

Cochranes of Oxford

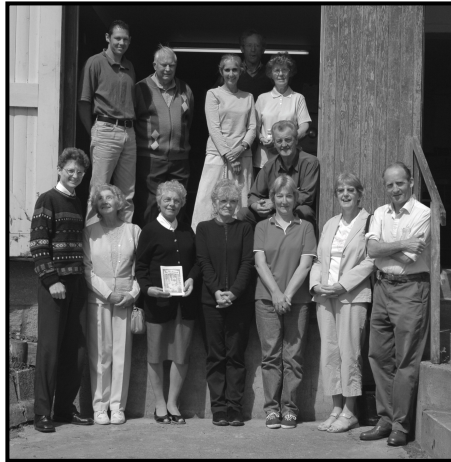
The Best Kept Secret in the Wychwoods

25 Years Later

Open the Aug/Sept issue of the first Volume of the magazine and you will find on the inside cover an advertisement describing the toys, molecular models and models of the solar system made by Cochranes of Oxford: "A small venture situated in Leafield and Shipton."

Did YOU Know They Were There?.

You can get the low-down from Gill Grason, Mavis MacVicar or Alice Harris who were and still are representative of the local and loyal workforce. The Managing Director is John Cochrane, though he is grooming his son, Tom, to take over some of the responsibility. There are currently 14 people employed in the business, one team working in the barns of "Grove Farm", Shipton, home of Mary and Malcolm Cochrane and the others at "Fairspear House" in Leafield, home of John and Margaret Cochrane. You would never guess that the entire production, packing, machining and assembling capacity is based here and that the business exports globally. They are good neighbours in the local community; perfectly illustrating that in *real* villages industry and housing can live happily side by side. No huge lorries, no noise, such a low profile that we were



lucky to get the team together for our photograph!

Cochranes of Oxford

The Company was founded in 1962 by John and Malcolm Cochrane and their parents, then living in Derbyshire. At that time the government was exhorting businesses to "export or die."

The Cochranes wanted to see if a small family business situated in and drawing from a rural community could successfully fulfil this role. They have! The proof of the pudding is that they continue to export well over half their turnover. There are very few educational suppliers founded 42 years ago that are still in business and independent. Originally the Company was called RJM Exports (after the initials of the original founders) but this name did not gel with their markets, so they re-named themselves: "Cochranes of Oxford", associating themselves with another famous educational brand name!

"Stick to the Knitting"

Not knitting! Cochranes of Oxford design and sell educational teaching equipment. But they have made a conscious decision to stay with what they are good at and never to over-extend themselves. A good business message! 25 years ago they also made kites and

toys, but now they concentrate on more technical products which are complex and demand the high levels of skill and attention to detail and accuracy which their local employes provide. Typical is the amazing Helios Planetarium which provides an extremely detailed and accurate model of the solar system. Unfortunately for those of us who would like to find it in our Christmas stocking, most are sold to schools and other educational establishments!



Helios Planetarium

Special Collaborations

Customers see affordable products of good quality which other people don't make. Behind this, lies a business which has to be quite nimble in seeing new needs and responding quickly. A good example is the emerging interest in DNA models, and the general growth of the Bio-Tech market. New product ideas also come from the unique relationships with schools and universities. Last year, for example, the Company was approached by a school to design a new product to help teach physics; lecturers in astronomy and lecturers looking for a new modelling system for demonstrating proteins. In the last month an email was received from an academic in India who had bought a chemistry modelling product and had developed from it a new models systems written up in the "Journal of Materials Education"!

The Company designed a giant DNA model for the Queens Golden Jubilee in 2002, and more recently for a dinner attended by Lord Sainsbury.

Generational Change

Tom Cochrane represents the new

generation in the family firm. He is well aware of the challenge he faces in building on the past and he sees a huge potential in exploring new opportunities. He explains that we can expect to see some well earned retirements amongst older family members

and some new hands and minds to take the business forward. It is important to him that all this will be done only with the support of the company's loyal workers and of the local Wychwood community.

Tom may be the youngest family member, but he clearly carries forward the founding values. The satisfaction for him is that: "The result of what we do helps children to learn more and makes a positive contribution to education at home and abroad."

Cochranes of Oxford are truly a local business, built on the specialist local skills of a rural community and showing how business success can marry happily with the needs of the local community. Here's to the next 25 years, but let's have an update, Tom, before then!

Liz Clarke - Watson

Stop Press! Shipton village has just won the "Best Kept Village- Medium Size" award again. Congratulations to all involved.