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## THE HISTORY OF AN OSSETT COMPANY: 1953 - 2005

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**RGS PATTERN BOOK COMPANY LTD.** and associated companies: Display Maintenance Ltd., RGS Transfer Prints Ltd., RGS Chromatone Ltd., Shaw Peace Ltd., MGL Carpet Finishers Ltd.

**Directors at 2005:** Richard D. Glover, Roy Harvey, Nigel Glover, John Windsor, Barrie Fitchett, Fred Whyte.

**Principle addresses:** Gedham Mills, Ossett and Old Bank Mills, Earlsheaton.

I started business the very next day after demobilization from the Royal Air Force in 1953. I served for nearly two years in the Libyan Desert, on the Castel Benito staging post to the Far East: the Korean War, the various troubles in Middle East, Egypt and the Mau Mau in Kenya. Hundreds of UK troops were billeted in nearby Tripoli to reinforce these theatres of war, and were ready to be airlifted from our base when wanted.

However, I had been taking typography and design courses whilst in the RAF, which stood me in good stead to start my own business, together with David Clayton, a graphic designer, who worked in an advertising agency in Leeds. The company was at first named Clayton and Glover Studios.

My partner and I started the business in a small shop of my fathers in Kingsway, Ossett, with fifty pounds given by my mother to buy various bits of equipment. We designed and drew posters and show cards for the local shops and businesses. The first two, being Barbara Newmarch's shoe shop and the Sutcliffe Moulded Rubber Co. One of our main earners was selling advertising space on dartboards, from local shops and businesses, which were to be given free to public houses. The boards were fitted into nicely made wooden cases, made by a local undertaker. The adverts, hand drawn and lettered, were placed each side of the open doors. I was glad my partner did the selling for this job, as it was not 'my cup of tea'.

In 1954, our turnover for the year was the magnificent sum of £510, and our profit of £94. Our drawings were £2 per week. One year later, for the year ending 1955, our sales were £1400, and profit £556 and our drawings, nearly £3 per week. Our liability with the bank was huge at 13/1d. We were learning and improving. By 1960, sales were nearly £20.000, and profit nearly £7.000.

Travelling around the district we were asked by G.C. Spedding Ltd. of Heckmondwike, if we could produce sample cards for the druggeting they produced. As money was a little tight, we would accept anything. This work really became the way forward for us for the next fifty years and more. We had to design and get printed 20,000 small folders, printed by my future wife's company - Shaw Peace Ltd. Then cut and stick eight carpet samples onto each card, cutting with only an old office hand-guillotine. Then stick them onto the cards. The whole of my family were involved, with grandparent and parents helping out. We sold these for the princely sum of 1.5d (yes! one and a half old pennies) each. A loss was made, but it made me realise we had to price jobs properly in the future.

In 1957, my partner David left the business, having the thought that he could earn a better living back in advertising. A few years later, David sadly died from a bad asthma attack, leaving a wife and two young children.

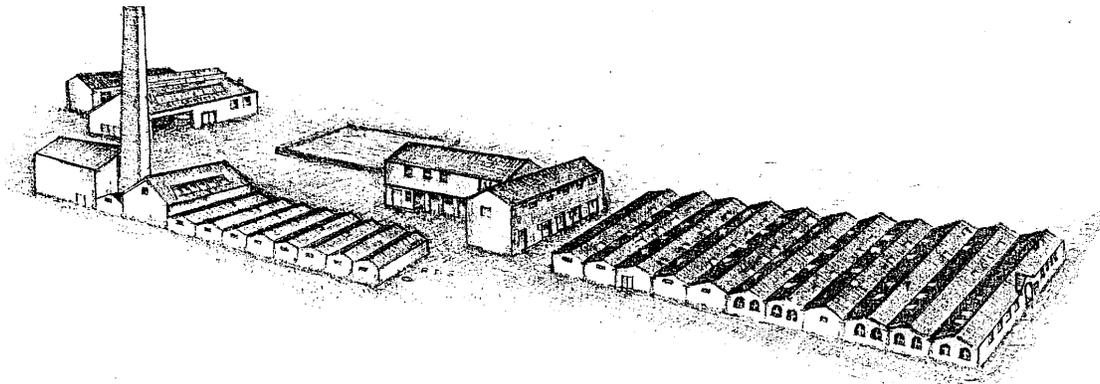
In 1959, we now named the company as the RGS Pattern Book Co. and decided to follow the lead of making shade cards. The new company also began to make pattern books and folders for the now growing carpet industry. We began pursuing the several Yorkshire carpet firms : T.F. Firth of Bailiff Bridge, Crossley Carpets of Halifax, and the modern firms, making the American tufted variety: Kosset of Brighouse, and Birstall Carpet Company, with their very high speed modern machinery. Velmar of Batley

was one where we produced the first shade cards, directly from their loom.

By the 1960s tufted, rather than woven carpets, were beginning to revolutionise the whole industry. Before this time carpets were always in short supply. We were now persuading manufacturers to give us the work which would normally be done by their own employees, in their own pattern room. Most were glad to outsource this work as we were considerably cheaper. Their overheads were based upon their average whole mill costs. They also could not keep their people working all year round. Neither could we! This was our big problem, keeping a steady workflow. It 'dogged' us for the rest of our time. It was either too much or too little, at certain times of the year.

Having no room left in Kingsway, I bought the old Queen Street Methodist Sunday school, which had previously been used as a factory making leather goods. I, and now my sales rep, Geoffrey Hanson of Gawthorpe converted it, taking out the old pews and staging. We purchased various pieces of machinery, especially a printer's guillotine, which speeded up the cutting of carpet pieces. We could certainly expand now in much larger premises, employing about 20 people. Later with a new sales manager, Mike Appleyard, a textile man, who understood the customers, we progressed much further. Soon we required more room, with large amounts of the best Axminster and Wilton carpets, coming down to us from Hugh Mackay in Durham. Also Readicut Wool Company, here in Ossett, using Axminster carpet made in Scotland. We were now gaining more new customers, for our pattern book department.

Soon we had to expand again, so we bought the old chapel next door, putting a floor in the upstairs, and installing bookbinding and silkscreen machines, under the guidance of Clifford Brown, a highly skilled man, who stayed with the company until retirement.



*Gedham Mill in 1900, before additions and alterations.*

In 1964, part of my grandfather's original old mill in Gedham came up for sale from R.T. Secker and son, who thirty years before bought it from Glover and Ellis Ltd\*. We decided to buy it with the help of a reluctant Yorkshire Bank. Now with over 12.000 feet of floor space, we could expand further.

A few years later we bought the rest of the mill with its total of 50.000 square feet of floor space. The mill was originally used for producing mungo and shoddy from old rags, brought in from all over the world. Ossett, being part of the Heavy Woollen District, had many such mills, all recycling old clothes into fibres for making cheaper yarns for the spinners and weavers. After the decline of that industry, many of the old mills in the town became vacant, becoming ideal for new trade and industry start-ups. We were one. The old mills now helped the town to prosper once again.

In the late 1970s, we again wanted more production area. We bought Mickman's hosiery factory at Ings mill. This was a more modern building, single story and ideal for our work. We installed silk screen machines and preparation areas and binding. Three years later because of the difficulty of managing two

sites, we decided to sell Ings mill, enabling us to build completely new bays to the Gedham site, greatly improving efficiency.

Part of the Gedham mill was used by another of our subsidiaries: Display Maintenance Ltd. This company was formed originally to service the pattern books we had made for manufacturers for use in retail outlets. Promotional teams throughout the country refurbished the books and updated them, rather than the carpet manufacturer using the time of his expensive sales force. However, this service eventually ceased because the sales force had an excuse for not visiting the customer and this naturally, displeased the sales managers.

Display Maintenance was run by a very energetic, Don Hardy, an 'old fox' from Velmar Industries in Batley. The larger part of DM's work was the designing and making of exhibition stands and general displays. They had a team of 8 designers and 20 carpenters making stands for promoting British carpets in exhibition halls in several countries, including Germany, France and even the USA. They eventually moved to our Old Bank Mills in Earlsheaton, where they grew to such an extent that the directors in 1990 decided to have a management buy-out. Then, as the lease from RGS was running out, DM moved to a site in Mirfield. The company is still in business in Mirfield.

Buying Gedham Mill was a big step forward, and we were able to store very much more carpet for use in the pattern book side of the business. We were now doing work for most of the major British carpet manufacturers: Brinton's, Carpet Trades, Victoria Carpets, and others from Kidderminster. In the early 1970s to speed up production, we bought a brand new 120 tonne roll feed, 'Samco' hydraulic cutting press, which utilised cutting formes of various shapes and sizes up to 1.5 metres wide. The machine was a fine example of British engineering. Two years later we bought a similar machine, able to cut up to 2m wide carpet and the 4 metre roll slitting machinery to go with it. At the same time our screen printing department was busy printing the PVC covers for the books, and the litho department, other printed literature.

By the 1980s, we were also producing pattern books and complicated folders for many other manufacturers, including Amtico of Coventry; Westex of Cleckheaton; Associated Weavers of Halifax; Kosset Carpets of Brighouse; Ryalux; Rivington and Penthouse Carpets in Lancashire. Sadly, these businesses are now nearly all gone from manufacturing in the UK. Other firms are simply using the product name.

Many, many thousands of pattern books were made from our various cutting machines. I calculate, at least 100.000 books and many more folders were made each year. We accepted many 40 foot containers from the customers, full of 4 metre wide carpets, around 2000 square metres per load. In our busy periods six of them would be waiting for us to process, by slitting, cutting, and whipping (overlocking), labelling and making-up into various sizes of books. The cutting machines increased our capacity so much that other types of cutting and processing work were required.

The Samco machine was really the catalyst for making other products, mainly printed carpet tiles, small rugs and fancy patterned bath sets. By 1990, we had perfected another type of pattern book. Namely one that could be opened and dropped down like a waterfall, with a concertina hinge, making it easy to see all samples at one 'drop'. This design we called a '*Drop Swatch*', which was very easily closed up again. Because we called it that, and registered as such, the Swiss Watch Company (product name Swatch) complained that we had infringed their product name and wanted it taken off the Trade-name Register. However, we didn't, and we won the case as the word 'swatch' was simply a generic name for a bunch of samples. Nigel Glover was the works director in charge of pattern book production from this time.

The 1970s was the time when carpet tiles were being introduced into this country. Heuga from Holland was the main manufacturer. They wanted us to procure carpet tiles for the UK market. To understand this work, I employed an 'old fox' Ted Lockwood, who was previously a manager at the Birstall Carpet

Company. Ted organised the manufacturing of the tiles by obtaining the correct yarns and having these tufted and backed with PVC or other types of backings, which when cut, had to be suitable for laying without moving, to Heuga's strict specification. A difficult job, indeed! However, a considerable amount of work was done for them. We carried on working for Heuga for several years before they took over a carpet manufacturer in Shelf, Illingworth Textiles, which became Interface, a conglomerate in the USA, which later became part one of the world's leading carpet tile manufacturers. This work was organised by our subsidiary: MGL Carpet Finishers Ltd. We were proud that we, and little Ossett, were partly the progenitors for others to take up this work.

By the 1980's the RGS Group had over 175 employees and a turnover of over £7 million. All work processed by us, not just imported and sold on.

It was at this time that we helped another Ossett manufacturer, Burmatex to show them how to make carpet tiles. They have made them ever since. However, they soon obtained their own carpet tiling machinery, leaving us a little 'high and dry'.

We had again to innovate for the tiling programme. We knew that plain carpet tiles would sell better if some of them were patterned. Luckily, our knowledge of printing benefitted us. In 1976, we invented and patented the process of sublimatic printing onto 3D substrates, i.e. pile carpet. Firstly, we silk-screen printed patterns with deep penetrating, sublimable inks onto paper and by heat in a partial vacuum chamber, and pressure from a heated platen, the design was transferred onto the substrate (the tile, or rug). The vacuum transfer machinery was patented by us, and made by Spooner Industries of Ilkey. Many of these machines, both for tile printing, and rug printing, were sold around the world, many to the USA. After 16 years these patents ran out and the market for them disappeared.

Whilst the development of this work was going on, both Courtaulds and ICI opposed our patent applications, saying that we were infringing their own patents. We proved that we were not, and they both, in the end, compensated us for work done by our patent attorneys. Previously only flat fabrics could be printed by sublimation. Transfer printing was organised by our subsidiary - RGS Transfer Prints Ltd. who were also originators of the very popular children's play mat. This company was run by Ted Lockwood, Barrie Fitchett and Clifford Brown.

Also at Gedham mill we had been making yarn poms - small tubes, two inches long, containing many hundreds of yarn ends in each tube of coloured woollen yarn for use by carpet designers, spinners and weavers. Many hundreds of yarn poms were made to fit into bound boxes made by us, and given names for each colour by the manufacturer, but with no specific order of hue, value and chroma, and therefore the actual colour was unable to be specified. Every manufacturer had a different, random selection of yarns taken from the colours they had been using for many years. All non-communicable between them, and everyone else in the industry.

It occurred to me that no worldwide system of colour communication was available for carpets. After 3 years of hard work in our own small dye house lab, we gradually dyed over 4000 lots of the best New Zealand wool, to produce the Chromatone (reg) Carpet Colour Atlas. These selectively, produced over 1080 colours, plus several tonal boxes, making over 2000 final shades. These are displayed in 36 triangular injection moulded boxes, each with 48 poms showing 'end on' yarn colour. To obtain the exact colour a Spectrophometer was used to enable us to colour correct to the exact shade. This was all designed with the help of Leeds University Department of Colour Chemistry and The International Wool Secretariat of New Zealand, working from their Ilkley laboratory. The dyer involved in all this work was Randall Lilley, previously a head dyer in Kidderminster. An ex IWS man, Ian Robertson, was the sales manager.

The RGS Chromatone Carpet Colour Atlas took a vast amount of work, not only the dyeing of the colours themselves but the designing of the final products, and how they all fitted properly in colour sequence in

the displays.

I consider that this product was the most interesting and important item we had ever designed and made. It is exported to over 36 countries and used by nearly every carpet designer, yarn dyer and manufacturer in the UK. With intermediates (numerical gaps, between the colours), the system was capable of specifying and communicating electronically, a theoretical 472,000 carpet yarn colours. Dyeing recipes could be taken directly from each pom on the simple six figure numbering system, saving much time and effort. Chromatone is now a worldwide reference standard for specifying carpet colours. The name Chromatone is design registered and the numbering system patented.

The Chromatone Carpet Colour Atlas is still being made, together with its pom replacement service. It is mostly exported by the original technical sales manager of that department: Ian Robertson, working from his own company in Leeds.

By the turn of the millennium, the whole carpet industry in the UK was being devastated by cheap imports and the fashion craze of awful, noisy, slippy, easily water-damaged, laminate floorings. All imported, and promoted by fancy men on television, who knew nothing of the harm they were doing by helping to kill off one of our basic traditional industries, for the sake of quirky fashion trends. Many of the big carpet manufacturers mentioned above, went out of business, with many employees losing their jobs.

This all resonated upon us too. We were the leading pattern book maker in the UK. Not only us, but all our competitors were losing out. With prices getting lower and lower, it was impossible for any of us to make profits, not knowing which way to turn caused havoc within our management system. Like many carpet manufacturers themselves, we eventually went down with them. With mounting losses, the bank took us out. A terrible traumatic event, which I must admit, nearly killed me. "Thank you Yorkshire Bank, you made a lot of money out of us". After a lifetime of trading, employing many hundreds of local people, all paying millions in tax over the 50 years, we had gone. Now, 100 people were all on the dole, using up some of those very same taxes. Luckily, virtually all soon got other jobs.

However, good things came out of misfortune. For some considerable time the doctors of Church Street surgery, had been approaching me about buying our litho printing department and artist studio building (the old Baptist Church). This was next door to them, they needed to expand, and add extra space for their car park. When I suspected that we were going down, I had further talks with them. I also knew that the other doctor's surgery in Prospect Road, Ossett were trying to find new premises as well. I approached them to perhaps join up the two practices. They did not want that at all. However after years - yes, years of bureaucratic haggling and delay, a good compromise was reached with the developer and Health Authority.

Whilst this was all going on I had been approached by the agents of a large supermarket, to build a food store on this same two acre piece of land. This I did not want, nor did the local shopkeepers, I believed it would have decimated many ordinary shops, and would have changed the face of the town centre. On the actual night before I was to sign the agreement with the developer and the Health Authority, the supermarket agents rang me to say "don't sign Richard, we will pay you straightaway". I was really tempted. Years of bureaucratic procrastination very, very nearly lost the new health centre.

Of course, I signed for the Health Authority, as that is what I wanted. The outcome was that they would both be accommodated in one building, but with completely separate surgeries - hence the oddly named 'Ossett Health Village', built on the land of our old mill. Now, Ossett had at last two doctors' surgeries, very modern, up-to-date, and seemingly working extremely well for the people of the town.

After the health centre was built about a third of the land was left, now enabling 34 town houses to be built, called Gedham Mews. This enabled about one hundred extra people to live and shop, right in the

town centre.

By sheer hard work, creativity, innovation and persistence through times good and bad, an Ossett business was born and flourished, employing many people for over half a century. That is my legacy for the town of Ossett.

**Richard D. Glover: November 2015.**

***Other reading from the author:***

1. *"The Medieval and Post Medieval Landscape of Ossett Township."* - 2008.
2. *"The Descendants of the Seagods"*, the Manningham/Glover Clan - 2011.
3. \*Glover and Ellis Ltd. Mungo and Shoddy Manufacturers, 1898 – 1959, *"The Story of a Mungo Family."* - 2013.
4. *"The Landscape History of a Yorkshire Township, Ossett 3500 BC - 1750 AD."*- 2014.
5. Patents - under the name of Richard Donovan Glover, see Google.