

THE HABERDASHERY DEPARTMENT

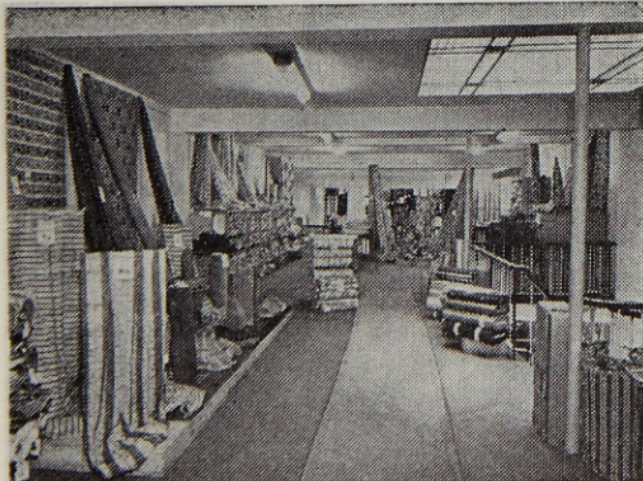
*The Department is at the rear of the shop on the ground floor.*

weak in th' 'ead", he admits that Chester is very conservative in its ways and it has taken time to break down a tradition of shopping with older established competitors.

How well this threefold handicap has been overcome is happily expressed by Mr. Boness when he adds: "After our first seven years we are proud to say our business is ranked among the valuable assets of Chester's shopping centre; even our competitors pay us the compliment of wishing we were not there". Mr. Boness emphasises also the strong bond between Chester and "our friends at Liverpool who have always been willing to help us". And an amusing tailpiece to this is added by Mrs. M. I. Macdonald, Section Manager, Household Linens, one of the two Partners who have been at Chester since the first day. Mrs. Macdonald recalls a customer whose daughter was doing her homework one evening and could not remember the name of the first President of the United States, "George . . ." she kept saying, "George . . ." until suddenly prompted by her much younger brother. "George Henry Lee" he said.

The second Partner who can remember the first day at Chester is Mrs. E. M. Plant, Services, who had taken special pride in the cleanliness of the building for many years before the Partnership acquired it. Mrs. Plant remembers what used to be the front workroom at a time when it accommodated fifty-four tailors, all sitting on the floor; and her memories of the takeover by the Partnership are vivid. Many alterations were made at once. A new back staircase was put in to replace the winding iron one. No sooner was this completed than the top floor ceiling fell in, and what had not come down of its own accord was promptly pulled down by the builders.

For Mrs. Plant the resultant shambles was heartbreaking.

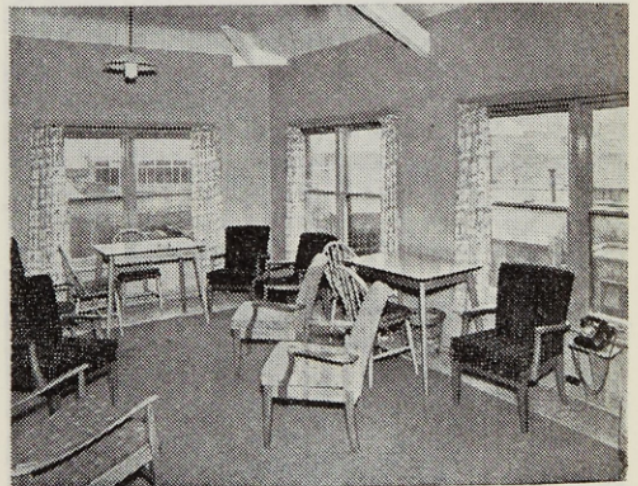


THE SOFT FURNISHING DEPARTMENT, FIRST FLOOR

It looked "just as if a bomb had fallen". Nor did the damage stop there, for instead of bagging the ceiling debris and carrying it down to the yard, the builders simply threw it out of the window, causing clouds of dust which billowed back in, settling over all the stock and seeping into every corner of the building. Then, so that their cement should not dry before they could use it, the builders started mixing it on the spot—on the brand new linoleum on the new floor. Each morning when Mrs. Plant came in, she felt more despondent, wondering where to begin and whether the shop was ever going to be straight again.

In six months it was, and for much of that time Mr. E. J. Evans, Deputy Manager and Manager of the Dress Piece Goods Department, Mr. H. G. Tremayne, Section Manager of the Soft Furnishings Department, and Mr. E. Burton, now Manager of the Dress Piece Goods Department at Liverpool, took it in turn to stay behind at night, often until nearly midnight. Several times Mr. Tremayne stayed there all night, trying to clean up a little behind the builders.

At last the rebuilding of the top floor was completed, resulting in a pleasant rest room and new cloakrooms and in 1956, with the expansion of the Soft Furnishings trade, an unused area was converted into a workroom. Prior to this, about two years after the rebuilding of the top floor, the present open staircase with its attractive shallow steps was built against the wall midway along the ground floor, curving up to the Soft Furnishings Department. A new doorway and lighting com-



THE PARTNERS' REST ROOM

pleted the renovation the building has undergone during the last seven years.

On entering the shop one is confronted by the tall, effective displays of Dress Piece Goods. Moving on towards the staircase one finds Paper Patterns emerging from underneath it and, straight ahead, Haberdashery. On the right is Household Linens which, together with the Carpet Library on the floor above, was added after the shop opened.

Mounting the staircase, slowly so that one can look at the cushions displayed on the wall, one arrives in the Soft Furnishings Department in time to hear Mr. G. Williams speaking to a farmer's wife in her native Welsh, a useful attribute which he shares with Mr. Evans and which serves also to remind one of a large volume of trade Chester attracts from the surrounding districts, particularly from North Wales.

Centuries ago this attraction was not without hazard, for the Welsh who came down from their hills then were intent on pillaging and plundering, and it was this that prompted the inhabitants of Chester to build on "Rows" raised above street level, the more easily to repel the marauders. To-day these Rows are part of the charm and comfort of shopping in Chester, for they serve as attractive and weatherproof arcades easily reached by stone stairways between shops on street level.

Continuing through the Soft Furnishings Department one comes to a narrow balcony, rather like an old musicians'

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