Member of the Month

This year T&G Durancyzk celebrates its 50th year as a member of the N.A.G. Before she folds away her loupe for good, Gladys Durancyzk spoke to Belinda Morris, who met her in her Hebden Bridge shop, about her half century in the jewellery business.



Tell me the history of T&G Durancyzk and how you came into the industry

My husband Ted was a sheet metal worker and, after suffering from asbestosis, was sent off to train in another industry. They told him that clockmaking would suit him. So I looked around Hebden Bridge for somewhere that he could work and learnt about a jeweller that was looking to sell up and rent out his space. After five years we moved from the original shop to a larger one over the road from where I am now. After 23 years we moved into this premises, which was in a terrible state so we took it on as a shell that we did up.

How did you start to get to grips with the jewellery trade?

The gentleman I bought the business from was so keen on the industry that he offered to come in to help me, so I learned a lot from him. I had given up my job as a machiner and went on a new two-week training course in Switzerland to learn about different aspects of the jewellery trade. I joined the N.A.G. and started five years of courses beginning with what was then called the Retail Jeweller Diploma. I could have carried on doing more courses, but about 25 years ago I was asked to be the chairman of the Yorkshire Centre and I've always been on its committee – I didn't have time to do both. I've missed only one dinner in 50 years (that was last year) but I'm going this year!



Has your business changed a great deal over the years?

Not really. We still have the same type of customer – all ages, men and women and, quite often, different generations of the same families, who we get to know. Although tourism is big for Hebden Bridge, our customers tend to be locals. Service has always been an important part of what we do. We're known for changing watch batteries and straps and people come from all over the area for that. We close the shop on Tuesday afternoon and that time Nigel – who has been my assistant for 31 years – spends doing watch repairs.



What stock do you carry these days?

We were always known for fancy goods as well as jewellery, clocks and watches, but these days it tends to be mostly everyday pieces like earrings and rings. Branded names come and go. I used to go to Leeds every week to buy stock, but today I rely mostly on reps coming to me. As I get older travelling is more difficult, so I haven't been to one of the major shows for about eight years. We have a goldsmith who works on bespoke pieces for us – he comes in once a week to pick up jobs (I don't post anything out).

In 50 years I imagine there have been a few downs as well as ups...?

People shopping on-line did have a negative effect on our business, but it's less of an issue these days. In fact we probably have more customers coming in wanting new batteries now than ever. And we also see a lot of rubbish that people buy from the internet!

In 2000 there was a terrible flood here and it came into my basement. Apart from ruining everything in the kitchen down there, I lost all my tackle for valuing, so at that point I decided I was not going to invest in new equipment and decided to stop offering a valuation service. I was, until then, a registered valuer.

You're now, finally, looking to retire. What brought you to that decision?

Two years ago I broke my ankle and I realised that I really couldn't carry on for ever. I could just about make it up the stairs to my flat and I could do the books, but coming into the shop six days a week was becoming too much. I have an arthritic neck which doesn't help. And, I'm 88 next month! My daughter was working with me in the business, but she's unwell; not fit enough to carry it on unfortunately. I would love to sell it to someone who wants to continue it as a jewellery business.

Do you have an amusing customer experience to relate?

Plenty! One that immediately springs to mind is when a man came into the shop with a clock that needed repairing. "What have you done to it, it really stinks?" my husband said. "I have a bad knee and I used some of my wintergreen oil on the clock to try and get it going..." was his reply.