

50 years of trading



In a commanding position in Slough's "golden mile," Suters department store stands as a symbol of half a century of personal service by the Suter family.

FIFTY years ago this week Clarence Suter started serving in the shop he and his father had just bought in Slough High Street—a triple-fronted old drapers and silk mercers store called Andrews and Son.

If you walk into Suters modern department store tomorrow and ask for something in the dress fabric department, you are likely to be served by the very same man.

That is what family tradition in a family business is all about. When it has been allied so successfully to modern shopping developments, you have the Golden Jubilee story of Suters in a nutshell.

Walking through the Slough or Uxbridge stores in the seventies, with their escalators, Traffic Lights boutiques, competitive selling on things like electrical goods, it is easy to see just how much the family has kept in touch and moved with the times.

INDIVIDUAL ATTENTION

But there remains a strong personal touch, a knowledge that an effort will always be made to cater for the specialised wish of an individual customer.

Mr. Clarence Suter, now nearly 75, will tell you: "In the old days if a customer wanted something special we would send to London for it immediately and get somebody to bring it back on the train."

"We don't quite do that now. But we make every effort to get something a customer wants quickly."

Suters was founded by Mr. G. W. Suter and his son, Clarence. They acquired Nos. 101 and 103 High Street and No. 104 on the other side of the street.

It was here Mr. Clarence's wife worked before they were married, for she was in charge of the millinery department at 104.

There were six assistants, all

female. Now the two stores at Uxbridge and Slough employ 440, nearly 200 of them on a part-time basis.

In 1924 two other sons, Arthur and Frank, joined the partnership and the old established business of Carrick and Coles of Uxbridge was bought.

There was further expansion in 1929 when the business of W. Coad Ltd. was taken over on the other side of Uxbridge High Street and Suters became a private limited company.

And G.W.'s youngest son, John, joined the company in 1930.

At Uxbridge there was a move in 1935 when Suters sold the Carrick and Coles premises and built a three-storey building on the Coad site next to the bus and underground station.

Incidentally, the name Traffic Lights was suggested by a girl member of the staff.



Mr. Clarence Suter

At Slough in 1930 Suters bought the music business shop of Blanchettes and in 1934 it incorporated it in the original premises, which had been rebuilt in 1932.

And in 1939 came the purchase of Hopkins and Sons which meant more expansion for the company in Slough.

G.W., the co-founder, died in 1946, as his sons returned to the business from the war.

The years of the post-war boom followed until in 1962 the Suters store in Slough as we know it was built.

With it came the opportunity to sell things the one-time drapers had never dealt in before . . . carpets, electrical equipment, cosmetics, hardware and kitchen equipment for example.

It was, and is, a far cry from 1920 when the business depended on linens, dress materials, soft furnishings, haberdashery, gloves, hosiery, millinery and lady's ready made.

There is, for example, a now thriving and popular restaurant service which is just introducing a policy of a wider selection of light lunches for the ladies.

And before the middle sixties, Suters had not concentrated on the 15-25 age groups in its sales programmes.

The swinging sixties altered all that.

Mr. Richard Suter, the company's sales promotion director, says: "We have always tried to cater for the family and all age groups. But before 1966 we catered better for the more mature people rather than the young swingers or the teenyboppers."

He goes on: "In 1967 we opened the Traffic Lights Boutique in Slough with two disc jockeys, Phil Jay and Chris Windsor. Last year Tony Blackburn opened a similar boutique at Uxbridge."

Some other things have altered with the times now. Until ten years ago Suters were still opposed to centralised buying. But it is nearly all centralised now.

COMPETITIVE

And they occasionally enter the cut-price arena — recently they have been selling Hoover equipment at prices which are probably the cheapest in Slough.

But even a cut-price vacuum cleaner comes with that family touch.

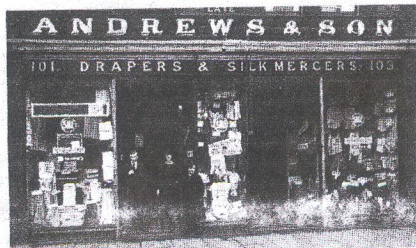
The four original sons are still all directors and normally attend board meetings once a month. They are Clarence, and Messrs. G. A., F. C., and J. D.

But the younger generation has taken over the main managerial functions.

Mr. David Suter is managing director and Mr. Tom Suter the merchandising director. Mr. Anthony Suter is director of store operations and Mr. Michael Suter the store manager at Uxbridge.

But, as Mr. Richard points out, there are good opportunities for non-family members. The company secretary is not a Suter, nor is the Slough store manager.

And the firm has buyers who are still in their mid-twenties. "We promote on ability," says Mr. Richard.



Where it all began . . . at the drapers' store, formerly Andrews and Son, in Slough High Street, where, 50 years ago this week Mr. Clarence Suter (pictured in the doorway) started his career, serving in the shop his father had just bought.