

# 1969 Axminster Carpets feature, as published by 'Axminster News'

## Introduction

On 14 February 1969 'Axminster News' published a full-page feature headed 'People who make Axminsters', comprising 48 'pen portraits' and photographs of a selection of employees of Axminster Carpets Ltd, with a brief history of the company to that point.

That brief history follows below, followed by the 48 'pen portraits' (without the photographs, unfortunately). The 'pen portraits' are arranged here in a different order, grouping the various skills and trades together, after the senior managers.

Small changes, to expand abbreviations and to amend the punctuation to suit this format better have been made, but otherwise the words remain as written in 1969.

## A brief history of the Company

We who live in Axminster know it as our Home Town, set in very pleasant surroundings, but the name of our town is a household word throughout the civilised world. Axminster to the world means carpets. For this fame we have to thank the originator of the Axminster carpet, Mr Thomas Whitty, who in the mid 1700's developed a loom producing a carpet with a hand-knotted pile. His personal diary records that on May Day 1755 the first Axminster from Axminster was woven. Thomas Whitty's carpets became world famous, but in 1836 the business was disposed of and Axminster was without a carpet factory for 101 years.

In 1936, Mr W H Dutfield, then the senior director of the firm of Dutfield and Quayle Ltd of Kidderminster, decided that carpets could be made equally as well in more congenial surroundings. He wrote to the Town Clerk of Axminster, the late Mr Cecil Forward, asking if the Council would welcome the re-introduction of carpet manufacturing, and if there was likely to be local interest. The reply, by return post, indicated an enthusiastic interest. A meeting was arranged at which Mr R J Luff and the late Mr S O Gill were present, and in a matter of weeks the company Axminster Carpets Ltd was formed, with Messrs Dutfield, Gill and Luff as directors. Mr Dutfield brought down with him from Kidderminster Mr Norman Humphries and Mr Jim Wright, and shortly afterwards Mr Cecil Hitchcock joined the firm. All three are members of the Board of Directors.

The factory was erected on the green field known as Gamberlake, and the first loom produced carpet again in Axminster in May 1937. Gradual expansion took place until the outbreak of war in 1939. Carpet manufacture ceased, and Capstan lathes, centreless grinders and a full complement of machinery for the production of aircraft components was installed.

At the conclusion of hostilities the looms re-commenced, and our men came back to us to be faced with the difficulty of obtaining living accommodation. Some had married during the war years and it seemed likely that we might because of the housing problem lose many of them. The Company, therefore, proposed a scheme for self-help, and 20 employees banded together and, with materials supplied free by the Company, built for themselves 20 bungalows now known as Dragons Mead.

After the war the sales policy of the Company was changed. Previously we had dealt with the wholesale trade but now confined supplies to the retail furnisher only. The Company developed rapidly and extensions to the buildings were erected at regular intervals and new looms and ancillary plant obtained. From our small beginning of 12 narrow looms we had within a period of 25 years (which included six years of war) established a plant making carpets from 18 inches width up to 12 feet wide. In 1958 a modern canteen was erected and is fully equipped to supply employees with anything they require from a snack to a full course dinner. During the after war period it was realised that some form of pension scheme was essential as many of our employees had been with us since our inception in 1937. The first scheme was inaugurated in 1951 and gave a pension for each year of service, varying in value according to the annual salary of the employee. It has now been found possible to extend the original scheme to the highest limits allowed by the Inland Revenue, and so, in addition to a substantial life cover during his working years, each employee can look forward to the comfort of a pension commensurate with his wage at retirement.

To give our many customers the maximum service we have a large fleet of pantechicons making regular deliveries all over the country, and these large grey vehicles with the familiar 'A' symbol are a common sight in Axminster.

No progressive company can afford to mark time and plans are being prepared for further extensive development, not only for actual manufacturing plant but also to develop the other departments to improve, wherever possible, the first-class service so essential in this competitive trade.

### **Directors**

**WILLIAM HENRY DUTFIELD, Managing Director**

The chief instigator behind the amazing growth of the Company and its continued success. Built up the derelict woollen plant at Buckfast into an up-to-date producer of our woollen yarn. Was a prime mover in the formation of our interests in New Zealand, Marlin Carpets Ltd, of which he is also Managing Director.

**REGINALD J LUFF, Director**

Together with Mr S O Gill was a Founder Director of the Company, and has always taken an active part in the policy of the Company, more particularly on the financial side.

**ERNEST O GILL, Director**

Mr Gill is the son of a Founder Director of the Company, Mr S O Gill. He has always shown a keen interest in the development of the Company, and in July 1962 he was appointed a Director. On amalgamation with Buckfast Spinning Co Ltd, he was also elected to their Board.

**NORMAN H HUMPHRIES, Director and Sales Manager**

Came from Kidderminster with Mr Dutfield on the formation of the Company. After the war, returned to Axminster and assumed responsibility for the sales side of the business. Appointed a Director in January 1953, and of Buckfast Spinning Co Ltd, on amalgamation. Captained Devon at Cricket and obtained an England trial for rugby.

**REGINALD JAMES WRIGHT, Director and Works Manager**

Came from Kidderminster with Mr Dutfield on the formation of the Company as Works Manager, and during the war held the A.I.D. Stamp and being responsible and mainly

engaged in producing aircraft parts. Appointed Director in 1958 and also of Buckfast on amalgamation. Takes a great interest in all ball games.

**CECIL T HITCHCOCK, Director and Secretary**

Joined the Company in May 1937, and was responsible for all the clerical work and accounts. During the war served as Flight Lieutenant in the RAF Training Branch. Was appointed Secretary of the Company in August 1946, and a Director in July 1962, and a Director of Buckfast Spinning Co Ltd on amalgamation.

### **Production managers and foremen**

**SIMON J DUTFIELD, Assistant Works Manager**

The youngest member of the Management but one of the most active. Educated at Blundells School he joined the Company, visited several friendly competitors and then served with Marlin Carpets Ltd in New Zealand, learning the duties of a Works Manager under Mr Robin Morton. Returned to England in 1968 and immediately commenced his duties as Assistant Works Manager.

**FRED CHANT, Shift Foreman**

Joined the Company in 1937. During the war he served in the Royal Navy, reaching the rank of Petty Officer. On return to civvy life he re-commenced in the weaving section, reaching top grade on a 12 feet wide loom. Within recent years appointed Shift Foreman.

**D MACDONALD, Shift Foreman**

Left driving for Perry & Perry to join the Company in 1950. During the war he served in the Royal Marines. Trained in the weaving section to top level, and within recent years appointed Shift Foreman.

### **Designer**

**GRAHAM AYRES, Head Designer**

Came to the Company from Colyton Grammar School and joined the Design department, where he gained valuable experience under Mr J H Dutfield, our Head Designer and father of the Managing Director. On the death of Mr Dutfield, Graham was appointed Head Designer, and produces a continual flow of 'best sellers'.

### **Weavers**

**REG DAVIS, 12 feet Weaver**

Joined the firm in 1937 and commenced training in the weaving shed. During the war served in the Devonshire Regiment as C.Q.M.S. Instructor. Returned to weaving and reached wide looms within a short time, Became senior weaver on his shift.

**BERT WHITE, 12 feet Weaver**

Entered the Company's employment in 1937 and trained through the weaving section. In the war served with the Royal West Kents. On demobilisation continued weaving, and progressed from narrow looms to top grade, 12 feet wide.

**JACK STUCKEY, 12 feet Weaver**

Joined the firm in 1938 and entered the Weaving Department. In the war served in the Royal Artillery and REME. Returned to weaving and soon attained to wide looms and is now on 12 feet wide.

WILF TRATT, 12 feet Weaver

Joined the Company in 1938 having previously been well known as a Traffic Warden. He joined the building section and assisted in erection of the extensions. Later transferred back to weaving and is now a top hand on 12 feet wide.

LES BROOM, 12 feet Weaver

Came to us from school in 1939. At outbreak of war went into forestry and later joined the Army. Returned to weaving and reached top grade on 12 feet wide loom. Married one of our girls, Esther Aggett, 1 child, a boy.

FRANK STOCKER, 12 feet Weaver

Joined the Company from school in 1939 and during the war served in the Royal Navy as Leading Stoker. Returned to the weaving section and progressed steadily to top grade. In 1949 married one of our girls, Peggy Bishop, who had actually been a weaver herself. Two children, a boy and a girl.

TOM HISCOX, 12 feet Weaver

Joined the firm in 1939 having previously been with R J Luff Ltd. Returned to weaving and soon made the grade to 12 feet loom. Is Chairman of Axminster Conservative Association and a member of the Special Constabulary.

LES TERRY, Weaver

Joined us in 1941 and did his war service in our engineering shop making aeroplane parts. After the war entered the weaving shop and eventually worked a plain loom, maintaining the production of 'Plains', which played such an important part in our success after the war.

STEVE HINE, 12 feet Weaver

Came to the Company in 1947, having served in the Devonshire Regiment. Commenced creeling in the weaving shed, and soon progressed to weaving on 3/4 looms, and is now fully qualified on 12 feet wide.

### **Loom tuners**

WILF HENLEY, Senior Tuner

Came to us in 1939 from Colyton Grammar School and until call-up worked in the office. Served in the Coldstream Guards with rank of Sergeant. On his return to Axminster decided against office work and trained as a Tuner under the late R C Porter.

TOM JARVIS, Senior Tuner

Unable to join the Forces, Tom came to the firm in 1941 and was on work of national importance in our engineering shop. At the conclusion of hostilities he was trained as a Tuner and soon acquired full responsibility for a shift.

ARNOLD SPARKS, Senior Tuner

Was with the Company for a short while before he was called up. Served with the Royal Artillery. Took advantage of the Government Training Scheme for a course of engineering

and then came back to our Machine Shop. After a couple of years transferred to Tuning. In 1947 married one of our girl employees, Winifred Hodge.

**BOB NEALE, Senior Tuner**

Took employment with us in 1948, straight from school. Became Tuner apprentice and served for seven years when he was appointed one of the Shift Tuners.

### **Other technical staff**

**GEORGE PAVEY, Manager, Warping Department**

Deserted gardening to work in the factory, joining us in 1938. Worked for short time in weaving shed and then transferred to Beamer. Now in charge of Warping Department, with a staff of three.

**ROSE FORD, Senior Winder**

Came to us in 1937 and was our first female employee. Has worked in the Winding Department all the time she has been with us. Left when war was declared, was employed by NAAFI.

**JOYCE THOMAS (née Arthur), Manageress, Picking and Finishing**

Came to us from school in 1937 and worked as a picker. After the war returned to Picking and Finishing and later appointed Manageress of the Department. In 1962 went to New Zealand to our Associate Company, Marlin Carpets Ltd, and trained their workers.

**BERT HUNT, Foreman Shearer**

Commenced with the Company in 1940, having previously been in agriculture. Has been responsible for all shearing for many years, both for narrow and wide carpets. In 1941 married one of our girls, Gertrude Larcombe.

**GLADYS ARTHUR, Senior Passer**

Joined the Company in 1940 from school. Immediately after the war when we had girl weavers Gladys was on creeling, but later transferred to the Picking and Passing Department.

**TERRY ISIT, Manager Making-up Department**

Came from London to Devon and joined the Company in 1961. For a short while in the weaving shed as creeler and then transferred to Despatch Department. Some 5 years ago took responsibility for the Seaming and Making-up Department and, now has a staff of four under his control.

**BILL HINE, Foreman, Stamping Department**

Came to us in 1945 from the Army, being disabled. Commenced in the machine shop and then transferred to the Stamping Department. Now in charge with a staff of three. In 1950 married Ada Bringes (née Huntley) one of our Pickers.

## **Stores**

FRED ELLIS, Manager, Yarn Store

Joined the Company in 1939. During the War served in the RAF. After hostilities returned to weaving until an accident caused the loss of one eye. Then transferred to Stores Department, and later took responsibility for Woollen Yarn supplies and loom programming.

GORDON WILLEY, Assistant Stores Manager

Came to the Company in 1937 from Websters Garage, and trained in the weaving section, reaching weaver status on 54 inch width loom. During the war was in our engineering department, and afterwards returned to weaving. In 1955 transferred to the Stores Department, and eventually appointed Assistant Manager.

DOUGLAS HODGE, Assistant Stores

His employment with us commenced in 1942, and until call-up was on war work in our engineering department. After war service with the Devonshire Regiment returned to lathe work in the maintenance department. Changed to weaving, reaching 10 feet 6 inches standard. Now acting as Assistant Stores.

## **Despatch and delivery**

FRANK WELCH

Joined the Company in 1937 from school and worked in the weaving section. Joined the Devonshire Regiment for the war years with the rank of Acting Sergeant Major. Returned to work in the Despatch Department, and is now in charge with a staff of 40 responsible to him.

BOB BOWLER, Foreman Driver

Commenced with the Company in 1951 as Long Distance Driver. Bob was a 'lone' driver when he first commenced with us, but is now Foreman Driver of a fleet of 10 vehicles which take our carpets to all parts of England.

## **Sales and administrative support**

DAVID SWIFT

Previously worked with his father, but when the latter retired he joined the Company and was in the Despatch Department for 12 months. Then transferred to the Sales Department, and now holds a position as Assistant to the Sales Director.

WINIFRED TRIVETT, Manageress, Showroom

Commenced employment with the Company in 1953 and worked in the Despatch Office, being mainly responsible for all stock records. Approximately 10 years ago was placed in charge of our Showroom

JACK HUNTER

Joined the Company in 1957 having previously been with a London shipping company. Shared responsibility of the rapidly expanding wages department. Now deals with Statistical Records for the Managing Director, day-to-day running of the Pension Fund, and with records and correspondence connected with the Works Manager.

Miss K HANN, Wages Department

Joined the Company in 1948 coming to us from Edwin Dawkins and Son Ltd. Was a shorthand-typist with other general clerical duties. Eventually took over control of the Wages Department, and its rather complicated calculations.

LINDA MARTIN (née North), Assistant Secretary

Commenced as a junior when she left school, and then became a shorthand typist in the Secretarial Department. In 1966 appointed Assistant Secretary and now responsible for all the day-to-day running of many secretarial activities, staff salaries and 'bought ledger'.

URSULA STEER (née Woodman), Accounts

Joined the Company in 1962, coming from London Hospital work, although she was an Uplyme girl. For a short time in Sales Department, and then to Accounts Section. Now in charge of Sales side of the Accounts, with a staff of four. In 1964 married Michael Steer of the Sales Department.

YVONNE PASCO, Invoices

Came to us after the war having been employed by the Ministry of Works stationed in Axminster Garage. After a short time in the factory transferred to the clerical side in the General Office. Took over responsibility for the Invoice Department and is now in charge with a staff of three.

### **Canteen**

LEN & DOREEN CASBOLT, Canteen

For health reasons left London in 1963 where they had their own flourishing restaurant. Originally employed by Peter Merchant Ltd, who ran the canteen, but later accepted responsibility on behalf of the Company. They have plenty of satisfied customers.

### **Building and maintenance**

ALF LAMBERT, Maintenance Engineer

Joined the firm in our first year and during the war served with the Royal Engineers. On his return to civilian life again went on to maintenance, and has continued in charge of all plant maintenance ever since.

COLIN WOODMAN

Came to us as a boy from school in 1937 and has worked throughout on general maintenance. Responsible for the day-to-day attention to the boilers and other 'dirty' work.

BILL BALL, Foreman Builder

Joined the Company in 1946, from Exeter, as a fully qualified bricklayer. Took over supervision of the bungalow scheme, and is now responsible for all building maintenance and erection of extensions.

BOB SIMPSON, Maintenance Carpenter

Joined us in 1946 after serving with Vickers Armstrong's Sub-Contracts Department. In this capacity he had considerable contact with the Company when on war work. He became assistant carpenter to the late Mr C Carter, whose place he took on Mr Carter's retirement. Bob is responsible for all maintenance on the carpentry side.