

OWEN  
OWEN



# SCENE

CHRISTMAS 1979

## Greetings from the Chairman



*Each year brings its own problems and surprises, and 1979 has been no exception.*

*Trade has been difficult in both the UK and in Canada, but all our stores should be extremely busy in the vital weeks between now and Christmas.*

*This will call for an extra effort from all of us. May I thank you for it, and on behalf of all the directors, wish you and your families a very happy and well deserved Christmas break.*

JOHN NORMAN

## CHRISTMAS IN ALL ITS MANY TRADITIONS

Christmas . . . a time for merry-making, good will to all men and a bountiful table. For most Britons the pattern remains unchanged as they rejoice, in true tradition, the most celebrated event of the year.

Think of Christmas and you conjure up a picture of angelic faces gathered round a glittering tree raising their voices to heaven; of fat turkeys nestling in a bed of roast potatoes and of Santa Claus struggling down the chimney with a sackful of gifts.

This is Christmas British-style. But how would you fare with a meal of squid, ravioli or perhaps cabbage rolls?

Thousands of miles away Christmas is celebrated with the same joviality, but there are differences, as Niagara Square's Personnel Manager, Mrs. Joanne Chrapko explains:

"Now, don't be alarmed! This is not another one of those 'Bah! Humbug!' type of stories. Father Christmas is alive and well in Canada. It's just that over here he wears many different hats.

Canada is a vast and beautiful land and never does she look any prettier than at Christmas. A soft, white blanket of snow covers the ground and ice-laden trees shimmer in the moonlight.

But Christmas in Canada means different things to different people. People from all parts of the globe

have emigrated to Canada and they have brought with them the Christmas traditions indigenous to their native lands.

Multi-culturalism is encouraged in Canada. In every city and town there are social clubs designed to keep the language and customs of foreign natives alive. Hence, Canadians celebrate Christmas in a variety of ways.

Naturally, with so many of us being of British extraction, many spend Christmas much as you might do. The Christmas tree becomes the focal point in the house and is usually placed in the living room or the recreation room.

However, it is now becoming quite common for the entire family to spend a Sunday before Christmas travelling through the countryside, looking for the best in Christmas tree farms. You are transported to the bush by a horse-drawn sleigh

and from there, wander about the vast acreage looking for your own special tree. Of course, you've brought your own axe or saw to do the chopping down. The whole family (dog included) then returns to the starting point where hot soup, cooked in a large kettledrum over an open fire, is served.

Father Christmas (Santa Claus to us) arrives in style in Canada. Traditionally, he first surfaces in Toronto, Ontario with Eaton's Santa Claus parade. (Eaton's is a large, national department chain). The streets are lined with hordes of eager faces, some of whom have travelled hundreds of miles to catch a brief glimpse of their old, white-bearded friend.

Floats, majorettes, clowns and marching bands from all over North America accompany him on the many miles of his journey. Millions of others throughout Canada and parts of the United States watch his arrival in the comfort of their own homes via television.

Not to be outdone, many other cities and towns have their own Santa Claus parades on the Saturdays prior to Christmas.

Homes throughout the country, by mid-December, have bright Christmas lights dotting the edges of their roofs and, in some cases, a large, illuminated Santa can be seen tottering at a chimney side.

Longer shopping hours give the Christmas shopper a more leisurely and relaxed atmosphere. The frantic crowds of British stores are unknown to us here.

Traditional Christmas foods can vary greatly in Canada. Many of us partake of the normal turkey and all the trimmings. Meanwhile, our Polish neighbours may be embarking on their traditional feast; a fifteen course banquet with such things as pierogi, cabbage rolls, fish and lots of sour cream. On the other hand, our Italian friends will be sitting down to a huge meal of squid, lobster, gnocchi, ravioli and tasty sweets, to mention just a few.

But there is one common bond uniting us all. Christmas is a time of joy, fun and merriment, a time to share with friends, relatives and neighbours, a time to partake of the spirit of Christmas, each of us in our own traditional manner".

## HARD GOING AT HALFWAY STAGE

GROUP trading in the six months to the end of July resulted in a pre-tax loss of £210,000 against a profit of £95,000 in 1978.

### UNITED KINGDOM:

In the United Kingdom, half-year sales showed an increase of 14.4% on 1978, but much of this increase came from the inclusion of the Slough and Uxbridge stores, and many of the other stores had sales increases of well under 10% — and that is much below the increases in wage rates and salaries, as well as the rate of inflation affecting our general expenses (rates, heating, lighting etc).

The greatest sales difficulties occurred in February when everything was still disrupted by the road transport

strike and appalling weather, and in the six weeks which followed the June budget, when the increased rates of VAT led to a very sharp drop in the level of sales. This was not peculiar to us, but was an experience shared by most other stores.

This trend has continued into the second half-year, with sales still running below the levels needed to meet constantly rising costs. That is why, in October, we have had to make further reductions in operating expenses to bring them more into balance with our sales income.

Not all is gloom. In many stores we have made worthwhile improvements to layouts and facilities over the year and in many departments we have further improved ranges of merchandise.

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HAPPY CHRISTMAS HAPPY CHRISTMAS HAPPY CHRISTMAS HAPPY CHRISTMAS HAPPY CHRISTMAS



## Worldwide Buying isn't all glamour



Mr. Henry Cotton's 27 years with the company — more than 20 of which have been in buying — have proved to him that his job couldn't be further from its glamorous image. One of the five Owen Owen buying directors for the last three years, Mr. Cotton has recently moved from his position in charge of Owen Owen's Household Division to overall buying director for TJs. This makes his twelfth move within the company since joining T.J. Hughes as a graduate trainee in 1952.

Bitterly disappointed by his rejection from Dartmouth Naval College at the age of 13, the young Cambridge graduate was not going to let his new ambitions in retailing be thwarted. He was turned down by Owen Owen before he applied to TJs for a trainee vacancy; and he never looked back.

Mr. Cotton is very conscious of all the opportunities which confronted him as a young man, and says how different things might have been if his father hadn't insisted that he joined the army rather than go down the mines. He served as a drill instructor in the Royal Artillery for his national service.

But one aspect of his life would have remained whatever career he chose — love of his native Liverpool. Despite working as far afield as Canada, in the Main Robinson store, and from Southampton to Preston in England, Mr. Cotton has only bought one house — his home for 23 years — in Grassendale Park.

At work, responsibilities are somewhat heavier, with buying trips, new contacts to make, markets to be assessed, and orders to be made up to 18 months in advance. It's a job that grows with you, through experience and contact. "As the company has grown the scope for change and expanding our merchandise ranges has widened", says Mr. Cotton.

While in Canada Mr. Cotton took the opportunity to explore as much as he could, including the Rockies, Alaska, Guatemala and Mexico. "I adore travelling but always want to see the more unusual places. One of my ambitions is to travel on the Trans-Siberian railway".

But when it comes to travelling the world for business, life is rather different. "The week or 10-day visit is exhausting — working every hour of the day, and travelling endlessly to find suppliers, who may be scattered hundreds of miles apart", says Mr. Cotton.

It's easy to imagine that buyers live in a world of their own, divorced from those who are selling, but Mr. Cotton disagrees: "I see buying as a service to the stores and we must provide what they need when they need it. If there are problems with a line, buyers — including myself — work on the department, talk to the customers and see for ourselves what the problems are".

According to Mr. Cotton there is a strong resemblance between the skills of his job and his life-long hobby — the theatre. Mr. Cotton has been Chairman of the Liverpool Playhouse for the last six years, and was joint founder of the city's Twenty Players amateur dramatic group, which existed from 1951 to 1964 to provide funds for Forces' charities.

And as if all these responsibilities and world travel weren't enough, he finds time, every October, to relax in "complete heaven" — drifting along the English canals at three m.p.h. in a hired boat. "We have seen most of the country in the most peaceful and enjoyable way".

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# Seasonal chance to improve again

All we need is some uplift in the national economy, and a really good period of Christmas trading to get profitability moving back in the right direction — a profitability which is essential for the continuing development of the group.

## ROBINSON'S

In Canada, there was an increased loss on the first six months as compared with the previous year. Six of the stores reduced their half-year loss, but the total trading had to take account of a considerable loss made by the North Waterloo store which opened in August, 1978, and has not yet had time to develop trade to a profitable level.

Sales in the Canadian stores have also been adversely affected by a change in merchandising policy. In previous years there had been many special discount events involving high costs in reductions — but this year these have been discontinued so as to establish trading on a firmer base less reliant on pure price appeal.

The new policy, has, however, meant that sales growth has been very much restricted, and this adverse affect will continue through to the year end.

In Canada, as in the UK, it has been necessary to make considerable savings in operating costs to match the level of sales income.

## PLUMB CONTRACTS

Plumb Contracts again had a good six months trading, with profitability ahead of the previous year. Their work has continued to include a number of major projects for some of the country's leading names.

The full-year's results, to be reported next April, will depend as

always on the course of trading in the critical months of November and December, and on the extent to which we are able to limit our expenses. (In the UK, at any rate, we shall also have the chance to put on big increases in January against the very poor January 1979 figures — always provided we do not have a recurrence of the January problems in industry).

## FACTS ABOUT THE STAFF SHARE PLAN

Did you know . . .

1) That a study was made in America of a sample group of companies which operated staff share schemes and a sample group of similar companies which did not operate them. Over the 18 years between 1952 and 1969, the companies with share schemes were much more successful. They:

- increased their earnings per share at nearly double the rate
- doubled the stock market price of their shares at nearly double the rate.

2) That under 5% of the adult population of Great Britain directly owns shares in British industry and commerce. Members of the Staff Share Scheme (who number more than 1600 people without taking account of those who have retired since 1974) are now part of that 5%.  
3) That the Owen Owen Staff Share Ownership Scheme introduced in 1974 was among the first of such

schemes to be introduced in Britain.  
4) That the main principle of the Owen Owen Scheme was identical with those adopted by Parliament in 1978 which has led to many additional schemes being introduced.  
5) That the market price of the shares was 35p. in 1974, and that at the end-October 1979 it stands at 95p. In between these dates it has been over 150p. Yesterday's market price can always be found in the financial columns of many newspapers — including the Daily Express, Guardian, Daily Telegraph, Evening Standard and Liverpool Daily Post.

6) That, since 1974, some 450,000 shares in the company have been allocated under the staff share scheme distributions.  
7) That those long service staff who have been receiving share allocations at the maximum rate since 1974 already have 398 shares in trust or in their own name.

## CANADA



A "cup" above the rest. . . Adrian showing one of his many trophies.

## Adrian pedals for the medals

Adrian Prosser has no difficulty at work on time, thanks to his skills as a speed cyclist.

The free-wheeling merchandise receiver from Hamilton Downtown store, entered competitive racing at 14 and has since pedalled to success in many countries throughout the world.

After winning bronze medals in 1972 and '73, Adrian was selected for the Canadian team competing in the World Championships in Warsaw, Poland. He was placed sixth.

His enthusiasm at a peak, he returned home to win gold, silver and bronze medals in the Canadian championships.

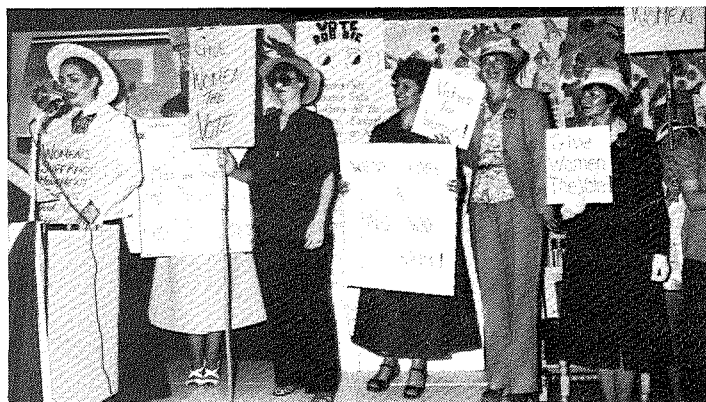
His talents were again recognised and the nimble 19-year-old was selected for a tour of Algeria, later racing in Britain and Ireland where he won several races.

1976 marked his moment of triumph when Adrian was chosen to represent Canada in the Olympics. So, it was with some pride that Robinson's welcomed Adrian to the company a year later.

## Peach of a treat

Personnel staff in Clayton Square sampled a rare treat recently when clerk Mrs. Edith Saitta brought in huge succulent peaches, grown not in sunny Italy, but in her garden in Liverpool.

The real credit for the fruit goes to Mr. Saitta who grew the bountiful tree from a stone. Quite an achievement in our climate.



Department manager Sarah Davies (left) "broadcasts" on behalf of the ladies' fashion departments.

## ELECTION CHALLENGE

In keeping with the current state of the nation, Robinson's Niagara Square chose an election theme to prepare their staff for April's Big Challenge Sale.

Every dollar rung through the register was a vote for Robbie — a humpty dumpty-like gentleman with an extremely long nose — who is the store mascot.

Each department presented a "party manifesto" stating why that department should be tops in the store, and more than 80 staff members turned up to cast their ballots.

The excitement generated by a ballot evening spilled over into challenge sale week when Niagara Square, and Robbie of course, emerged victorious at the close of business on April 28.

# RETIREMENTS

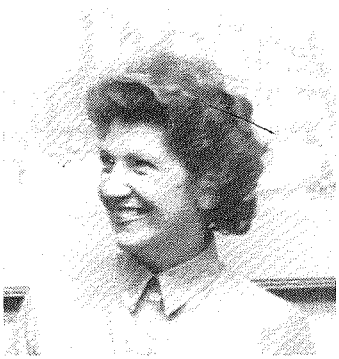


Mr. Alan Broderick retired in May 1979 after 31 years service with the company. He joined in 1947 as assistant secretary and accountant, becoming head office accountant in 1961. In 1967 he was appointed group internal auditor, a position he held until his retirement.

Pictured with Mr. Broderick are, left to right: the Chairman, Mrs. Broderick and Personnel Director, Mrs. Stella Adams.



Mr. Arthur Pye, who joined the company at Lutton Road in 1932 as a porter has retired after 47 years. He was made a dutyman in '46 and a house supervisor in 1967. Pictured with Mr. Pye are Mr. Fleming, Director and General Manager, T.J. Hughes and Miss Rigby, Personnel Manager.



Mrs. Daisy Sir, who joined us at London Road as a sales assistant on the lingerie department, has retired after 28 years service. Daisy held various appointments until her retirement as A.S.M. of the shoe department.



Mr. Haydn Thomas retired this summer after 30 years with our Kidderminster store. At a surprise party many old friends joined his colleagues in wishing him well.

He was presented with a radio cassette player and a set of patio chairs on behalf of the management and staff, and as a token of appreciation for his long service, Mr. K.B. Speddings, general manager, presented him with a carriage clock.

Left to right: Mr. Speddings, Mr. Thomas, Mrs. Mary Ashbery, sales manager, and Mrs. Thomas.

# SERVICE AWARDS

A celebration drink for five members of Brighton store who received their long service awards recently.

Personnel Director Mrs. Stella Adams made a special journey to the seaside town to make the presentations to, left to right: Mrs. Iris Lucas (dress fabrics), Mrs. Margaret Slaney (merchandise office), Miss Betty Cheesman (A.S.M. on accessories and hosiery), Mrs. Molly Wall (A.S.M. on dress fabrics and haberdashery), and Mrs. Iris Ridley (Sales manager for dress fabrics and haberdashery).



# 25 years in Nursing

Twenty-five years ago Mrs. Skinner entered the Coventry store to get a job application form for her husband — and ended up being employed herself — as a nurse.

Nurse Skinner says her job involves more than treating cuts and bruises; it means being a caring social-worker for everyone who comes along wanting advice and help. Then there are many pensioners to visit, which she says adds a satisfying extra dimension to the job.

Home life is busy too, with one daughter, four grandchildren and a husband, who spends all summer touring the country staging gladiator



fighters with Gladiator Productions of Coventry.

Nurse Skinner doesn't just wave him goodbye on the trips, but helps make costumes, cook and do the make-up. She calls herself "a camp follower" but draws the line at actually sleeping under canvas!



Shrewsbury's "Jack-of-all-Trades", Freddy Franks receives his long-service award from Mrs. Stella Adams, Personnel Director. With them are Mr. B. Boycott, General Manager (left) and Mrs. Beryl Franks, who also works in the store in the Linen Department.



# Happy memories for Rosina

Rosina Beard, the Chester employee who carved herself a career despite being deaf and dumb, has received her 25-year service award.

Rosina, whose past achievements include the winning of a certificate and bronze medal for life-saving, started work with Richard Jones and remained after the Chester store was taken over by the company. She was transferred from the workroom to the basement, where

today she is a stockroom assistant.

Says Rosina: "I have many happy memories of the 25 years I have worked in the store and although I have been totally deaf since birth I haven't found my work difficult. This has been made possible by the kindness and great help I have always received from all the staff at the store."

Despite her handicap Rosina leads an active life, and in fact two

years ago passed her driving test. She lives with her husband Ernest, who is also deaf, in Hoole, Chester.

Pictured at the presentation to Rosina of a carriage clock are: left to right — Office Manager Joyce Carruthers, Rosina, Mrs. Gillian Dodd (social worker with the deaf), Personnel Director Mrs. Stella Adams, Mrs. Janet Matthews (Personnel Manager) and Mr. Kenneth Stewart (House Manager).

# A career milestone for Jean

1979 marked a milestone in the career of Miss Jean Crawford from Weston-super-Mare who received her 25-year service award.

Miss Crawford joined the store in September 1954 as Sales manager/department head of children's wear, corsetry and underwear until 1974 when the children's department closed.

Since then she has remained on corsetry and underwear.



MISS JEAN CRAWFORD



# BUYING

AS STANDARDS of living rise, decorative, artistic goods for the home are becoming increasingly more popular. For this reason Gift departments in our stores are part of our "Seven Up" promotion, with the aim of realising potential in the area of luxury home gifts.

Italy, renowned for its beautiful range of leather and alabaster gifts, seemed the obvious place to investigate for an expansion of our range, and so add a touch of distinction to our merchandise.

In February, 1978, some of our gift buyers visited Florence for the first time, purchasing £70,000 worth of alabaster gifts and figurines, leather bottles, globes and fancy candles, which met with instant success in our stores.

The success of the first trip resulted in a return visit to Florence — or Firenze as the Italians call it — in February 1979, not only to repeat the winning lines of 1978 in greater depth, but with a view to introducing new areas of merchandise. In the event, initial orders were placed for about £200,000 widening the current imported ranges and moving into the field of china and porcelain gifts.

During our trip, we visited the Volterra factory which supplies our alabaster. All Italian alabaster and onyx items are produced in this area. Many gift manufacturers in Italy run their businesses on the lines of a cottage industry and this manufacturer was no exception. One employee was seen washing all the excess resin off the alabaster pieces by dipping each piece in turn into an ordinary tin household bucket — no machinery — every piece was cleaned by hand.

The dust remaining after the alabaster items had been shaped was collected from the floor and mixed with a resin to produce "alabastrate", a substance used to make figurines. We are now this manufacturer's biggest single customer, our interpreter tells us (neither the owner, nor any of his employees, can speak a word of English!).

The merchandise bought during our trip was delivered into the central warehouse, Bootle, during May and June and the initial distributions despatched to the stores during August.

Reaction to the new merchandise was tremendous, and before the end of August, a further £50,000 was spent on repeat orders due for delivery at the end of October. One store reported a gentleman buying leather bottles to take home as gifts for his relatives — who live in Italy!!



Sue Ross (left) Gifts Buyer and Buying Controller, Cathy Lewis, examine some of their wares.

## When in Rome you can't always do as you want

Buying trips abroad conjure up a glamorous image to most people but they are always hard work and very tiring. Take a look at the itinerary below:—

### DIARY OF EVENTS:

#### Sunday, February 25, 1979:

7.30 a.m. — Miss Ross and Miss Lewis arrive at Heathrow to find all planes to Pisa have been cancelled.  
8.00 a.m. — They meet up with Mr. Hoelsli, who has managed to obtain one seat only on the flight to Zurich (born lucky!), from where it will hopefully be possible to pick up a connecting flight.

8.15 a.m. — Miss Ross and Miss Lewis manage to obtain standby seats on the Zurich flight.

9.15 a.m. — Leave for Zurich.  
10.30 a.m. — Arrive at Zurich only to find all flights to Pisa are cancelled. (They don't only have strikes in England). There is, however, a flight to Milan at 2.00 p.m.

The hours at the airport were not wasted, but spent studying and working on plans of the ground floor of Redditch.

2.00 p.m. — Leave for Milan.  
2.45 p.m. — Arrive at Milan to find that there would not be a plane to Pisa until 6.00 p.m. (by this time, they are working on the top floor of Redditch).  
6.00 p.m. — Leave for Pisa.  
7.15 p.m. — Arrive at Pisa.  
7.45 p.m. — Board the bus for Florence.  
9.30 p.m. — Arrive in Florence — (a mere 12 hours late).

#### Monday, February 26, 1979

8.30 a.m. — 6.00 p.m. — Gift Fair — no lunch.  
8.00 p.m. — 12.00 p.m. — Working on orders (whilst eating sandwiches).

#### Tuesday, February 27, 1979

8.30 a.m. — 2.00 p.m. — Gift Fair.  
2.00 p.m. — 6.00 p.m. — Suppliers.  
7.30 p.m. — 12.30 p.m. —

Worked on orders — (more sandwiches!!).

#### Wednesday, February 28, 1979

8.30 a.m. — 5.30 p.m. — Suppliers.  
7.30 p.m. — 9.30 p.m. — Special Treat — they ate!!  
9.30 p.m. — 11.30 p.m. — Worked on orders.

#### Thursday, March 1, 1979

9.00 a.m. — 6.00 p.m. — Suppliers.  
7.30 p.m. — 9.30 p.m. — Dinner —

Today was the last day of the "Italian Carnival Week", a day when young Florentines run amok through the streets, spirits high and anything goes (except breaking the law).

Miss Lewis is hit on the head with plastic tubing — Miss Ross is smothered with shaving foam — and Mr. Hoelsli frightens the advancing Florentines with one look!

#### Friday, March 2, 1979

8.30 a.m. — 2.30 p.m. — Visit alabaster factory in Volterra — two hours drive by car.  
2.30 p.m. — 6.00 p.m. — Italian agent's office to

finalise shipping arrangements, delivery days etc.

7.30 p.m. — 1.30 a.m. — Worked on orders (sandwiches again!!).

#### Saturday, March 3, 1979

10.00 a.m. — Arrive at the Italian Airways office to check on the return flight only to find Alitalia again on strike.

11.30 a.m. — Still at the offices — no news —

12.00 a.m. — 4.00 p.m. — Lunch and shopping/sight-seeing.

4.30 p.m. — Back at hotel awaiting telephone call for information of flight.

#### Sunday, March 4, 1979

1.30 a.m. — Telephone call from Italian Airways — flight available from Pisa to Rome at 7.30 a.m.

8.00 a.m. — Leave Pisa for Rome — on the only plane leaving Pisa that day — a school outing to Rome!! The three of them with 60 excited Italian 10-year-olds at 8.00 a.m. on a Sunday!!

9.15 a.m. — Arrive at Rome.  
11.30 a.m. — Flight to London — via Libyan Airways (the only one available).

Was Miss Lewis' dream the previous night — of being hijacked — becoming a reality?

Armed bodyguards aboard — they left for London — enjoying on the way a lunch of cold ravioli washed down with vintage coca-cola (no alcohol carried).

1.45 p.m. — Arrive Heathrow — only to be interrogated by customs officers — this delay resulting in them nearly missing the connecting flight to Liverpool.

2.30 p.m. — Leave Heathrow for Liverpool.



Wedding day smiles from Mrs. Christine Glaister (nee Roughton) central buyer for baby and girls' wear, who married earlier this year.



Mrs. Diane Charnock (nee Wainwright), central buyer for household linens presents a charming picture on her wedding day, earlier this year.



## Historical dining place

Following the example of some of our other stores, Shrewsbury recently replaced its 52-seater Quickfayre restaurant with a smart 76-seater situated in a part of the building, which is steeped in history.

The room dates back to 1598, and used to be called Cartwright's Mansion. Furnishing has been carefully chosen to complement the existing architecture and style.

It has taken a small army of builders, carpenters, electricians and painters since July to complete the new restaurant, but it was worth it!

### CROSSWORD SOLUTION

**Across:**  
1. G.M.; 2. Owen; 5. Owen; 7. S.M.; 10. Madames; 12. Thesian; 13. Linen; 14. Song; 15. Bah; 16. A.C.N.; 17. Rush; 20. Coty; 21. Account; 22. Fire; 24. Good; 28. Way; 30. Sip; 31. Near; 32. Obese; 34. Insight; 35. Lifters; 37. Hard; 38. Ware; 39. Us.

**Down:**  
1. Gambler; 3. Womens; 5. Option; 6. Energy; 8. Monthly; 9. Adonis; 10. Diablo; 14. Scholar; 18. Ace; 19. One; 22. Fashion; 26. Dresses; 27. Enigma; 28. Wanted; 29. Confer; 33. Flow.

## Model idea lands £1,000 for charity

The Newport store should consider setting up a model agency after the success of their last fashion show in September.

Run in conjunction with a local hairdresser, the event was held at Tiffany's and raised £1,000 for the children's ward of Newport hospital.

The fashion models — all from the sales floor — displayed clothes from Rare Set and their own fashion departments. And to complement the glamorous outfits were glamorous heads; 40 different styles modelled by the hairstylists.

The event was covered by local press and attended by the town's Mayor and Mayoress, and the Bishop of Monmouth.



Mrs. Margaret Dewar, Personnel Manager of the Canadian stores interrupted her Summer holiday to visit Stafford House.

Mrs. Dewar was born in Dudley, West Midlands and moved to Canada 28 years ago.