

# 1920-1970

## SUTERS FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY

"YOU could fire a machine gun down the High Street and you wouldn't hit anybody . . ." Mr. Clarence Suter was recalling the days when he and his father set up their business in Slough.

He had just spent 14 months recovering from a war wound inflicted when he served in the 61st Division with the Gloucesters.

As soon as he was out of hospital, he and his father, Mr. G. W. Suter, looked around for a drapery business near London.

Until 1918 his father had owned a drapery business in Ledbury, Herefordshire.

In fact the Suter family has been in the drapery trade since the 1700's, and before that are believed to have been hatters in Nottinghamshire.

In September, 1920 they acquired from Andrews and Son, numbers 101 and 103 High Street, Slough, and number 104 on the other side of the street.

At that time Slough was a relatively sleepy town, but was already showing signs of becoming an important industrial area.

For it was in May the same year that Slough Trading Estate began. "It was known as Slough Dump," Mr. Suter remembers.

When the business started there were six assistants, all of them girls, and it was not until five years later

## The saga began with six girls and a sleepy High Street



Suters original shop in 1920

that the first man was employed.

Today Suters employ 450 men and women and the shop which began as a small draper's has expanded to a full scale departmental store, the only one in the town.

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

In 1929 it became a private limited company and in the same

year the business further expanded and purchased the Uxbridge firm, W. Coad Limited which occupied the present site of Suters Uxbridge store.

With the tremendous growth of Slough in the years

immediately before the Second World War it became obvious that there would be more and more people wanting to buy from Suters and soon the store would

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## The Suter Saga

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decision they were fortified by a confidence in the future of Slough which had continued during nearly 20 years in the town.

Thoughts of further expansion to solve the space problem had to be temporarily forgotten during the war.

But when in 1946 Frank and John rejoined the business the five directors again took up their plans for a bigger store.

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Soon after this, the head of the firm, Mr. G. W. Suter, became seriously ill. Although it was his first illness, it proved tragically to be his last.

His motto had been — "Stick to the business and the business will stick to you."

The immediate post war years saw a

marked increase in the population of Slough and its surrounding areas and the shop became more and more crowded.

The need for a bigger Suters became acute, but it was not until 1959 that the mammoth rebuilding scheme began.

It was undertaken in three phases so that the shop could remain open to customers through the three and a half year building programme. On October 4, 1962, the spacious new departmental store was opened by actor Robert Beatty.

Suters would probably have had its new store long before this if it had not been for post-war building restrictions and the "credit squeeze."

And if their plans had gone according to schedule, the cost of development would not have been nearly as high.

"We wanted it to



Suters and Slough High Street as it was in the post war years.

BY COURTESY OF GREVILLE STUDIOS.

be double the size of the store we have now," said Mr. Clarence Suter. "We bought up land in Wellington Street and Mackenzie Street and took over several neighbouring shops with a view to building a really large store."

But they never obtained the necessary planning permission to extend the business into all these areas. Most of the

land was later compulsorily purchased by the council to be used in the redevelopment of Slough.

Suters was the first shop in the town to be equipped with escalators. When they were installed, all traffic had to be diverted from this part of the High Street

And it was the first store in the country to use television scanners as a security device. Suters had

this effective anti-theft system installed throughout their various departments in 1967.

But in spite of setbacks encountered through the lack of planning permission to extend the store as had been envisaged by Suters directors, the company is constantly evaluating ideas for its development, its merchandise selection and its service to customers.