

SPOTLIGHT

Each month we hope to take an in-depth look at a local business. To start our series we put the spot light on **NICHOLLS**

The department store **NICHOLLS** was conceived by C. Nicholls, who still lives in the village. On his discharge from the R.A.F., after serving 5½ years as a wireless operator and gunner in bomber command, he obtained a workshop in the then Silverwings Cafe in Lower Road. The business of repairing radios and electrical appliances flourished and he expanded and moved to the present site. Chinnor and District Radio Service as it was then called grew from strength to strength over the next 20 years. At its peak the business was quite sizeable for a then very rural area, employing 18 full-time staff, it had 4 vans in use and 500 TV's on rental to customers over a very wide area roughly a 20 miles radius.

After this period of consolidation and growth C. Nicholls, being a man of foresight, decided, due to the changing character of the TV and electrical retailing field and also the expected rapid growth of the surrounding counties, to diversify into other retail goods.

This was accomplished over the next 10 years, during which time the building was greatly enlarged to its present size and modern state to accommodate a very wide range of goods including at one time a Child's Nursery Department and a Lady's Fashion Department, both of which were phased out after trial periods. During this time a new shop front was fitted and the name changed officially to 'Nicholls'.

After 30 years in business C. Nicholls decided it was time for change and to open the business to fresh blood and new ideas. Consequently Peter Gibbons while on holiday from Canada and looking for a suitable business to purchase decided to take the plunge and took over in September 1977.

On acquiring the business it was decided to make better use of the available space and sub-let to increase customer traffic flow. This resulted in Windmill Foods, Pauline at Nicholls Ladies Hair Fashions, Smarty Pants Boutique and ironically enough reverting full circle to the old days Telefix TV Sales and Service.

On the retail side the business was ticking over quite nicely but the buying power was insufficient to compete with the High Street Multiples. It was decided to cut prices nevertheless and to take a lower profit and hope it would prove successful. It did, turnover rose rapidly in the next few years in all departments until it was quite capable of competing with the opposition on most lines. A new line is taken on each year if possible, last year ladders were stocked and this year footwear was introduced, both very successfully.

Promotions are held regularly during the year, especially with toys at Christmas, where the multiples are undercut. One of the highlights of the year is when Father Christmas visits, no charge is made for children to visit his grotto and receive a toy or sweets. This has proved very popular with people because they do not have to travel into town and consequently it grows in popularity every year.

It has also become a recent policy of Nicholls to reduce their expenditure on local paper advertising and with the revenue saved they are able to encourage local societies by providing shields for competitions, e.g. *The Table Tennis Club, Chinnor Boys Football Club, The Horticultural Society and The Angling Society.*

As time progresses and the area changes with it, hopefully the businesses on Nicholls corner (as it is now described in the bus timetables) will go from strength to strength continuing to serve and play a vital part in the community.

