

Dragon's Den - Wychwood Style Local Businesses Continue to Thrive

Despite economic downturn, changing lifestyles, new technology and of course constant competition, local businesses continue to seize opportunities.

'Till We Meet Again

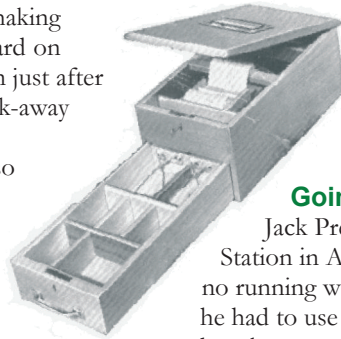
Inevitably, of course, some businesses have disappeared. The Oxfordshire Cash Register Company started making wooden cash tills in the tillyard on Upper High Street in Shipton just after the First World War. A break-away faction formed the United Woodworking Company, also called the Till Factory, on Station Road, and a third factory, Wychwood Manufacturing, was set up on Ascott Road in 1946. All have now disappeared, as has Shipton Gas Works. It produced gas to light the streets and heat buildings in Ascott, Milton and Shipton. After nationalisation in 1949, gas was pumped from Oxford and the site closed in 1951. The HSBC Bank in Milton closed in 2000 and now provides a weekly mobile service at Milton Village Hall. Harmans Butchers in Milton High Street closed in the autumn of 2002 when Mike Harman retired after 34 years. The premises had been a Butchers for 120 years and is now a housing development, although the stone bull head which had adorned the shop front still remains.

Keeping It in the Family

The longest surviving business in the area must be Groves. The present company, Alfred Groves and Sons was formed in 1904 but its origins go back to 1660 when William Groves, a Stone Mason, set up

business in Milton to take advantage of the local stone quarries. Matthews Flour Mill was built in 1911 by Groves and has undergone various expansions and modernisation and is still going strong. So is Cochranes of Oxford which advertised in the very first issue of the magazine. The

company was founded in 1962 and makes high quality educational equipment including molecular models, sold all over the world.



Going Strong!

Jack Prew took over Milton Service Station in August 1965 when there was no running water or sewage disposal, and he had to use a bucket of water from the brook to search for punctures in tyres. In 2005 he had a staff of eight and is still going strong. David Johnson took over Station Road Garage in Shipton 43 years ago, and it has been run as a family business ever since. The story of Avery's Store is also a multi-generational family one. Built by Peter Townsend in the late 1800s, the shop was a butchers, grocers and confectioners in its current location at 8, Church Street. Peter's daughter Annie Marie married David Avery in 1897 and they took over the shop. Their son Percy, with his wife Ivy, took their turn and when their son Vic married Gladys in 1957 she also helped in the shop. In the late 1970s the grocery side started to fade, and in 1979 Vic and Gladys' daughter Elaine turned it into a florist. The shop closed when she married but in March 2005, Elaine re-opened as a florist, calling the shop Ivy's after her grandmother, and that is what it remains today.

Shop Talk

In 1988, Elma Williams recalled some of the shops from her youth. These included butchers, bakers and saddle makers in Sipton and even an antique shop at No. 6 Church Street, which only survived for a short time. London House in Milton, so called because her Aunt Lydia bought her stock from London warehouses; supplied everything the villagers needed from baby's booties to farm-worker's boots and stylish ensembles for weddings and funerals. Her favourite was Franklins in the High Street in Sipton. The ground floor was in three sections, with groceries, the bank and hardware. A flight of narrow stairs led to more hardware and best of all toys! Franklins closed in 1941 and was then divided into separate dwellings. Sipton House Stores started life as Dees store in Sipton in about 1900. In 1921 it became Hathaways, and was described in our pages by the Dowager Duchess of Devonshire as providing "*Everything the heart desires.*" Later, Sipton House Stores was run for ten years by Keth and Joan Fairall before they handed over to the Colledge and Schofield families and it became Costcutters. In early 2006 the shop was closed and we await developments.

New Entrepreneurs Welcome!

On the side of renewal we have the Co-op in Milton which re-opened after extension and refurbishment in 2003 and the Wychwood Deli set up by Chris Morton in Milton in 2007. Perhaps the biggest success story of all is the Ascott Shop. The project to open a new village shop in Ascott began

in around 2002. It opened in November 2003 as a community shop with a small number of paid staff and a team of volunteers. By early 2005 it was reported as going from strength to strength and in early 2006 it was runner up in the Oxfordshire Village Shop of the Year. That was nothing, however, compared to 2008 when it won three awards in the space of three months:



Best Village Shop/Post Office for the South in the Best Rural Retailer Awards, Best Village Shop in Oxfordshire awarded by Oxfordshire Rural Community Council, and runner-up for Best Village Shop/Post Office in the National Finals of the Best Rural Retailer

Awards. What a fantastic achievement by the three paid staff, 40 volunteers, and all those involved in the creation of this superb facility!

Even IBM Started Small

Other recent small business start-ups include Trevor Ford with his Wychwood Windows based on the Swinbrook Road in Sipton, Philip Pratley with Wychwood Wrought Iron which he set up in 2000 in Ascott, Heather Edwards with Beauty By Heather in Milton and Unique Catering Ltd set up by Michelle Wathes and Philip Kent. Of course, many other people now work from home, enabled by Broadband technology, so the pages of *The Wychwood* are full of enterprising people offering pet sitting, sewing services, tutors, furniture restoring and picture framing. Small businesses are alive and well and flourishing in the Wychwoods!