

VALERIA VICTRIX TO GEORGE HENRY LEE

The Partnership's Branch in Chester

ON the 29th January the Chester Branch of the Partnership, George Henry Lee (Chester) Ltd., celebrated its seventh birthday. It is a fascinating Branch to visit, for historic associations crowd thickly about the traveller who journeys from the heart of the Partnership's empire to this charming and prosperous outpost which is garrisoned by thirty Partners.

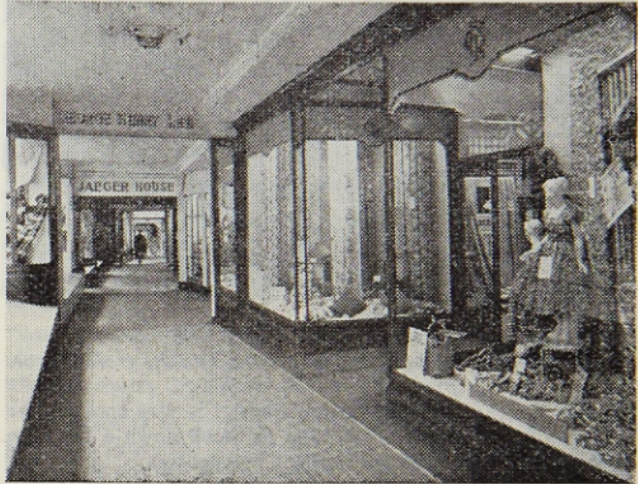
Less than sixteen hundred years earlier the Roman Twentieth Legion, proudly named Valeria Victrix, was still there—one of the three legions which throughout the centuries of Roman occupation garrisoned the country, with their headquarters at the great fortresses of Caerleon-on-Usk, Chester and York. And though now one travels by rail from Paddington the route is so little altered that one can almost see the swirling dust raised by the sandalled feet of the legionaries as they tramped down Watling Street (now Edgware



G. H. LEE, CHESTER

The actual entrance is on the first floor off the covered walk known as the "Rows".

Road), following this famous highway as it left London by way of Elstree and ran "straight and bare as the pale parting-line in hair" across the country to Wroxeter, where one branch struck south towards Caerleon-on-Usk and another northwards, linking Chester and the west of England with York. But the soldiers were not the first to go that way; as always throughout history, the merchants had ventured there before them, for there is evidence that Chester was a market as early as the Bronze Age. Coming to times nearer our own, for two hundred years before the partnership took over the Chester Branch had belonged to John Smith & Son, military and civil tailors. When Mr. R. Lee, Assistant to the Service Manager of G. H. Lee, went there to strip the shop in readiness for its new fittings, he found many examples of the fine workmanship of the previous business: gorgeous uniforms in scarlet and



THE SHOP ENTRANCE

gold, helmets of every conceivable design, hunting kits, riding habits and sheriff's regalia. One tall canister contained a towering busby, taller than any worn today; when Mr. Lee touched it, it crumbled to dust.

In less than a week, during which the dust inside swirled thick as the snow outside, the shop was stripped and, among other things, an old safe weighing ten hundredweight was somehow manhandled down the narrow, winding staircase. It was found to contain nothing but innumerable grave deeds going back scores of years, and the connection between these and a tailor's business has puzzled Mr. Lee ever since. On Monday the 22nd January 1951 seven vans of new equipment arrived. On Wednesday the stock started coming in, and by Friday everything was ready. On the following Monday, the 29th January—more than 3,000 years after amber, lapis lazuli, glass and silks brought by the Phoenicians were probably bartered there—the Partnership began to trade in Chester.

It was an uphill fight, under three particular disadvantages. First, unlike most of the Partnership's acquisitions, there was no goodwill, for that had moved elsewhere with John Smith & Son. Second, there was the 1951 recession in the textile trade which struck the area some months after the shop had opened. And third, although Mr. L. A. Boness, Manager of the Branch, would hesitate to echo the old rhymester who said "Cheshire born and Cheshire bred, Strong i' th' arm and



THE INTERIOR OF THE SHOP FROM THE DOORWAY