

WILLIAMS STORES: A GRUNDISBURGH

The people of Grundisburgh - and beyond - think of Williams' Stores as a village institution, the place where one can buy anything from a sherbet-dab to hardware or a new outfit!

Ray and Joyce Williams took over the shop in 1967 from the then owners, Mr and Mrs Nichols; previously it had been owned by Mr M K Lingley, and originally, as shown on many old photos, by Mr A J Savage.

In Mr Savage's day the shop was a grocery store, selling home-cured bacon, ground coffee, loose tea, sugar, rice - these latter being weighed up into blue sugar - paper bags - with a home delivery service by horse and cart and later by motor van.

The shop at that time was also the post office and telephone exchange, and in addition sold drapery, footwear, wool and haberdashery, china and linoleum.

It seems the tradition of the premises as a good general store, meeting the needs of the community, was begun then.

Although the Williams changed the style of the shop somewhat, selling off the grocery side and installing electrical goods and hardware plus gardening items and fuel, the tradition of serving the needs of the village continues.

"I found it at Williams"

Often one hears comments like "I searched Ipswich for such and such, and then came home and found it at Williams".

In the short space of time in which I was talking to Mrs Williams for this article, she was able to satisfy customers' requests for knitting wool, an inexpensive birthday card, a mousetrap, hinges, reading glasses and a pail with a lid.

Another very valuable service Mr and Mrs Williams offer to the community is their support for village activities. Where you get the key to hire the tennis courts or to get into the church? Where are tickets for GADS' plays sold?

The shop windows are usually plastered with posters advertising events and items for sale. No charge is made for this - a contribution to the Lifeboat tin on the counter is suggested instead.

Prior to their purchase of Williams' Stores, the couple were renting the shop area of Commerce House, selling radios, televisions and electrical goods. At this time, they lived in Waldringfield as the living quarters at Commerce House were occupied by Mrs Felgate, a former teacher from Grundisburgh School, where she had taught for 50 years.

When Mrs Felgate died in 1961 the Williams bought the property and moved in with the three daughters they then had (Claire, Julie and Diana). The family was swelled later by the addition of another daughter, Rosie.

Grundisburgh born

Joyce Williams was herself born in Grundisburgh, in a nursing home in Meeting Lane. Although at that time most babies were born at home, Mrs Williams was the child of 'older parents' - her father as a Royal Marine had seen action in the Boer War.

They kept the Barley Mow off-licence on the corner of what is now Maltings Lane and The Street; but when Mrs Williams was two years old, the off-licence was closed and the family moved to Burgh.

The then Joyce Cage attended school in Grundisburgh until she was 13, when she went to the Rural Pupil Teacher's Centre at Wickham Market, cycling the 16 mile round trip daily. At 15 she started her teacher training, which meant spending some time each week at her local school and some studying.

It was during this time that

whom she describes as a 'fantastic teacher'.

At the end of these three years Joyce was successful in the examination and became an 'uncertificated' teacher before going on to teacher training college in Hertfordshire to complete her training.

Met at a dance

Mr and Mrs Williams met at a dance at the Crown Hotel in Woodbridge.

Ray describes himself as 'a Norfolk Dumpling', his parents ('they were Nomads'!) having moved to Martlesham in his youth and from where he joined first, the Fleet Air Arm (he had thoughts of becoming a pilot), and then the Navy - in communications.

During his service time Ray visited Australia and would have liked to have settled there, but Joyce had no desire to leave Suffolk. They were married in Woodbridge and lived in the town at first, in one room and 'with no money'; later they moved to Waldringfield where Mrs Williams continued her teaching career.

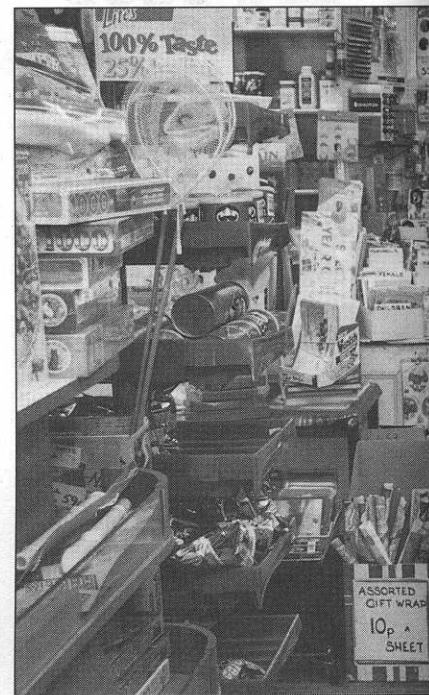
Mr Williams says proudly that his wife was a good teacher who once was offered the headship at Great Glemham - a post she turned down due to family circumstances.

The Williams daughters help out in the store when they can, particularly Claire who works every morning Monday to Thursday.

35 years support

An even more regular helper is Dulcie Kuczerenko who has worked at the shop for 35 years. She came originally to help in the house after Rosie's birth but has become an increasingly vital part of the stores. Her support has been particularly valuable recently during Ray's recent stay in hospital.

There have only been three occasions when Williams



normal opening hours - for Rosie's wedding, Princess Di's funeral last year and for the funeral this summer of Dulcie's husband Tony.

Both Mr and Mrs Williams are concerned for the future of their store, along with many others who are suffering from the onslaught of the supermarkets, and they feel quite pessimistic as to the eventual outcome.

We are all familiar with the slogan 'use it or lose it'. I'm sure I speak for everyone in the hope that Grundisburgh will not lose this particular - and unique - facility, and that Mr and Mrs Williams continue to run their wonderful store.

Madge Nicholas

Clockwise from top right: Burgh resident Sam Shepherd searches for "a scary video"; Ray and Joyce Williams outside their famous stores; The shop as it was before the extension was built in 1901 and before the small extension displaying hardware was added (the mail box is still there, inside the shop); James and Jonathon Farnhill from Otley try on wellington boots:

