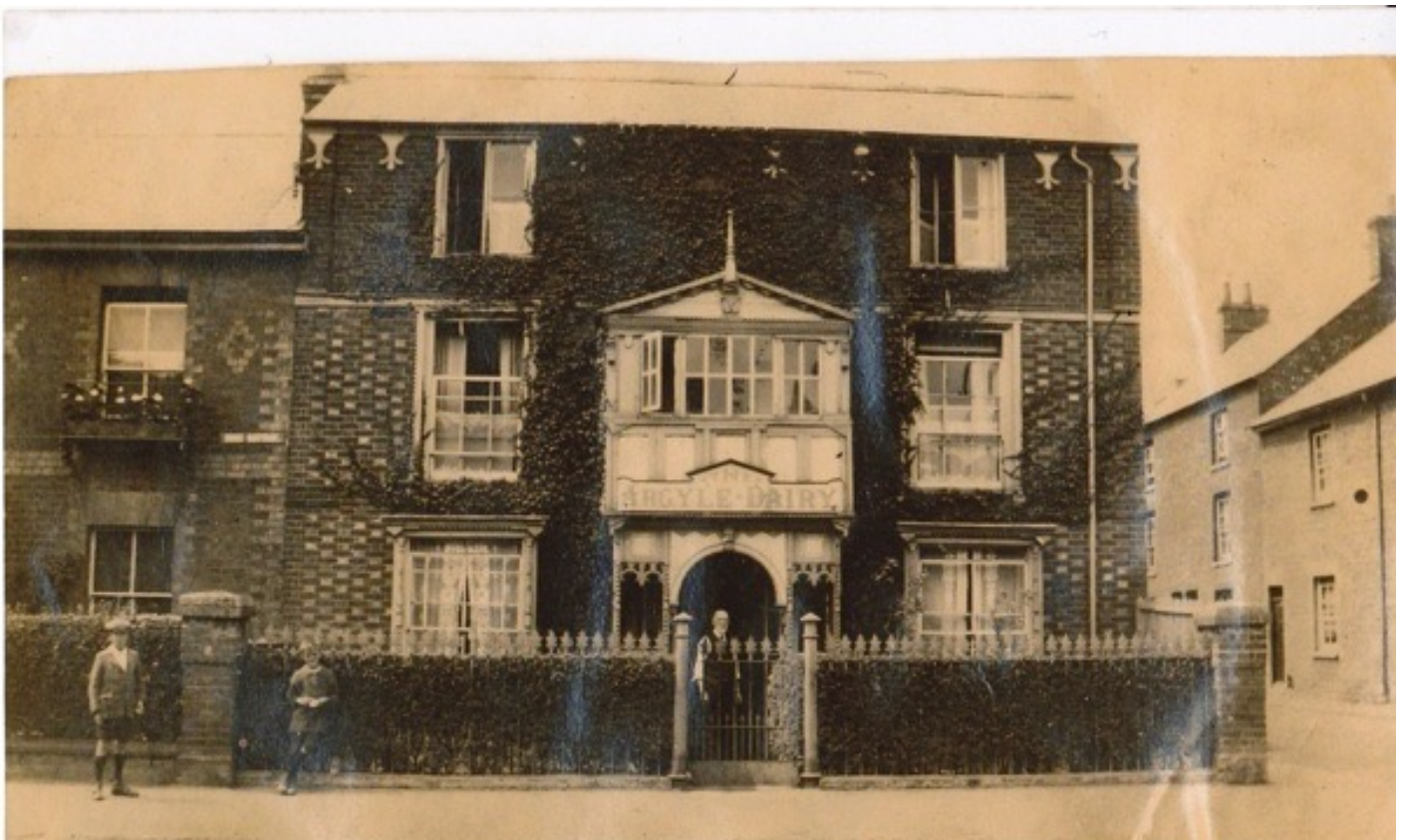


George Henry Argyle was a sixteen-year old dairy boy. The 1881 Census for Abingdon in Berkshire, England says so. The milk industry was good for George in more ways than one. Delivery of dairy products even led to his marriage. His future wife probably met him regularly twice every day in the course of their work, reason being that part of his delivery route lay along Marcham Road. Ellen Sessions resided and worked there with her sister Eliza in the home of prominent Abingdon solicitor and Town Clerk Bromley Challenor. The young women had left their parents in nearby Wantage to earn livings as domestic servants. In 1889 George and Ellen were married.

A decade later in the 1891 Census year, George Argyle was described as a milk purveyor living with his wife and firstborn Arthur at 14 Victoria Road. Part of that building located on a corner of Edward Street and Victoria served as his newly-owned dairy. This happy change in status had been made possible unexpectedly by the dishonesty of George's former boss. A little detective work had told George that his employer was watering down the milk which he, George, must sell to disgruntled customers. When he figured out what was going on he quit and in a daring move took the risk of starting up his own business.

The Victorian era and the Industrial Revolution must have been inspiring him, goading him to get ahead. Whatever the impetus was, The Argyle Dairy quickly did well enough to have its name inscribed in concrete over its main door.





Argyles left to right: John, Ellen, George, Nellie, Gertie, Arthur
c.1900

George and Ellen parented four children, Gertrude Florence Mary being my grandmother. The family lived behind and over the dairy and was well enough off to employ a maid who wore the familiar black dress, white apron and cap which we see in old movies featuring better-off home owners of Victorian and Edwardian times.

The couple followed a steady routine. Each morning after George got raw milk from the farmer along Spring Road, he rode home standing on his horse-pulled cart, a large urn now full of milk beside him for company.

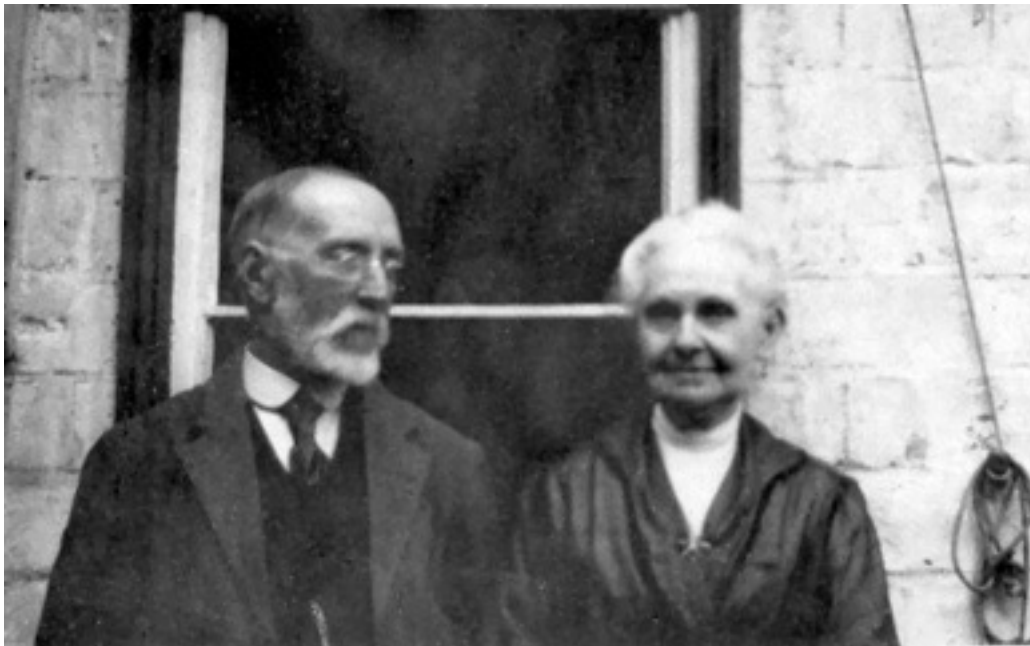


a similar cart of 1900s vintage

It was then the job of Ellen, my great grandmother - his full working partner - to filter the milk through clean cloths and pour it into tin containers which were measured in gills and pints. Pasteurization was not yet part of a dairy's process. The rest of the milk was poured into a fresh and clean urn which would be hoisted up onto the cart. It would dispense whatever quantity of milk a customer might pour into his or her own jug right at the householder's door. Or, the customer could buy standard amounts. In the afternoon the pattern was repeated. George's two older children helped out. Arthur earned six pennies weekly for his deliveries by pushcart to houses beyond George's own route and Gertie earned three pennies for light loads carried to two homes in Spring Road. Meanwhile on the premises Ellen Argyle washed all surfaces thoroughly, churned butter, made cream and stayed open for business if a consumer should come by.

But George had another interest which would overwhelm all else in his life. In the years of his marriage and parenthood if not sooner he was known to be an avid reader of Biblical scripture. Around 1900 a sect known as Russelites came to the fore. They would later rename themselves Jehovah's Witnesses. George became one of them and in 1903 sold the Dairy outright, much to Ellen's chagrin. He moved self and family to Reading where the Russelites had a meeting hall. This action marked the end of the Argyles' hard-won financial prosperity. Onward in religious terms for George but backward in the monetary sense. The material world did him no favours and by 1913, after a poor experience in market gardening in Tilehurst, he uprooted the family and moved them across the Atlantic Ocean in hopes of a better income in Toronto, Canada.

The Argyle Dairy and living quarters at 14 Victoria Road were bought by Charles Burt and taken over later, presumably, by his son. Except for the Dairy's name it would never again be connected with my ancestors. Still, what happened to the business interested me and information in this regard fell into my lap.



Charles Burt 1841 to 1923 and wife Sophia.

The Story of Argyle Dairy c. 1890 - 1982

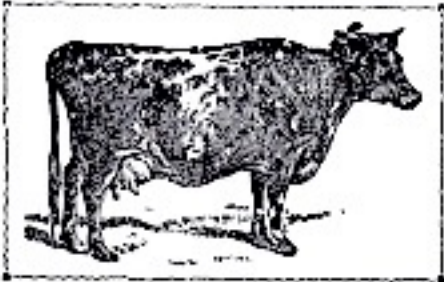
The Argyle Dairy after 1903 sale to Charles Burt



38 HOOKE'S ABINGDON ALMANAC AND DIRECTORY.

ARGYLE DAIRY,
19, HIGH STREET,
— AND —
14, VICTORIA ROAD,
— ABINGDON. —

*New Milk direct from the Farm delivered in
all parts of the Town twice daily.*



FRESH
CREAM.

⊙

NEW
LAID
EGGS.

BRITISH DAIRY BUTTER
Fresh from the Farm four times weekly.

Cadbury's Celebrated Bourneville Biscuits. All kinds in stock.
— Sole Agents in Abingdon for the "ANCHOR" TEA. —

ARGYLE DAIRY,
19, High Street and 14, Victoria Road,
— ABINGDON. —

An ad from HOOKE'S ABINGDON ALMANAC
1930s?

While the Argyle name stuck, in 1938 Smith Brothers of Wantage and Witney, established in 1883, joined with Burt. As well, an entity known as Elm Farm Dairy merged, possibly in the 1970s. Vale and Downland Museum in Wantage holds an amber-hued pint milk bottle with three names etched into the glass: Argyle, Smith and Elm. In Abingdon itself, the Argyle Dairy name stubbornly held.



left to right: Argyle Dairy, Smith Bros., Elm Farm Dairy
photo courtesy of Vale and Downland Museum, Wantage, Oxfordshire, England

In parallel, since 1906, a dairyman surnamed Candy had been running his own small Abingdon dairy business. In 1933 his son James S. Candy decided, after working and living on a cattle ranch for eleven years in Argentina, to follow in his father's footsteps as a dairy farmer in the Abingdon area. He rented Milton Hill Farm and abutting cattle land which he worked with his wife Kitty and his father. When Mr. Candy Senior retired James went in search of a smaller site. Somewhere between 1937 and 1945 he found buildings and pasture land to rent from the Tatham family, on the outskirts of the town, at Northcourt. That property has a wonderful history.

It was once Abbey Grange (1270 A.D.) of Northcourt, started up by the monks of Abingdon Abbey as a branch farm site with at least four buildings. For many years James Candy ran his dairy from that property on Northcourt Road, in a newer barn which was only three hundred years old.

Throughout the 1940s Argyle and Candy Dairies both benefitted from the increased milk demand for World War Two's evacuee children who were housed for safety with families in rural towns like Abingdon. Business expanded to other villages. Competition between the two and with still smaller dairies was strenuous. When routes overlapped games were played. Opposing dairymen removed each other's bottles and hid them in bushes ahead of delivering their own brand.

The Smiths who still owned the Argyle Dairy, and Candy, were able to buy out practically all the other local small companies and by 1952 the Argyle Dairy was Candy's only serious competition in Abingdon. By then Candy himself was selling six hundred gallons of milk daily. The two amalgamated in 1956 to become Argyle Candy Dairies. Efficiency increased in all assigned delivery areas, responsibilities were delegated and Candy's work life eased.

He kept a hand in the business, though. In 1956 the very young Queen Elizabeth visited Abingdon to open the restored County Hall which is the centrepiece of the town's main square. A luncheon was held after the ceremony and dessert was a fruit salad. The mayor had asked Candy to supply cream for the dessert, thick cream from jersey cattle and he gladly did so. Still ambitious, he saw this as a great advertising

opportunity. He imagined words like 'As served to her Majesty the Queen' on his company label. To his great dismay, though, the Queen declined the cream, telling the mayor she had to watch her figure.

This energetic man found time, throughout the Fifties and Sixties, to take on numerous civic positions and was elected mayor of Abingdon in 1962. Eventually he purchased the Grange's ancient buildings outright although he owned neither the land on which they stood nor the surrounding property where his cattle grazed. Around 1960 he had been obliged to remove the cattle so that a major housing project could get under way there. He then moved into straight distribution of milk. In 1978 Candy & Argyle Dairies amalgamated with Clifford Dairies at Bracknell but James Candy could not carry on forever. In 1982 after a commitment of sixty years he retired from the dairy business. A larger concern known as United Dairies took over and Argyle and Candy were no more.

Since 1960 Christ Church, Northcourt had been housed in one of the Grange structures, that being the 12th Century Tithe Barn. The dairy buildings and Dairy Yard surrounded that church property. Through the years Mr. Candy apparently had gained and kept ownership of those buildings and the Dairy Yard. In 1996 church authorities approached the Candy family about buying.



The Story of Argyle Dairy c. 1890 - 1982

medieval tithe barn, one side of Christ Church, Northcourt today

Christ Church finally did make the purchase in 2002 and an extensive, sophisticated renovation and building project was begun. By 2013 the two adjoined 17th Century barns where the dairy once flourished and which are seen in the recent picture printed below were beautifully and thoughtfully restored. The cafe at one end of the complex is a bright, striking and welcoming place.



Cafe and Entertainment Barn of Christ Church, Northcourt,
in Abingdon, Oxfordshire, UK

The friendly history printed below appears on the cafe's menu for every visitor to read.

Welcome to The Barns Café!

We hope you enjoy this beautiful barn, built over 300 years ago as part of Northcourt Farm. The farm itself dates back almost 1,000 years, when it was started by the monks of Abingdon Abbey. Right up to 1945, the farm barns were working buildings, full of crops, machinery, and animals; and then until the 1990s, they housed a dairy.

Then the barns stood empty, until the people of Christ Church (that's the church in the other barn you can see across the car park) decided it was time to bring them to life again — to buy them, rebuild them, and create something special for the community.

After years of hard work, the vision became a reality.

All those centuries ago, the monks of Abingdon were big on offering hospitality to all. So what we're doing now is following in their footsteps — opening up a place that's full of good things.

Pick yourself something lovely
from the menu, relax and enjoy!

The Story of Argyle Dairy c. 1890 - 1982

Resource:

*A Tapestry of Life by James S. Candy, copyright 1984 and published 1984
by Short Run Press Ltd., Exeter, Devon England*

Many thanks to

*Janice Gordon, chairperson of Christ Church Barns Building Project
and former churchwarden of Christ Church*

Christine Talbot, administrator for Christ Church

Barbara Ayers, great granddaughter of Charles Burt second owner of Argyle Dairy

Jackie Smith, Abingdon archivist

The Story of Argyle Dairy c. 1890 - 1982

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