

75
YEARS

Est. 1946

THE HISTORY OF
GLASSWELLS

**The Story of a Family from Bury St Edmunds
Celebrating 75 Years in the Home Furnishings Trade**

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1946-1996

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PART TWO

75 YEARS
OF SUCCESS

PART ONE

1946-1996

Part one of the Glasswells History book was completed in 1996 to celebrate our 50th Anniversary.

In producing this book I would like to acknowledge my thanks to Fred Watson, Paul's History Master at Culford School, who first suggested that we should write the story of my father's life. He was fascinated by Jerry's achievements and how Glasswells had grown. He prepared some of the first notes about the early years, followed by some initial chapters.

Unfortunately, Fred died a few years ago and the Glasswells story remained untold. Then came the opening of the World of Furniture store and the realisation that we would be 50 years in business in 1996.

I decided to complete the Glasswells story as part of our celebrations and my thanks are due to past and present members of the staff, and members of my family, who have helped in many ways by supplying additional information about the past and in helping to bring the story up to date.

Finally, my thanks are due to Theo Cutting, who is Special Projects Editor of the Bury Free Press, who has pieced together all the many parts of the jigsaw to produce the Glasswells story, 'A World of Furniture', in its final form.



Leslie Glasswell,
Chairman



Jerry Glasswell, Founder of Glasswells.



MAY 1996:

INTRODUCTION

Jerry Glasswell was a remarkable man. At an age when most people begin looking forward to the pleasures of retirement he launched a business that was to expand beyond his wildest dreams. His story is one of flair and ambition, hard work and determination, plus a large slice of courage and a sense of style that was to prove invaluable in his chosen career - the World of Furniture.

When he died in 1984, the furnishings business of Glasswells was a household name in East Anglia. Serving the grandchildren of some of his very first customers, he also had the satisfaction of seeing the third generation of his own family growing up ready to play its part in the business. Jerry's son, Leslie, built on the solid foundations that had been laid by his father and in due course he was joined in the business by his own son, Paul.

Today in 1996, Leslie is chairman and Paul the managing director of a company that has as its headquarters one of the biggest retail home furnishings stores in East Anglia - appropriately called Glasswells World of Furniture. Opened on a five acre site in Newmarket Road, Bury St Edmunds, in 1992 and extended in 1994, there is still ample land remaining for substantial future development.

Although Jerry did not live to see Glasswells World of Furniture, he had presided over the development of business that had grown from a back street shop to one of the major furnishing retailers in the region. But success did not change him. He remained Jerry to many of his old customers - and he never forgot the community that had supported him over the years.

CHAPTER ONE:

THE EARLY YEARS

Sitting comfortably in the lounge of his Briarwood Avenue, Bury St Edmunds, home in the autumn of his years, Jerry Glasswell would sometimes light a pipe and look back with satisfaction on a life that had been lived to the full. He had taken a big gamble at a time when most men were settled in their careers, with perhaps a glimpse of the pleasures of retirement ahead. Against the advice of his wife, he had used his modest savings to start a second-hand furniture business in a tiny shop in a then unfashionable part of the town. It meant a lot of hard work, but it had become the foundation of a prosperous family business dynasty - one that has still not finished expanding.

Success came later in life than it does to most business men, for Jerry - christened Jeremiah Stanley Horace - was, in fact, 50 years old when he launched out into the retail trade and made his mark in the world of furniture. The Glasswells were a Norfolk family, the origins of their name rather obscure. Jerry was named after his grandfather, Jeremiah, who had lived at North Walsham and married Sarah Ames in 1841. They had five children, the last being a son, Bucklar, Jerry's father, who was born in 1872.

Bucklar followed in his father's footsteps in the cabinet-making trade. When he was 21 he married Agnes Youngman, a pastry cook whose family were confectioners with a shop at North Walsham. They had first met when Agnes delivered some cakes to his home and it was a family joke that their romance was further proof of the old saying about the way to a man's heart. Bucklar and Agnes wanted a large family, eventually numbering ten boys and five girls. Jerry was the third child, born on 20 December, 1896, at Walsoken, near Wisbech, Cambridgeshire.

Skilled as a French polisher, Bucklar had to search hard for work and on one occasion made a marathon walk all the way from his home to Plymouth, in Devon, looking for a job on the way. Having no success he then walked back again.

When Jerry was 18 months of age, Bucklar decided to move the family to Suffolk. The prospects looked brighter in Bury St Edmunds, a prosperous county

Jerry Glasswell, Pictured at age 75



market town. They took a cottage in High Baxter Street, later moving to live at 22 Long Brackland and then Springfield Avenue. Bucklar found work as a French polisher for Thomas Shillitoe, Mayor of Bury, at the turn of the century, who had a building and decorating business in College Lane. At the time, the town was ringed by a large number of important country houses and Bucklar's skills as a French Polisher were in considerable demand by their country family owners.

Working among the treasures to be found in these great houses helped him to develop a knowledge and love of antique furniture. It was a passion that was to remain with him for the remainder of his life. But times were hard in the early 1900s and Shillitoe, who had been Mayor for three years in succession, suddenly went bankrupt. It was said the business had suffered because he had given too much time to his civic duties. It was a major blow for Jerry's father, who never again managed to secure a regular job.

“We knew the depths of poverty and it was this experience that spurred me on in later life.”

- Jerry Glasswell, Glasswells Founder

He was then living in a four room cottage in Long Brackland and, with a growing family to support, there were constant money worries. Life was certainly no sinecure. A fine craftsman, Bucklar never sought wealth and was always happy to share what little he had with others. Family life was happy but often on the breadline. “We knew the depths of poverty and it was this experience that spurred me on in later life,” Jerry used to say.

At the age of two Jerry began his education at the nearby St John’s Infants School, later transferring to the town’s Guildhall Feoffment School. When he was seven he took his first job - displaying that streak of initiative which was to stay with him all his life. Out of school time he worked for an hour a day, six days a week, for a Mrs Prigg who lived in a large old house at 76 Whiting Street. He was paid just sixpence - 2½p in today’s currency - for the whole week’s work. Jerry later recollected:

“I shook the mats and sifted the cinders, cleaned the steel knives and polished the shoes.”

For two years Jerry worked for Mrs Prigg as odd-job boy, then opportunity knocked again - this time with a Mrs Ellen Jennings who ran a register office for servants from premises at 19 Hatter Street. At a stroke he tripled his wages to a weekly 1s 6d - 7½p in today’s money. Once more he carried out odd jobs, but with the additional responsibility of running errands at lunchtimes. There was an added bonus too - a good breakfast on Saturday mornings.

Leaving school at 12 he decided to improve his position in domestic service and took a post away from home at a large country house in Lincolnshire. Jerry felt he might eventually reach the top of the ladder and become a butler. But he disliked the place from the

outset. Although he admitted later that the food was good, he did not like the lonely fens. His employers were hard taskmasters too and he had to knock on the master’s bedroom door at five every morning just to show he was up and about. Working mainly for his keep, it took quite a time to save sufficient money to pay the rail fare back home, but as soon as he was able he returned and took a job that was to give him his first taste of life in the retail trade.

He became an errand boy for a branch of the International Stores, a grocery shop in Abbeygate Street, Bury, part of a grocery chain with branches nationwide. Jerry subsequently became an apprentice and by 1914 was earning what was then the princely sum of 4s a week, 20p today. That was the year the First World War broke out and Jerry, then 17, rode off to do his duty, joining the Sixth (Cyclist) Battalion of the Suffolk Regiment. It was something of a family affair, for his father, Bucklar, then 42, and Jerry’s brothers, Arthur and Alfred, all served in the same regiment. Jerry was not sent abroad but spent most of his time on coastal defence, finishing up with the rank of Sergeant Instructor in Musketry.



The International Stores, where Jerry had his first taste of the retail trade as a grocery errand boy, can be seen on the right of the old picture of Abbeygate Street, Bury St Edmunds. The shop was on the corner of Whiting Street and Abbeygate Street, nearly opposite the Corn Exchange.

Returning to Bury on demobilisation, he took a job for a time working with his father who was running a general second-hand business from a warehouse in Churchgate Street. It was not very successful so he moved on to work at a furniture shop called Felgate’s at the bottom of St John’s Street. However, soon after - the year was 1919 - Jerry was able to return to his old firm, the International Stores, which had a shop on the corner of Whiting Street, nearly opposite the Corn Exchange in Abbeygate Street. His wages went up to 27s 6d a week - £1.37½ in new money. He did well and within a year was offered promotion as manager of the firm’s branch at Stowmarket.

CHAPTER TWO: LONDON BOUND

Jerry enjoyed his new job at Stowmarket, little realising that both the town and the International Stores were to play a major part in his later life as a furniture retailer. His talents as a manager were quickly recognised by the company and he was promoted to take charge of a much larger branch at Seven Kings, London.

On the strength of his new job, Jerry married on 3rd August, 1921. His bride was Ethel Maud Read, two years his junior. She was the daughter of Thomas Read, an engineer who worked for Bobby's, a major local employer with engineering workshops off St Andrew's Street South and Kings Road, Bury, and Ellen, a parlour maid who was employed at a house in Out Westgate. Ethel herself was employed at Boots, the chemists, although she had previously worked from home as a needlewoman earning 1s (5p) a week. Once again Jerry had displayed his sound judgement for, although Ethel's parents had been dubious as to whether Jerry was good enough for their daughter, she was to be his lifelong companion and willing helper.

Jerry was not always easy to live with, for he was always thinking about his next scheme. Ethel, however, had a great sense of humour and Jerry did not always receive the sympathy he sometimes felt he deserved. They set up home in a flat above the shop, a far cry from life in Bury. Sharing a love of dancing, they organised dances in their spare time for the Shop Assistant's Union.

In his new role, Jerry quickly displayed his flair for organisation and business. Fortright in his views, he had a large staff and managed them with humour and goodwill and the branch soon became known as "the neatest and cleanest"

International Stores in London. His windows were always well dressed, especially at Christmas, and his ideas were respected by colleagues. One of them recalled: "We liked to hear him talk, for there was good sense in what he said and a knowledge of what he was talking about. He generated such a fund of good fellowship that people crowded round him eager for his views, advice and assistance."

Full of ideas, Jerry became recognised as an authority on bacon and wrote a booklet - now out of print - called 'How to Cut up Bacon'. A contemporary in the grocery trade commented: "What he does not know about the subject need not now be written." Recognising his talents, senior management invited him to transfer to head office but Jerry declined, preferring to be at the sharp end of retailing and able to talk to customers. His outspokenness often landed him in trouble with his superiors and led to conflict with the management. While on many occasions proved right in his judgement, relations eventually became so strained that in 1938 Jerry decided he would prefer freedom to do things his own way - with a business of his own. Years later, a senior International Stores executive admitted to Jerry they



High Road, Chadwell Heath.

had made a mistake in letting him go.

But, at 42, Jerry still had his own niche to carve. He left the flat and moved to Montpelier Gardens, Chadwell Heath, where he had already taken a mortgage to buy three properties - for himself, the future use of his son Leslie, born in 1923, and his daughter Peggy, who had arrived six years later in 1929. By turning two of the houses into flats he was able to meet the cost of repayments and acquire much needed additional income at the same time.

An old picture of the Market Place at Stowmarket where shops included a branch of the International Stores grocery chain where Jerry became manager in 1920 on being promoted from the Abbeygate Street Shop in Bury St Edmunds.



His first venture was something of a culture shock from the hygiene of the grocery trade. He had spotted the row upon row of chimney stacks in suburban London and decided someone had to sweep them. He brought a tiny Ford van (EMP 470) brand new for £105, a set of sweeping rods, devised a special curtain to contain the soot within the fireplace and began knocking on doors for business. It proved a winner.

Business grew so quickly he invited one of his brothers, George, who was, in fact, an experienced sweep, and Tom Buckle, who had married his sister, Olive, to join him. But, within a year or two, it was clear the partnership was not going to work. They fell out and the business was disbanded. On his own again, Jerry was undeterred. After all, houses had more windows than chimneys that needed cleaning. Glasswells for Window Cleaning was an obvious trade card, but this time he decided to keep the business in his own hands. In the short time left before the Second World War broke out in 1939, he had built it up to employ a team of four men. Among them was his son Leslie, now chairman of Glasswells. Leslie had left school when he was 15 to work for the British Commercial Transport Company, a firm of shipping agents in the City of London. He did well, earning 15s (75p) a week with an extra 2s (10p) if he went in early to open the post and a further 2s if he stayed on to 7pm to post letters and put bags on the Hook of Holland line.

While he enjoyed the bustling atmosphere of life in and around the docklands, where he was a frequent visitor, Leslie soon realised that such a long day - plus the travelling time to and from work - held few attractions for the future. Indeed, if he gained promotion he would probably have to



Peggy Glasswell and her mother were evacuated to Bury St Edmunds during the Second World War. They lived with Peggy's maternal grandmother at 164 Westgate Street, now No. 74.

work even longer hours! Like his father he felt the need to be in charge of his own destiny. After only a year or so with the firm he decided to quit his job and join his father - a partnership that was to last in varying forms for some 44 years.

CHAPTER THREE:

BACK HOME AGAIN

When the war was over, Jerry returned to Bury St Edmunds. He had no intention of ever again living or working in London. For a time he took temporary work with the American Red Cross, in St Mary's Square, and also helped with the resettlement of evacuees. But the call of the auction room aroused his business instincts. His father Bucklar was at this time working as a freelance auction porter, specialising in furniture sales. Jerry decided to join him in the business. It turned out to be quite a successful partnership because Bucklar was never very practical but Jerry had a flair for organisation.

Through his previous experience in the cabinet-making trade Bucklar brought knowledge and understanding to the auction rooms. Jerry, in turn, created order out of chaos and introduced new ideas - eventually acting as a head porter to H.C. Wolton and Son, a leading firm of local estate agents and auctioneers. Jerry's ideas and methods of running auctions were revolutionary. His main efforts were directed at improving the display of goods to be sold, rather than the haphazard way in which they were then being offered. His methods, usual today, were then something of a novelty. He covered the auctioneer's trestle tables with white cloths and made sure the silver and silver plate were polished and that the china was washed - jobs in which he was given valuable assistance by his wife Ethel. He also brought order to the saleroom by displaying each lot in turn on a separate table in front of the auctioneer so that bidders had no doubt what was under the hammer. In his belief that honest and attractive

displays of merchandise were in the best interests of customers and vendors alike, he was foreshadowing the style of his future furniture exhibitions which were to set the Glasswells on the road to prosperity.

Having previously made up his mind to join his father again once the war was over, Leslie immediately returned to Bury on being released from the RAF in October, 1946, joining him as a freelance auction porter and helping with their shop which had been opened a few months before in May. As porters, both men were soon in great demand, particularly at the frequent country house sales resulting from post-war austerity. Sales were sometimes family occasions, for they were often joined by Jerry's younger brother, Frank, and brother-in-law, Tom Buckle. Other helpers included "Bunny" Palfrey and Frank Cahill.

To begin with, they used buses to reach their various destinations, but having to travel according to timetables meant wasting a lot of time. Jerry had retained the little van he had used in London during his chimney sweeping days so he brought it back into service for journeys around the West Suffolk countryside. Greater flexibility meant they were able to work longer hours, sometimes 12 hours at a stretch. Considerable preparation was needed for some of the larger country house sales and they would sometimes spend weeks making a complete inventory of contents to produce the sale catalogue. On occasions they had to sleep away from home for days at a time.

Jerry had by this time sold the three properties he had been buying in London and with the proceeds had acquired number 3 Briarwood Avenue in May, 1946, for £900. It was to be his home for the rest of his life.

Business had never been far from his mind and it was his experience with auctions that had given him a glimpse of the potential in the world of furniture. When Leslie had been home on leave they often talked about starting a furniture shop - and that is exactly what happened.

With £2,000 Jerry had left over from the sale of the London houses and £300 Leslie had managed to save in the RAF, they pooled resources and, as partners, took the plunge in opening a shop selling second-hand furniture, china and glass. The move had not met with unanimous approval, for Ethel had reservations about it. The mid-forties were difficult days and there were big risks involved. In any case, Jerry was now 50 and she did not like the idea of her husband risking all they had on such a venture. But Jerry had made up his mind and when she saw that he would not be

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75 YEARS

Number 3 Briarwood Avenue, Bury St Edmunds. Jerry bought the property in 1946 and it was his home for the remainder of his life.





The first Glasswells shop at 35 Brentgovel Street, Bury St Edmunds. It was opened in 1946 when this picture was taken.

dissuaded, she gave her full support, becoming an integral part of the venture.

To begin with they had trouble finding suitable premises, but eventually found a small shop to rent for £100 a year at 35 Brentgovel Street, Bury. They agreed to take it - only to meet an unexpected hitch. Lacy Scott, agents for the owners, the Misses Sneezum, who lived in Devon, refused their offer. It was only after Tom Wilson, of Partridge and Wilson, solicitors in Guildhall Street, Bury, stood surety for them that the transaction went ahead. As it turned out, the arrangement brought considerable long-term benefits all round. Over the years the Misses Sneezum proved understanding and helpful landlords, while Baseley Hales, senior partner in Partridge and Wilson, continued to look after Glasswells' interests throughout the most critical years of the firm's

expansion. His advice was in constant demand on many aspects of the developing business, ranging from leasehold negotiations to the formation of the limited company in 1958. He became an indispensable family friend and counsellor and for a number of years Baseley and Leslie continued their friendship as members of Bury Rotary and Round Table clubs.

When he died in 1988, Glasswells appointed another Bury firm of solicitors to act on their behalf - Greene and Greene, in Guildhall Street, where David Medcalf, a leading local solicitor, was a friend of Paul's. The same year, 1988, also saw the end of the long association of Glasswells with Bury accountants Binder Hamlyn, where Michael Fulcher and Bob Durrant had provided invaluable help with many financial matters, particularly



Some of the first furniture removal vehicles acquired by Glasswells. This picture was taken in the 1950s.

family trusts. However, it was felt from a business point of view they should move to Baker Tilly, of London, auditors to the Associated Independent Stores buying group - of which Glasswells are members - to come specifically under the accountant management of Clive Parritt.

It was on 18 May, 1946, that Glasswells opened for the first time. Jerry and Leslie were partners from the very beginning, but as a start-up business it was not sufficiently viable to provide them all with a living. Ethel gave invaluable help running the shop while the men continued their work at local auctions. It was an excellent combination, for the sales were also a means of acquiring stock for re-sale. By now Jerry was also highly respected in the auction business and was often commissioned by London dealers to make acquisitions on commission - providing useful additional cash flow. As the shop began to expand, Jerry's brother Frank became its first employee and brother-in-law Tom Buckle became involved on a part-time basis.

“The confidence created between customers and the store is one of our biggest assets.”

- Excerpt from an early advert

The following year the lease of the property next door, at number 36, came on the market. Jerry immediately took it over - effectively doubling retail selling space. Turnover jumped from £5,000 in 1946 to £12,000 in 1947, reaching about £20,000 a year later.

Second-hand furniture was in considerable demand at this time. Until factories were finally released from war work and raw materials became more available again, young couples stood little chance of buying anything new. To help the situation the government decided to issue newly marrieds with special utility furniture 'units,' which, in effect, did for furniture what ration coupons had done for food. While the allocation was rarely sufficient to furnish a whole house, couples could buy the essentials from English manufacturers producing items under what was known as the Utility Scheme. The combination of these 'units' and the restarting of production lines made newly marrieds keen to acquire all the latest furniture.

At the same time it was also getting increasingly difficult for the Glasswells to purchase sufficient second-hand furniture at auction against increasing competition from both the public and the trade.

An added complication was illness. Jerry was unable to work for six months and Leslie found it difficult to cope on his own with both the business and the auctions. A momentous decision was taken - to buy and sell only new furniture. The decision was well timed. The demand was there, supplies of new furniture were increasing all the time as production lines returned to normal, and it was more profitable than dealing with second-hand stock.

One of Glasswells first advertisements in the Bury Free Press in May, 1948, took advantage of the improving supplies. It read:

Utility Furniture off Units

We are expecting Utility Furniture to be taken off units shortly. Make sure YOU are in the front line by coming to us and reserving your requirements.

As well as deciding to sell only new furniture Glasswells introduced hire purchase facilities at the same time. This proved highly popular. Initially, finance was provided through Mercantile Credit in London, to whom customers paid their instalments monthly by post. However, Glasswells felt this meant they lost contact with customers, so they decided to gradually introduce their own hire purchase scheme. In this way they could keep in touch with shoppers, whom they hoped to serve for life.

Jerry's daughter Peggy joined the firm in 1948, having previously worked for three years with the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries. She became cashier, hire purchase clerk and later wages clerk under the care of Mrs Edith Day the book-keeper. She also sometimes helped out as a salesperson.

As sales of new lines steadily increased and auction work continued to grow, deliveries became a problem. There was a simple answer: Jerry and Leslie decided to apply for a 'B' licence to transport furniture. The application immediately provoked opposition from rivals in the transport industry but after an initial refusal they went to appeal and won their case. This meant they were now able to deliver furniture from the shop, collect goods to put into auctions and carry out removals.

This generated even more work and longer hours. Auction sales were often held in the Corn Exchange in the centre of Bury which meant that everything had to be taken there by van - and there was always the possibility of being asked to make deliveries afterwards, sometimes to buyers from as far away as London.

The household removals side of the business was also growing at the same time and a larger vehicle soon became necessary to cope with the demand. An 800 cu. ft. furniture van was specially built at Tayfen Garage, Bury, followed by a second soon afterwards.

Increasing trade brought with it a major problem - an acute need for more storage space. Premises were taken in Orchard Street, followed by additional space above a dairy in College Street. This also meant that Jerry could bring order to their stock, using the Orchard Street space for bedroom and dining room furniture with three-piece suites at College Street. A little later a third storage area was found in Queen's Road where all the bed springs and mattresses were kept.

Efficient and friendly consideration of individual needs quickly became a hallmark of shopping at Glasswells. Right from the beginning the firm was noted for its customer care. An early advertisement announced:

'Every transaction with us is personally supervised by the management. The confidence thus created between customers and store is one of our biggest assets.'

Often Glasswells would hire a taxi to take customers to each of their storage places for viewing, the Brentgovel Street shops being too small to display everything. It paid dividends and business grew.

In 1948, a shop at 9 Risbygate Street became empty for a few weeks and Leslie and Jerry arranged to use its windows for a temporary display of three-piece suites. The result was an immediate improvement in sales. It was clear that, although customers were able to see a wide choice of furniture at their various stores, attractive and spacious displays helped sales enormously. It gave them an idea that was to reshape their entire business.

An early Glasswells window display. This picture was taken at the Saffron Walden branch in 1951.



CHAPTER FOUR: THE FIRST ROADSHOW

It was in March, 1949, that Leslie persuaded Jerry to stage a furniture exhibition. Today, it would be called a Roadshow. Unable to secure the Old Town Hall in Bury - now the Market Cross Art Gallery - because it was already booked, Glasswells decided to hire the Town Hall in Haverhill. Taking it for a few days meant they were able to use the space to create attractive displays of furnishings in room settings so that visitors could see what pieces

would look like in their own homes. It would also promote the name of Glasswells further afield and extend their reputation for the quality of the goods they sold. As there was no furniture store in the town at that time and people travelled to Cambridge to buy larger household items, the outlook appeared promising. They hoped to pick up some useful sales.

A view of Glasswells first exhibition of furniture held at the Town Hall, Haverhill in 1949.



The cost of hiring the Town Hall was £100, a large sum of money for a small business in those days. Attempts for a reduction in the fee failed but as they had already ordered a large quantity of new furniture specially for the event, they decided to pay up and hope for the best. Because the Bury warehouses were already full and there was nothing similar available in Haverhill, they rented temporary space at a coal yard, in which to store furniture ready for setting up when the Town Hall became available. Even so, some items still had to be brought from Bury.

The concept was new and exciting for a firm founded just three years previously. A bold as well as an enterprising move, the show turned out to be an event that was to reshape the future. Looking back, Leslie says: "The exhibition was probably the biggest chance we ever took in business. We had ordered goods which we did not normally stock and were faced with paying what was then an enormous rent to display them." But there was no turning back, the commitment had to be honoured. However, Jerry and Leslie need not have worried. The show was a huge success. The Town Hall was packed with visitors. Takings soared to £3,600 in three and a half days, including £2,000 in up-front money before customers even received the goods they ordered. Compared with the average £500 weekly take at the Bury shop this was a staggering sum. "I shall never forget it as long as I live," recalls Leslie. "We were packed out from morning to night. We had to bring a small safe over from our shop in Bury to put the money in. "We had advertised the show heavily. Of course, in those days there was no television and people used to look for somewhere to go." They immediately began looking for permanent premises in Haverhill.

A later exhibition at the same venue in 1959 when backgrounds had been introduced to create individual displays.



In the meantime they took a stand at the first post-war Trades Fair held in Bury in the autumn of 1949. It, too, did good business. Then, to consolidate their position at Haverhill they decided on a second exhibition there. An intensive advertising campaign included the following preliminary announcement in the Bury Free Press:

GLASSWELLS CALLING

Furniture you can't resist!

Do not fail to visit our Grand Furniture

Exhibition at the Town Hall, Haverhill.

Opening day Wednesday November 30 at 2.30pm.

We shall be pleased to show you round and offer you the advantage of our wide furnishing experience. Admission free.

GLASSWELLS.

The Cash or Credit House Furnishers.

The show was every bit as successful as the one held earlier in the year and it was decided to stage an exhibition every Saturday until such time as they could open a shop there. They also found a new and less costly venue in the town's Corn Exchange but it meant a great deal of hard work carting and carrying furniture. A van load would be stored in the cellar and another brought over from Bury for setting up on Friday nights. On Mondays they would then dismantle the show, storing furniture in the cellar again before setting up the corn merchants' stands ready for the market during the week. "The only access to the cellar was through a trap door and we had to lift everything through it. It was very, very hard work," recalls Leslie.

In 1950, Glasswells established a permanent base in Haverhill by acquiring the old Post Office in Queen Street. It was managed by Joe Groom. In those days Haverhill had a population of less than 5,000. Leslie recalls: "Some shops used to close on Wednesdays and Saturdays because there were so few people about. Everyone seemed to want to get out of the place. If you fired a gun down the main street on a Saturday the only thing you were likely to hit was a stray dog - it was so empty." Nonetheless, Glasswells did good business, drawing in trade from a wide area.

A major town expansion agreement with the then

London authority was also destined to change the face of Haverhill in the next few years, bringing in many new industries and considerable growth in population. Glasswells confidence in the future of the town proved well founded. Glasswells success at Haverhill was repeated in Saffron Walden in 1951. Once more the Town Hall was used as the setting for the latest lines in home furnishings.

With trade prospects continuing to look bright, yet another shop was acquired - this time the location was King Street. In between times Glasswells managed to secure a booking of the Old Town Hall in Bury for a show in the spring of 1950. An advertisement in the Bury Free Press read:

Announcing

AN EXHIBITION OF MODERN FURNITURE

sponsored by GLASSWELLS of Bury St Edmunds at THE TOWN HALL from Thursday March 2nd to

Thursday March 9th from 10am to 9pm.

We extend to you a most courteous invitation to visit this forthcoming furniture exhibition organised entirely by GLASSWELLS.

The EXHIBITION contains everything that is new in design - in modern ideas - in materials and comfort.

It's an exciting prospect to see the country's finest furniture made by the most famous makers, collected together in our local Town Hall.

Remember the date. March 2nd.

GLASSWELLS

The well known local House Furnishers, 35 and 36 Brentgoval Street, Bury St Edmunds. Phone 419 and at Queen Street, Haverhill, phone 179.

At the time Jerry and Leslie were continuing their work for local auctioneers and had organised the



Glasswells staged major furniture exhibitions at the Bury St Edmunds Corn Exchange over a number of years. Jerry is pictured in a panoramic view of the display which attracted record crowds over a five-day period in 1950. Used as a corn market on Wednesdays, Jerry, Leslie and their staff used to help the caretaker sweep it out before setting out the furniture. They then had to clear the market hall on Tuesday before the weekly corn market set up again next day.

sale of the contents of Herringswell Manor, a large country house not far from Bury. An enormous marquee had been put up, in which the goods were on view. The Glasswells, keen to know how things were going back at the Town Hall, left Frank Glasswell to answer viewers' questions. This upset the auctioneer who accused them of giving more time to selling their own furniture than his auction. Refusing to accept the criticism, they decided there and then to phase out their portering activities. The exhibition at Bury Old Town Hall turned out to be another big success. Visitors crowded in to see the displays - and they spent their money too.



Glasswells were at the Suffolk Show when it was held at Rougham in 1951. They hired an enormous marquee to show furniture. Peggy Glasswell can be seen on the right.

Jerry and Leslie both felt they could not fly in the face of fortune. Furniture exhibitions were set to become a hallmark of their business operations. The reason for the repeated success of these displays was largely due to the fact that following the austerity and rationing of the war and immediate post-war period people wanted to cheer themselves up by buying something new. Also, as manufacturers moved production into top gear, new designs were being introduced creating renewed interest in interior décor and furniture fashions.

Jerry and Leslie had been quick to see that their shops and warehouses were too cramped. Taking a large public hall in which to stage an exhibition provided the essential space to show furnishings to best advantage. It was clearly the marketplace for the immediate future.

Another exhibition was arranged in Bury. This time the even bigger Corn Exchange was hired and an advertisement in the Bury Free Press on 20 September, 1950, boasted that the show, opening on October 5, would be the "largest of its kind ever staged by a local trader". The next day the Bury Free Press reported:

"The biggest show ever held in Bury St Edmunds by a single trader opened at the Corn Exchange yesterday afternoon. Glasswells furniture exhibition takes in more than 6,000 sq. ft. of space, featuring over £6,000 worth of goods."

In an interview Jerry was quoted as saying: "My son travels up and down the county selecting the goods. We deal with firms who specialise in making one particular line of furniture. In that way we get a craftsman's job."

Leslie recalls: "The Corn Exchange took a tremendous

amount of filling. As soon as the farmers had finished at the Corn Market at around 5.30pm on Wednesday we moved in, helped the caretaker to sweep the floor and then began setting out the furniture. It meant working all night to get the exhibition ready for opening at 10am the next day. "We would then stay open until Monday but had to be out of the hall on Tuesday before the Corn Market opened again on market day. It was always a rush whenever we took the Corn Exchange." No business runs without its troubles, however, and in the summer of 1951 one of Glasswells vans was stolen. Used in a theft of livestock at Bury market it did not turn up for some months, until it was found in Norfolk. It caused quite a few problems but, always ready to turn an upset into an advantage, they advertised -



An old picture of Bury St Edmunds Corn Exchange before shops were inserted on the ground floor, with a new main hall at first floor level. In the autumn of 1950 (before the alterations were made) Glasswells stages what was then the biggest ever show put on by a single trader in the town.

“Missing! EMP470. One of our vans is missing. However, DELIVERY of goods to our customers is being carried out promptly as before.”

Earlier that year, in the spring, they had staged another exhibition in Bury showing some of the very latest designs from the Earl's Court Furniture Exhibition. It included five stands from the national show itself. Then in the summer of the same year Glasswells were at the Suffolk Show at Rougham, and advertised in the Bury Free Press -

“The name of Glasswells is associated with Good Furniture, Good Value, and Good Service and we have brought to the public, through our many exhibitions, the best designs from the country's leading craftsmen. What you have seen at our Suffolk Show stand is merely a sample of what can always be seen in our showrooms.”

Over a period of 20 years, Glasswells staged more than 100 furniture exhibitions in the Bury St Edmunds area. Each show received the same meticulous, with no detail too small for consideration. Organising these exhibitions entailed a great deal of work. Don Boughton, who joined the staff in 1953 as an accounts clerk in the Brentgovel Street office, and is still serving Glasswells loyally, spent many hours with Leslie often working through the night until breakfast sorting out the details of the next show.

Hours were spent with graph paper fitting everything into the space available, using scaled cut-outs. Special backgrounds were designed and fresh flowers ordered and artistically arranged. Shows were eventually organised so that they moved in sequence from Bury to Haverhill, and on to Newmarket, Saffron Walden, Thetford and Mildenhall. Each tour lasted several weeks in the spring, with sometimes another run in early autumn.

More business meant an ongoing need for additional storage space. The premises in Orchard and College Streets, although not entirely satisfactory, were large enough to cope with the needs of the Bury shop but the amount of furniture required for the exhibitions and for the shops now established in Haverhill and Saffron Walden made more space essential.

A warehouse had been taken in Thetford but storage difficulties were also being compounded by Glasswells own successful marketing techniques. Keen to do business with the younger generation, they often stored items for young couples until such time as they actually married and set up home. Trade had also received an unexpected boost in 1951 when it was announced that the

price of all utility furniture was going up by 25%. There was a rush to buy before the new prices came into force.

Aware of the likelihood of a big price rise in the pipeline, Jerry and Leslie had the foresight to buy in extra stocks, housing them in temporary stores that included a redundant chapel, an airfield hanger and a disused cinema. Jerry said afterwards that they sold more furniture in the two weeks before the new prices came in than they had during the three previous months.

The year 1951 also saw the death of Jerry's father, Bucklar, who died in his sleep and was buried in the borough cemetery. With his smart appearance, white hair and trim moustache he had been a popular figure for many years at local auctions.

He never had, or wanted, much money. Although he had suffered hardship during his life he had gained the respect of all who knew him. It must have given him great pleasure to see that he had passed on his enjoyment of beautiful furniture and antiques to the younger members of the family. He must also have been deeply rewarded by watching his son and grandson developing an increasingly influential business in the town to which he had moved in search of work so long before.



Bucklar Glasswell and his wife Agnes pictured in the 1940s.

Furniture styles as they were in 1949 when Glasswells took a stand at the first post-war Bury St Edmunds Trades Fair in the autumn of that year.



CHAPTER FIVE:

THE SCENE IS SET

The year 1952 saw the beginning of two significant Chapters in the Glasswells story - one personal, the other a development that was to lead to a major change in their overall business strategy.

The first, however, was a wedding. On 14 August 1952 Leslie married Heather Rogers at St Mary's Church, Bury St Edmunds, followed by a buffet reception - a new idea in those days - at Everard's Hotel, opposite the Corn Exchange. They looked hard to find a house, for property was in short supply following the Second World War. However, they eventually bought a three-bedroom semi-detached at 60 Hollow Road, just over the top of the bridge near the beet sugar factory. "Marriage was the most important event of my life," says Leslie. "We have been very happy. In the beginning we did not even have a car and often walked home from work to a house that was icy cold because it did not have central heating."

Heather had moved to the town from Dorset in 1951 when her mother died and her father remarried. The couple met at Risbygate Tennis Club where they were enthusiastic players. Their happiness and support for each other was to reflect itself in the growing success of the family business. And, as they raised a family of Susan, Judy and Paul - who were all destined to eventually join the firm - they became increasingly confident of maintaining a



This picture was taken at the christening of Leslie and Heather Glasswell's first child Susan. From left, back row: Jerry Glasswell, Tim and Peggy Reardon, with Leslie Glasswell; from left, front row: Agnes and Ethel Glasswell, baby Susan and her mother Heather.



Leslie and Heather on their wedding day, 1952.

controlling family interest in the company. Their hopes for the future were eventually realised when Leslie retired as managing director in 1989 and it was a proud moment when he handed over the running of the business to Paul.

With two small shops in Bury and shops at Haverhill and Saffron Walden the business was not very big in the early 1950s. "We had no money to take on any other premises but our landlords in Bury, the Sneezum family, were very good. Our rent was quite reasonable and they were always agreeable to alterations," recalls Leslie. "Many people used to think that doing work to other people's property was rather foolish, but we felt that if we had a reasonable lease that could be extended, at least during the time the lease had to run, we had the opportunity to expand and improve trade. So on we went."

The exhibitions had become the main focus of the business. As well as increasing cash flow they helped to iron out the peaks and troughs of the furniture trade. "The exhibitions taught us how good furniture should be viewed by customers and it fired us with enthusiasm to improve our shops," said Leslie.



Pictured at the opening of their new store from left: Mr A. White, chairman of Bury Chamber of Commerce, the Mayor, Councillor Bevis Southgate, Jerry and Ethel Glasswell, Leslie Glasswell and Agnes Glasswell centre front.

The second next significant event of the year occurred when opportunity for further expansion knocked once more - in the form of additional storage in St Andrew's Street South. The property concerned also belonged to their landlords, the Sneezums, and had the advantage of being just round the corner from the Brentgovel Street shop, so it would be easy to take customers there to see lines they were unable to display because of lack of space. An old coach house, it stood behind two empty cottages and had an earth floor. After renovations, it was brought into use. It was small, but highly convenient. "Looking back I realise it was really very small indeed," recalls Leslie. "It had no proper heating and we used paraffin stoves when it turned cold, but to us then it was absolutely marvellous. You had to walk through the cottages to get to the coach house so it wasn't long before we thought of taking them over and adding a shop front."

The cottages also belonged to the Sneezums and Jerry and Leslie successfully negotiated an extension of their existing lease to include them. A local builder, Harvey Frost, was engaged to draw up plans for a single storey shop extension with windows facing St Andrew's Street. The estimate was £5,000.

But sometimes second thoughts are best and the more they thought about the idea the more they were convinced they ought to be much bolder and double the size of the premises by adding a first floor. At over £10,000 the cost was more than double and more staff would be required to look after it. Harvey Frost won the contract, Glasswells preferring to give work to local firms. The new building was opened by the Mayor of Bury St Edmunds, Councillor W. Bevis Southgate, president of the town's Chamber of Trade



The first big store just round the corner from their Brentgovel Street shop, Glasswells first acquired storage premises behind some cottages which they subsequently took over and re-developed in 1954 when the shop was opened.

and Commerce, on 9 October 1954. For the first time since the war the Bury Free Press carried a full page advertisement. It was confidently stated that "in these days of fierce competition, this is the first completely new building to be erected by a local born trader for over 50 years." In his speech Jerry said he was glad to be a Bury boy.

The business at this stage consisted of Jerry, Leslie, and Frank Glasswell, Tim and Peggy Reardon, Don Boughton, who eventually became manager of the St Andrew's Street store, Leslie Fiddy, manager, and Mrs Edith Day book-keeper.

Tim Reardon had joined the firm in 1953. Engaged to Peggy Glasswell, they were married in June, 1954. With the opening of the new St Andrew's Street premises, Tim and Frank took charge of the Brentgovel Street shop, along with Peggy. In those days the stock included lino - which had to be cut off rolls - and Lloyd Loom chairs. A steady stream of customers also included those making hire purchase payments.

Peggy recalls that the Brentgovel Street shop did much better than expected after the opening of the new store, and that John Adams was engaged to help run it. He brought in new ideas, including selling nursery furniture and Hoover electrical products. But there was always a problem with traffic in the street outside and Peggy remembers she often lent a hand with unloading furniture to help get vehicles away quickly.

It was also around this time that her husband, Tim, took over the running of the removal side of the business which was developing out of the firm's fleet of delivery vans. When the British Road Services firm of Pickfords was de-nationalised by the Government in the mid-1950s, the Pickford fleet of furniture removal vehicles was put up for sale in various parts of the country.

Jerry and Leslie took a trip to London and bought two of them, enabling Tim to considerably expand this side of the business Basil Simpkin was Tim's first removals driver on an ex-Pickfords 1,500 sq. ft. van, LLX 472. Later on, in 1976, when Tim handed over the running of the removals section to Fred Raison, he returned to the Brentgovel Street shop to become totally involved in selling and helping out at branches whenever necessary. Tim retired in 1991 but still comes in to Glasswells most days and can be seen on the shop floor talking to old friends and customers, and is still selling.

The new St Andrew's Street building had given Glasswells their largest shop to date. With over 3,000 sq. ft. it provided much needed space for furniture displays, but the additional business generated by the new store brought yet more problems. In a nutshell, the more trade expanded the less convenient it was having warehouses dotted about all over the town. All this led to a complete rethink of the firm's operations.



The Brentgovel Street, Bury St Edmunds, store of Glasswells after it had been extended to incorporate the shop next door at number 36. The photograph was taken in the 1950s.



Jerry Glasswell speaking with the Mayor of Bury St Edmunds.

“In these days of fierce competition, this is the first completely new building to be erected by a local born trader for over 50 years.”

- Glasswells newspaper advert, Bury Free Press

Customers at the St Andrew's Street opening event.



'Roboto' entertaining the crowds at the store opening.



CHAPTER SIX:

THINKING BIG

Even in the 1950s, traffic congestion was becoming something of a problem in Bury. Brentgoval and St Andrew's streets were increasingly busy, the latter being on the main A45 route through the town. Traffic problems were also compounded by the fact that St Andrew's Street contained the rear delivery loading bays for the busy shops fronting the Cornhill. Furthermore, the more Glasswells expanded business the more evident it became that servicing shops and customers from warehouses scattered about the town was highly labour intensive. For a start, too much time was taken up going from one place to another.

More important still was the fact that supplies from manufacturers needed to be ordered in quantity to qualify for a discount and to keep displays up to exhibition standards it was important to be able to replace sold goods immediately from stock. "We knew this was the right way to do business," recalls Leslie. "It also gave us the flexibility to replace goods at the most convenient times, in the evenings if necessary, with minimum disruption to our shops." The answer to the problem was to build a central warehouse. Large enough to take care of all the firm's distribution and storage needs.

It happened that Jerry had bought a piece of building land close to the Tollgate Inn in Fornham Road, Bury. It had cost £300 in 1951, and was intended for a new house for Leslie and Heather and their young children. The family put their heads together and

were unanimous in their decision. Business must come first. The site of 1.1 acres was large enough for a big warehouse and was easily accessible. The first step was to obtain planning permission but this was delayed because of objections from local property owners. However, consent was eventually won for a 10,000 sq. ft. warehouse on condition it was screened by trees. The cost of building was exactly £1 a square foot and work began in 1955. The original plan included a garage on the site as well, where Glasswells own fleet of vehicles could be parked and serviced.

The steady growth of business at that time is illustrated by the fact that within 18 months of completion it became necessary to extend the warehouse by a further 5,000 sq. ft. In fact, additions to the building were made quite regularly until the mid 1960s when storage space reached the maximum 30,000 sq. ft. possible on the site.

"We were very proud of our Tollgate warehouse because it was the engine room of the company, enabling us to supply our branches from a central source," recalls Leslie. "Not many firms had this facility and we soon realised that we needed to use all the available Tollgate land for warehousing," he continued. "The building was therefore extended to a total of 30,000 sq. ft. in just a few years. There is no doubt in my mind that the Tollgate warehouse was the 'jewel in our crown' because it helped us to trade in the best possible way. We were able to store customers' purchases until they needed them, as well as maintain good stocks of furniture ready for quicker deliveries of orders."

Some years later, in the early 1980s, Leslie had the idea of converting the store into a retail furniture warehouse but the borough council turned down the application. He remembers: "We appealed but still lost, although the council allowed Sainsburys to build a new store out of town."

Glasswells were now thinking big. Able to buy even larger quantities, they could negotiate bigger discounts from manufacturers - savings that could be passed on



The Tollgate warehouse which became the 'engine room' of the expanding Glasswells business. The first part was built in 1955, but it needed to be extended within 18 months, reaching 30,000 sq. ft. (the maximum possible on the site) by the mid 1960s.

to customers, making the firm highly competitive. The large centralised warehouse also meant that every inch of space at their shops could be used for retail sales, there being no need to store anything on the premises. They had also found that the immediate replacement of sold goods with new lines from the store also stimulated interest among shoppers. The warehouse had indeed become the hub of operations and in charge of this nerve centre in the early years was Frank Glasswell, who had been associated with his brother Jerry since the first shop was opened 1946.

When opportunity knocks the door needs to be opened, even if it's not convenient at the time. Just as the first warehouse bricks were being laid in 1955 by Bury St Edmunds builders Harvey Frost, chance came along with a prime site in the centre of Bury. Barclay Motors, a well known local firm, decided to move elsewhere in the town, vacating its new car showroom in part of the Corn Exchange in the heart of the town. It had long windows facing the Traverse and the lease came on the market for £1,000. It was the perfect spot for a furnishing store.

At a stroke Glasswells acquired an 80 foot window frontage in a prime shopping area. At the time it was one of the biggest window display spaces in East Anglia. To make the most of the position, a leading West End designer was engaged to create a series of superb display rooms - right next door to the hall that had been the venue of some of Glasswells biggest exhibitions. They now had three shops in Bury, each serving different markets. The Corn Exchange took the highest quality stocks and was managed by Claude Long, the St Andrew's Street shop, managed by John Adams.



Mending the floor in the Corn Exchange Showroom.



The Corn Exchange showroom in Bury St Edmunds. When Glasswells took it over it was one of the biggest display windows in the region.

The 1950s saw Glasswells targeting towns in the Bury St Edmunds area, such as Thetford, Mildenhall, Newmarket and Brandon, where as a result of exhibitions, they had gained a number of customers using the firm's own credit facilities.

Many were unable to get into Bury to make payments because of transport problems. It seemed logical to collect their instalments, so three or four outside representatives were engaged to make home calls. They were under the control of Colin Fayers. "This side of the business blossomed to include additional sales from a catalogue which we used to take to customers when we collected their instalments," recalls Leslie.

After a few years people became more mobile and were able to get to the shop to pay their dues. The number of collecting staff were allowed to fall by not replacing people as they left and Colin eventually became the only one doing this work. All new business was put through the St Andrew's Street shop where hire purchase continued to expand.

When, in 1966, Leslie's sister, Peggy, who was then running the hire purchase section, decided to leave to bring up her family, Leslie's cousin, Terry Glasswell, took over the department. Peggy had two daughters to look after, Shelley - now working as a receptionist at Glasswells World of Furniture in Bury - and Sarah. Terry had originally worked for Mann Egerton, a local garage, where he had been engaged in internal audit and accountancy work.

Under his guidance the hire purchase operation continued to expand, using the firm's cash resources for lending. This continued right up to 1989 when the company's hire purchase portfolio had grown to more

GLASSWELL'S



Photograph of our last year's Exhibition

EXHIBITION



We are proud to present the most Gigantic Furniture Event ever to take place in the Eastern Counties to be held at the



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GLASSWELL'S YOUR HOMELY HOUSE
 OF, BURY ST. EDMUNDS FURNISHERS

A full page Glasswells advertisement which appeared in the Bury Free Press in 1957.



In the late 1950s Glasswells branched out with a shop in Stowmarket taking over a firm called Cole's. However, after several years of hard work Glasswells decided to pull out of the town, eventually selling the freehold of the shop, for a handsome profit.

than £1m and 10,000 accounts. Leslie commented: "We had a very good HP business and a great deal of success with an 'add on' promotion in which customers paying £20 a week bought more furniture along the way but continued to pay just £20 weekly.

"In time, hire purchase became less flexible so we started a new scheme called 'Five Star Credit' in which we issued a credit card, allowing customers to become more flexible with their monthly payments. "An interest charge was levied on the outstanding balance every month and a monthly statement was sent out. In this way we were able to maintain close contact with customers and promote goods on a regular basis." By the late 1980s many people were finding it difficult to keep up payments because of the economic conditions. Debts rose to an unacceptable level - bad news in a company using its own money to fund the scheme. Expansion of Glasswells in Norwich and Braintree also meant dealing with customers from a much wider area, making it difficult to check backgrounds, obtain credit ratings and to keep track of their movements. It was also becoming more of a problem to obtain payments through the courts.

In 1991 Glasswells began operating credit facilities through Lombard Tricity, having decided to discontinue their own scheme. They felt that a specialist finance company could administer it better. In any case, Glasswells were looking to expand in

Bury and would need considerable funds - including the £1m that had been built up in their own scheme. While credit remains a very important part of furniture retailing, a lot of the promotional work in the business is now based around interest free loans.

Glasswells became a limited company in 1958. Mr Baseley Hales, of Partridge and Wilson, their solicitors, was instrumental in introducing the firm to Mr Philip Shelbourne QC, who drew up a trust scheme under which the firm was to be organised in future for the benefit of the family. This was followed by an educational trust to which more money was added over the years for the education of Susan, Judy and Paul, Jerry's grandchildren. Jerry was not keen on private education but Leslie, who was living in Hollow Road, Bury, felt his children would benefit from it. As a result the girls went to the East Anglian School and Paul went to Culford, with Judy attending Culford later on when it had become co-educational. Peggy's children went to Culford too, also after it had become co-educational. Jerry wished all his grandchildren to be treated alike and it was his determination to provide equally for them all that had motivated his provision.

Jerry was also concerned about the future of his staff and Glasswells became one of the first private companies to operate its own pension scheme. Remembering what life had been like for his father who had no retirement income, Jerry started a private, non-



Jerry seated at the checkout of a new branch of the International Stores which was opened at Diss soon after he had sold Glasswells premises at Stowmarket to the grocery chain. He is pictured with the International's then managing director Leslie Greene who had started his career at Stowmarket just after Jerry had left to manage a branch in London.

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75 YEARS

contributory scheme for employees in 1959. To begin with, it amounted to four shillings - 20p - a week for every completed year of service. Monitored and updated over the years, the current scheme is now contributory and has a total of 70 members. Administered by Sun Alliance, its excellent benefits include pensions of up to two thirds final salary, depending on length of service.

At present the pension fund has £1.5m invested for the benefit of Glasswells staff and directors.

It was in the late 1950s that the opportunity first presented itself to branch out at Stowmarket. For £30,000 Glasswells were able to buy a firm called Cole's, a very old established business with a variety of activities including painting and decorating, removals, an undertakers and even a marquee hire department. It employed cabinet makers and upholsterers and had a total payroll of about 25. The business was acquired in 1960 but detailed analysis soon showed that various sections were unprofitable. Funeral work, cabinet making, upholstery, and painting and decorating were all gradually phased out. Removals made money but furniture sales were disappointing. Furthermore, the shop was not particularly well sited and the front was often damaged by lorries mounting the narrow pavement outside. "I remember the first thing we decided was to get rid of the funeral side of business," recalls Leslie. "I didn't like it and wanted nothing to do with it, but in retrospect I suppose it was the most profitable part of the operation."

In 1960, Leslie brought in a friend, Vic Brega, as overall general manager for Glasswells. They had become

firm friends as members of Bury Round Table. Appreciating the fact that being able to get on well with a colleague was one of the most important things in running a business, Leslie asked Vic to join him when Jerry was thinking of taking a back seat. Although Vic had no knowledge of the furniture business, Leslie felt that by working closely together he would be able to pass on much of his own experience and knowledge. "This proved to be the case almost immediately," recalls Leslie. "Vic quickly became a very important part of the company."

One of Vic's first jobs was to sort out the latest acquisition at Stowmarket, where Bernard Cole, son of the previous owner, had been appointed by Glasswells as manager. The business was very diverse and labour intensive and it proved difficult to introduce the "Glasswells way" of doing things. Bernard left to pursue

another career in the furniture industry and although the business was slimmed down over the years it somehow never became a "Glasswells shop". Most Stowmarket people also seemed to travel to Ipswich to do their shopping. However, the site was large and offered potential and after lengthy deliberations Vic, Jerry and Leslie agreed the best way forward would be to upgrade the property and expand it, using the tried and tested Glasswells formula.

“Being able to get on well with a colleague was one of the most important things in running a business.”

- Leslie Glasswell

Plans were eventually submitted to the local planning authority but hit a snag. The council insisted on extensive, and expensive, car parking. Jerry and Leslie were unhappy, so was Vic. After several years of hard work it appeared that Stowmarket was the one town where



Glasswells expanded at Haverhill, with a double unit in Queen's Square, 1960.

they seemed to have made a blunder. They decided to call it a day and get out when a reasonable opportunity presented itself.

The first offer came from the International Stores - the firm that had launched Jerry into the retail trade as a manager in the very same town. Then, the Co-operative Society came in with a higher bid. Jerry much preferred the offer from the International but in the end he and Leslie sat back and let the two companies fight it out.

The International Stores won the day with a final offer of £120,000 - a highly profitable outcome on a business about which the Glasswells were not very keen.

Leslie's son Paul had by this time joined the company and the three generations of the Glasswell family, Jerry, Leslie and Paul, all travelled to London to sign the deal in 1980. When they got there they were met by the chairman and managing director of International Stores, a Mr Leslie Greene, who, it turned out, had himself actually begun his career at Stowmarket branch in 1921 just after Jerry had left it for London. Naturally the two men had much to talk about and Mr Greene agreed the International had

made a big mistake in letting Jerry leave the company in 1938! Leslie later recalled that although his father was then in his eighties the admission made him feel vindicated after more than 40 years.

Shortly afterwards, the International opened a new store at Diss and Jerry was invited to the ceremony. He was photographed sitting at a checkout handing a packet of tea to Mr Greene.

It was around 1961 that Jerry, Leslie and Vic began taking a closer look at their original premises in Brentgovel Street which were old and in need of comprehensive reconstruction. The manager there was then John Adams, Leslie Fiddy having left, while Don Boughton had moved round the corner to look after the St Andrew's Street store. After inspection the architects, along with local builders, Bakers, advised comprehensive reconstruction. Because the buildings were leasehold the owners, the Misses Sneezum, were asked if they would give a longer lease at a reasonable rent if the property was improved. Pleased with the plans and with what Glasswells had done in the past they readily agreed a new lease on highly favourable terms.

With agreement reached in principle the stage was set for major alterations - but there was a problem. Glasswells could not afford to lose the business that months of reconstruction work would entail. However, fortune sometimes favour the brave and just at that moment an old established furniture shop, Smiths, on the Cornhill, became empty. It had been acquired by Greene King, the Bury St Edmunds brewers, who agreed to rent the premises to Glasswells pending their own plans for its redevelopment. Work could now go ahead without interruption to the business. More display space was also now urgently needed at the Corn Exchange shop - a problem that could be overcome by installing a mezzanine floor. The town council would only allow the work if nothing was attached to the main columns of the building. This also meant major alterations.

Retaining the Cornhill shop for as long as they were able, Glasswells first completed alterations at Brentgovel Street and then transferred the Corn Exchange business to Smith's old shop while the second phase of work was underway. In this way both shops were able to continue trading while major work was in progress. It meant that by the early 1960's Glasswells had more and better floor space than ever before. Brentgovel Street was used to specialise in beds and bedrooms and a newly introduced electrical appliances department, the firm having become a main agent for Hoover.

“The computer program was not capable of simple maths let alone dealing with complex company accounts.”

- Judy Glasswell

Always on the lookout for new business opportunities Jerry and Leslie considered moving into Ely around this time but abandoned the idea.

They seized an opportunity to expand at Haverhill in 1960, renting a 4,500 sq. ft. double unit in a new development at Queen's Square. The manager there was Leslie Moate. The new Haverhill store did so well that the old problem of space cropped up again. Then, in 1964, a shop opposite became vacant. Glasswells had no hesitation in taking it on in order to open a carpet business. Although small, it gave Glasswells added presence in Haverhill town centre.

Leslie Glasswell recalls: “Father had an insatiable appetite for expansion, we were always looking around at various businesses. There was always

something going on during this period. If it wasn't a new shop it was an extension to the warehouse - we were always spending money on something.”

All the major changes made at Glasswells stores in the eight years to 1968 were carried out under the supervision of Vic Brega. Projects in which he was involved included the alterations to 33-35 Brentgovel Street and the formation of the bedding shop, installation of the mezzanine floor at the Bury Corn Exchange premises, the new Haverhill store at Queen's Square, two extensions to the Tollgate warehouse, Bury, taking it to a maximum 30,000 sq. ft. the new Haverhill carpet shop and major extensions to the St Andrew's Street South store. In recognition of the many improvements he had made since joining the firm, Vic was appointed a director in 1969 - becoming the first outside director to be invited to join the board.

In 1963 Terry Glasswell, a cousin of Leslie, joined the company as credit and office manager. By 1970 he was helping with stock control and, as manager of the office, also became involved with the firm's debtor systems and the expansion of credit facilities. Terry worked under internal accountants Robert Last, who left the firm in 1979, and Garnet Wright, who replaced him. By the early 1980s Terry was looking after the Sudbury, Haverhill, Braintree and Saffron Walden branches, as well as overseeing stock control, the “engine” of the business. When Garnet left the company in 1983, the opportunity was taken to restructure the department and Terry was promoted to financial administrator. A junior accountant was taken on, leaving Terry in charge of the company's financial systems.

Then, in 1987, at a special family dinner at the Silken Tassel in Northgate Street, Bury, also attended by the company's solicitor, Baseley Hales, and auditors Michael Fulcher and Bob Durrant, Terry was promoted to financial director, a position he holds today.

Believing in keeping up with modern technology, Glasswells bought their first computer in the 1970s. It was a Burroughs B80, and a number of programs were specially written for the business. Leslie recalls that it produced “dreadful complications” but at this stage his daughter, Judy, came into to business. She joined the firm in 1979 as assistant to Robert Last the company accountant.

By the time she married Rowland Beaney later the same year, Garnet Wright had become the accountant, and Judy well remembers their first computer, often working late at night and early in the mornings to cope with it. “The computer program was not capable of even simple maths let alone dealing with complex company accounts,” she recalls. Judy had previously worked for accountants Binder Hamlyn and with help from Terry Glasswell they overcame the initial

problems and from then on the computer “helped rather than hindered” the company. Judy left in October 1981 to take care of her daughter Kate born that year and later had a son, Thomas, born in 1984. She and her husband Rowland had met while at school. They both went on to university - Judy to Nottingham and Rowland to Cirencester Agricultural College.

Rowland had to work for two years before taking his final examinations in 1979 to qualify as a chartered surveyor. He joined Bidwells, of Cambridge, eventually leaving in 1983 to become a partner with his father in R. C. Knight and Sons, of Stowmarket. Rowland has helped Glasswells on several occasions over the years, most recently with the lease of the latest premises at Ipswich.

Leslie's eldest daughter, Susan, was also employed by the firm as his secretary. Having been educated at the East Anglian Girls School in Bury she left in 1970 to train at the Frankfield Secretarial College in Tunbridge Wells. She then took up her first secretarial post in Norwich, leaving for a more important position working for the managing director of a Ford main dealership in Nottingham. She joined Glasswells in 1976 to work in the stock office under Terry Glasswell

and became Leslie's secretary in 1978 - the same year as she married John Creed. Susan left the company in 1980 to start a family, with David born the same year, 1980, Caroline in 1982 and James in 1985.

The late 1960s also saw further expansion for Glasswells in Saffron Walden. Thanks to the hard work and vision of Vic Brega, additional space had become urgently needed to show off more furniture, in keeping with the belief that the more people could see the more they were likely to buy. An agreement was reached with the shop's owners to make a large extension. An additional 60 feet were added to the rear of the building, along with a first floor. The work trebled the size of the retail area and a new lease was negotiated for 21 years at a rent of £500 a year, rising every seven years to £750 and £1,000.

Further expansion was to follow in 1988 when Glasswells refurbished a storage building to turn it into a 1,000 sq. ft. carpet shop. The main store was improved at the same time. This included replacing the King Street shop front along with considerable internal alterations to improve furniture displays. A total of about £50,000 was spent on “tenant improvements”.

Bill Howard, carpet manager of the Saffron Walden shop, which was expanded in the late 1960s (and again in 1988) talks to youngsters from a local school about retailing. They were on a special educational visit to the shop in the '60s as part of their studies.



CHAPTER SEVEN:

THE FIRST £1,000,000

A section of the interior of Glasswells' St Andrew's Street South, Bury St Edmunds, store pictured after extensions had been opened in 1968.



In the 1960s, trade at the St Andrew's Street South shop, under manager Don Boughton, surpassed expectations to such an extent that Jerry, Leslie and Vic soon began looking at ways the store could be expanded again. It happened that their landlords, the Sneezums family, owned two adjoining cottages, one unoccupied, the other converted to a small shop selling weighing machines.

They made an approach for a lease with the intention of using accommodation to sell second-hand furniture - a side of the business that developed by taking in part exchanges from customers. As soon as they took possession they realised the site offered much greater potential. It provided the perfect opportunity to expand the St Andrew's Street shop front further down the street. A new building could be put up incorporating second floor administration offices and an in-town furniture store to service greatly increased retail space. The cost of the work was put at around £68,000. The Sneezums approved, but friends tried to dissuade Jerry and Leslie from spending so much on a property they did not actually own. Undeterred, they took a long-term view.

If they could not double or treble business from the enlarged property, held on a long lease at a competitively low rent of about £500 a year, they did not deserve to

be in business at all. Appreciating the added capital value that would be given to their site, the Sneezums agreed a new 21-year lease at a nominal figure. Plans were drawn up by architect John Abbott and local builders Bakers, of Thurston, were awarded the contract. By 1968 the new building was complete.

Opened by the Mayor, Councillor J.R.M. Painter, it was their best shop yet. Purpose-built, it had between 7,500 and 8,000 sq. ft. of retail selling space with offices that brought administration together under one roof for the first time. The store manager continued to be Don Boughton. Following their established formula, all the retail space was set out like an exhibition.

At the official opening attended by many representatives of the town's business life, Leslie proudly announced that Glasswells were approaching a £1,000,000 turnover for the first time.

The next year, 1969, saw more expansion in Brentgovel Street. An adjoining fish shop came on the market and by taking it over they could have three shops in a row. Once again the Sneezum family were the owners and were keen that the Glasswells should have it. So, Glasswells took over the lease and carried out refurbishment to make it a suitable addition.

“In those days it was a great deal of money and we were very pleased indeed.”

- Leslie Glasswell

By this time, Glasswells had become a founder member of a buying group of independent furnishers



St Andrew's Street redevelopment 1968.

called Floreat, which gave them added advantages in bulk purchase. Vic had also become a member of its buying committee. Leslie, who was chairman of the Bury St Edmunds Chamber of Trade and Commerce in 1971, was also becoming increasingly known in a much wider sphere of the furnishing trade. He was particularly active in the National Association of Retail Furnishers. In 1972, he gave an address to its national conference at Stratford-Upon-Avon on the subject "Grow your own Warehouse" and explained how Glasswells had prospered by using out of town storage as the hub of retail operations. His talk generated so much interest that furnishing traders from all over the country came to Bury to see how it worked. Many went away and followed suit.

In 1975, there were further major developments involving the Brentgovel Street property when the shop and adjoining premises, a block stretching from

numbers 32 to 36, came on the market following the deaths of the Sneezums. Offered at auction, the property failed to reach the reserve and was withdrawn. Leslie then made an offer and secured it for £42,000.

Although neighbouring buildings were in a poor state, he was satisfied that when their leases expired he would be able to redevelop and refurbish the whole area. After such a long and close relationship with the Glasswell family, the Sneezums had left instructions that Glasswells should have the first offer of the St Andrew's Street shop.

As sitting tenants with 17 years to run at a special lease rent of £150 a year, Glasswells were in an excellent position to negotiate, for no one else would be able to obtain a rent review until 1992. Following negotiations they bought the freehold for £30,000 in the name of the family. The deal was signed in 1976 - a highly significant year in the development of the Glasswells group.



New Curtain Department, St Andrew's Street redevelopment in 1968.



At the official opening of the St Andrew's Street shop, attended by many representatives of the town's business life, Leslie proudly announced that Glasswells were approaching a £1,000,000 turnover for the first time.



Members of the Glasswell family pictured at the St Andrew's Street reopening from left: Jerry, Leslie, Susan, Ethel and Heather Glasswell, with Tim and Peggy Reardon.

CHAPTER EIGHT: SPACE FOR GROWTH

While the completion of the St Andrew's Street store in 1968 may have been an end in itself, bigger ideas were already afoot. Aware of the changing trends in the marketplace, Leslie and Vic were taking note of the out-of-town furniture warehouses that were then springing up all over the country.

So, on a wet and windy day in 1971, Leslie, Vic Brega and Tim Reardon decided to see for themselves just what it was all about. They rose early on a Sunday and drove to a retail warehouse they had been recommended to visit in Wales. When they got there they could hardly believe their eyes. Located on an old airfield, it was bustling with shoppers, despite persistent and heavy rain. Thousands of people had parked their cars all over the place and were spending money as if there was no tomorrow.

They drove back to Bury deep in thought, stopping at Haskins, of Shepton Mallet, to visit another similar warehouse. It, too, was doing a roaring trade. And to clinch matters when they called in at an old army camp at Bedford to another emporium, called Queensway, it was also choc-a-bloc with customers.

They needed no further convincing. This was the way

to go. Arriving home they immediately began looking for suitable premises and found just what they wanted at the Old Maltings in Mildenhall Road, Bury - not far, in fact, from their own central warehouse.

Before deciding to go ahead on their own, Leslie and Vic went to see Gerry Parish, managing director of Queensway, a warehouse firm which had been started in Norwich. They wanted to explore the possibility of joining forces and felt that their joint expertise would be mutually beneficial. But the meeting turned out to be far less cordial than planned and Leslie and Vic left abruptly, with the firm intention of going it alone instead. They decided to upstage the name Queen by a King, calling the new firm Kingsbury - the 'bury' denoting the fact that the new venture was being started in Bury St Edmunds.

Glasswells immediately took the Old Maltings, which provided a massive 20,000 sq. ft. of space at a price of 25p per sq. ft. No money was required to set up shop, the premises were simply filled with furniture for sale. Overheads were minimal as incoming goods were priced up and put on display straight away, being immediately removed and delivered when sold. No expense was involved in storage, there was no money to wait for, no hire purchase agreements to worry about and hardly any office staff was needed - it was a new and wonderful way to do business.

Vic Brega transferred from Glasswells to the new business as chief executive, and Bill King, accountant, also moved across from Glasswells. Other members of Glasswells staff who joined the new firm included Derek Buckle, Leslie's cousin. Because of the sound reputation Glasswells had already built up in the trade, they were also able to negotiate an extra month's credit from manufacturers.

With the expertise of Michael Fulcher and Bob Durrant of accountants Binder Hamlyn and £10,000 capital, a new company was formed. It was funded 51% by Glasswells and 49% by members of the family, Leslie, Heather, Tim and Peggy. Vic Brega also had a



The third Kingsbury Warehouse at Whittlesey, near Peterborough, had 40,000 sq. ft. of display space. Although miles from anywhere in fen country, it did terrific business from the day it opened in 1972.

share and the children Susan, Judy, Paul, Shelley and Sarah all had an interest.

From the day it opened in 1971 the first Kingsbury took off. Crowded with customers it played a major role in the development of the Glasswells group over the next five years. Its success was such that within six months they had no hesitation in making a decision to open a second, similar centre. Premises were found near the railway station at Colchester but they encountered planning problems and the application had to go to appeal. Glasswells briefed Queen's Counsel, Frank Layfield, who later became responsible for some of the most prestigious planning appeals in the country. He demolished the arguments of Colchester council officials and the chamber of commerce, winning the day with planning consent for a warehouse totalling 15,000 sq. ft. The appeal cost £3,000.

Six months later they looked at a third warehouse at Whittlesey, near Peterborough. When Leslie first saw it he wondered just where the customers would come from. The building provided 40,000 sq. ft. of display space but was miles from anywhere in the middle of fen country. Undeterred, they decided to press on and in March 1972, the doors were opened to the public for the first time.

In designing the layout they had cleverly created the public entrance in one corner of the building so that a breathtaking overall view of the displays was the first thing to greet customers on stepping inside. A small in-store restaurant was installed and furniture was set out to exhibition standards with designer stands.

It was another immediate success. On the first day there were long queues of cars everywhere. At one point they even blocked a level crossing, delaying a local train. On the next day, Leslie and Vic toured the neighbourhood offering a bottle of sherry as a peace offering to the many householders whose driveways had been blocked by cars.

Glasswells were allowed to open the warehouse on Sundays and while the warehouse may have seemed in the middle of nowhere that did not deter the crowds. The competition threatened all out war.



The first Kingsbury warehouse opened in the old maltings in Mildenhall Road, Bury St Edmunds, in 1971. It was the first in a chain of warehouse stores eventually sold for more than £1m.

"We did incredible business at Whittlesey. The cornerstone of it was Sundays when a third of our business was done," recalls Leslie. "We drew on all our expertise to make it a success and our good track record meant that we were able to offer products from all the leading UK manufacturers."

In March 1973, a fourth Kingsbury of 40,000 sq. ft. was opened at Northampton. Not as successful as the previous three, it still did good business. By this time the operation had grown to such a size Vic and Leslie decided to split their responsibilities - Vic taking sole control of the warehouses and Leslie the Glasswell shops.

Then, a year later in 1974, they opened another Kingsbury at Grantham, having bought a property from a man who said he was going to retire. However he changed his mind and shortly afterwards started up in opposition. He was better known in Grantham than Glasswells so the latest Kingsbury struggled a bit. Next came a 20,000 sq. ft. warehouse in Norwich. Opened in 1975, Kingsbury were for the first time in direct competition with Queensway - the firm with which they had hoped to join forces at the very beginning.

In the spring of 1976, they opened yet another warehouse, this time in Cambridge, and their most expensive outlet yet. A total of £100,000 was spent setting it up. The huge building was completely carpeted and a first-rate heating system installed. Glasswells were indeed leading

the field in the development of warehouses into today's out-of-town shops.

With the urge of even further expansion, Vic Brega, whose drive and enthusiasm had contributed so much to the success of the venture, was scouring the country for new openings. He came up with excellent opportunities at Newcastle, Gateshead, Bournemouth, Lincoln and Doncaster. Producing a considerable profit, furniture warehouses seemed to flag up the future, but a nationwide network would present logistical difficulties.

Jerry feared that the family side of the business might become strained. Leslie and Vic also had reservations, but in retrospect, Leslie reckoned that had Jerry been 20 years younger he would have taken up the challenge of organising a far flung business empire - probably leaving them way behind. "Father had not been greatly involved with the development of Kingsbury although he had given it

his full and enthusiastic blessing," recalls Leslie. "I do remember we had one of our very few arguments when the Kingsbury business was just about to take off. The Corn Exchange shop was doing well and an adjoining shop unit became available. Father wanted to take it on to extend the store."

"Being an old and listed building it would have cost a fortune to link the two together, for not very much extra space. I could see Kingsbury growing quickly and told father I wanted to pursue this side of the business, leaving the Corn Exchange for the time being. He never did agree with me."

Out of the blue in 1976 an offer was made for Kingsbury warehouses as a whole. Then, soon after, two other offers appeared on the table. The three bidders were Combined English Stores, Hardys and Allied Carpets. At first Leslie was reluctant to sell, but he began to think again. Talking over the possibilities with his son Paul and Vic, it became clear they would have to

When the new Haverhill store was opened in 1978, twenty year long service presentations were made to members of Glasswells staff. From left, back row: Colin Fayers, John Adams, Ted Crouch, Don Broughton and Leslie Glasswell; from left, front row: Harry Cotterell, Frank Glasswell, Jerry Glasswell, Claude Long and Leslie Moate, the Haverhill branch manager.





The development at Queen's Square, Haverhill, which not only provided Glasswells with a big new store, but made them substantial landlords at the same time.

leave East Anglia to live somewhere more central if they were to run a nationwide chain of warehouses successfully. They even considered the possibility of buying a helicopter.

Keen to stay in Bury, Leslie and Vic kept on talking to see what might develop. Negotiations took four months to complete. Leslie recalls: "The talks with Combined English Stores went on and on. We preferred them because we felt they would be best for the staff.

"There was no way we were going to sell out to a company that was not prepared to look after the people we had recruited and the management that was going with it." It was a very challenging time, involving a great deal of hard work. Leslie described it afterwards as like being, "put through a wringer" every time he went to the head office in London.

He continued: "Having made an initial offer the buyers then wanted to get the best possible deal for themselves by trying to knock the price down on one pretext or another. Negotiations became very protracted and on many occasions we hired a limousine to travel to London with our legal advisor, Baseley Hales, of Partridge and Wilson, Bob Durrant

and Michael Fulcher of accountants Binder Hamlyn, and Vic Brega."

However, in July, 1976, they sold Kingsbury Warehouses to Combined English Stores for just over £1m.

There was also an agreement that the deal should be tied to the next year's profits and when the figures were published Glasswells received an additional £200,000. What had started with a capital of £10,000 had blossomed to the tune of £1.2m. All the family, plus Vic, had a share in the outcome.

Vic also had excellent prospects with the new Kingsbury management having decided to leave Glasswells and continue to run the business - ending what had been a very happy and successful partnership. This was the first time that any part of the Glasswells group, a private trading company, had been sold.

The disposal of Kingsbury now meant that Glasswells had added very considerably to their financial resources - funds which could be used to further develop the stores which bore their name. But the next development came as a complete surprise. Early in 1977, Haverhill Town Council asked Leslie if he would consider re-developing an important town centre site with a large shop, which

they could have themselves, and two further stores to let. The council said it would agree to a low rent if Glasswells constructed the premises but Glasswells replied they would only go ahead with the scheme if Sainsburys decided to proceed with plans to build there too.

Then came another, even bigger, surprise. Agreement had been reached and building was due to begin when the council came back with a further proposition. Would Glasswells build five more shops on some additional land linking up to the new Sainsburys store? The cost was estimated at £220,000, the most Glasswells had so far ever considered spending on one project.

An agreement was reached giving Glasswells a 99-year lease on the property. It was a highly attractive deal which meant a big new shop for themselves as well as becoming substantial landlords.

Building began in 1977. The architect was David Hatcher and local builders, W. J. Baker, constructed the new store and the five shops for letting. The new Glasswells shop covered 10,000 sq. ft. of floor space. It had a suspended ceiling and provided the very

latest retailing environment. Manager was Leslie Moate who had been with the company for 19 years.

At the time Paul, who had just taken a Diploma in Retail Management, was away gaining further experience in the furnishing trade by working for the London firm of Perrings, a large privately owned family business with about 40 stores. He spent 18 months at both its Brent Cross and Stevenage branches.

“I had no Vic Brega to call on and found it tough going all on my own. I decided to ask Paul to join me in the business and become involved in the Haverhill development,” said Leslie. “He was not very old then but proved of tremendous help. He was able to tackle much of the day to day administration and learned very quickly.”

In the autumn of 1978, television personality Nicholas Parsons came down to open the new complex. An open evening for local councillors and leading business figures in the area was held beforehand. It was attended by the Mayor of St Edmundsbury, Councillor Bob Elliott, and during the proceedings Jerry presented long service awards to members of the staff. All seven shops had been let and were flourishing.

Glasswells branched out in Sudbury in 1979 when they acquired the old established furniture firm of Alston's. It proved to be a shrewd move and produced a big increase in business straight away. Over the years large sums have been spent improving the property. The Sudbury store as it is today.



“Paul was not very old then, but proved of tremendous help. He was able to tackle much of the day to day administration and learned very quickly.”

- Leslie Glasswell

Still business continued to expand. Six months on, in 1979, Leslie, Paul and Terry looked at the old established firm of Alstons of Sudbury. Realising it would be easy to service from the Tollgate warehouse they brought the property - which included 6,000 sq. ft. of retail space - in the name of the family.

The premises needed considerable updating to bring them up to the Glasswells standard. For a start, the toilets were outside and the first floor was lit by gas. Leslie recalls: “We all felt very happy. We now had a good store in a good market town and looked forward to capitalising on our Suffolk history. Terry did a good job of pricing the stock and we bought the property and stock complete.”

Richard Ball was the manager and Graham Vale looked after the carpet department. The total staff was six. The first two months were spent in refurbishing and refitting the property, including the installation of a new shop front. Attractive showrooms in a major position in the High Street with a public car park behind gave Glasswells a strong local presence. It was a shrewd move which produced a big increase in trade.

During the latter part of the 1970s Glasswells left the Floreat Buying Group, mainly because Leslie disagreed with its national advertising policy which tended to make members' shops look like Floreat stores. Leslie valued Glasswells independence. One of the advantages of membership had been discussions with other private traders and this Leslie missed a great deal. Feeling that Paul would need talks with other independent furnishers in the

future, he applied to join Associated Independent Stores when it advertised for new members at the end of 1982.

The group consisted of privately owned department stores throughout the country and Glasswells became its first furniture only retailer. The exchange of ideas among members was stimulating, and good for business, and a number of other furniture retailers soon decided to join as well. Leslie quickly became involved at head office level and chaired the Merchandise Advisory Panel Committee. In 1987 he was invited to join the board. During his three years in office Leslie's former buying group, Floreat, ran into problems and as a result nearly 100 new members, all house furnishers, were incorporated into Associated Independent Stores, making it the strongest group of its kind in the country.

Paul had also become involved in its work, particularly with the Steering Committee. He continues his interest in the group today and, in 1993, gave a presentation on Glasswells new World of Furniture store to 200 delegates at the annual meeting. It was very well received and many members followed it up by visiting the store and subsequently incorporating many of his ideas into their own businesses. Members were, in fact, so impressed that Paul was invited to give a follow-up presentation at the annual meeting the next year.

The continued growth of Associated Independent Stores is illustrated by the fact that, from 1981 to 1995, its 105 members and £355m turnover had risen to a 256 membership, with an annual turnover of £1,085m.

CHAPTER NINE:

THE END OF AN ERA

The completion of the St Andrew's Street store in 1968 had been the highlight of Jerry Glasswells' life. His favourite saying was that it stood as a "monument to self-denial".

Everything he had earned had been ploughed back into the business and was still being reinvested even in the latter part of the 1970s. The firm was continuing to grow and Jerry was very proud, remembering that his father, Bucklar, had died nearly two decades previously, well liked but with virtually nothing to show for a lifetime of hard work.

While Jerry had wanted to make his mark in life, he never forgot the community that had supported him. That's why back in 1954 he had started a Christmas distribution of tea and sugar to pensioners in the area. In a newspaper interview in 1971 he explained his reasons.

Jerry and Leslie distributing tea and sugar to pensioners.



"Some years ago I felt that the people who had helped me to get on in life were those of my own age so I decided that at Christmas I would give every pensioner two pounds of sugar and a quarter of tea."

Pensioners queuing outside the St Andrew's Street store for their tea and sugar.



The first distribution was made in Bury but was later extended to Haverhill, Saffron Walden and Stowmarket. To receive the gifts senior citizens were asked to call at the shop and show their pension books. They came in their thousands and Jerry was often there having a chat with customers, whom he regarded as friends from the old days. It was not a charity but a token of appreciation and thanks to all the people of the district who had supported the firm over the years.

Jerry said in 1975: "I look forward to this as a family occasion. I meet old customers, old friends and people I served with in the First World War." Earlier, in 1955, in an advertisement

GLASSWELLS

CALLING ALL OLD AGE PENSIONERS!
GLASSWELLS FREE
TEA & SUGAR
GIVEN AWAY
TO OLD AGE PENSIONERS IN BURY ST. EDMUNDS & DISTRICT
FRIDAY DEC. 16TH.

SILVER
SPOON

“I look forward to this as a family occasion. I meet old customers, old friends and people I served with in the First World War.”

- Jerry Glasswell, 1975



Three Generations of Glasswells leadership: Leslie, Jerry and Paul, with the Mayor of Haverhill in 1978.

announcing the second distribution Glasswells said -

“We have been fortunate in the past year due to the support of our many customers, and we would like to pass on a little of this success to those less fortunate.”

The same year the Bury Free Press reported that Jerry and Leslie and members of the staff distributed two pounds of sugar and a quarter pound of tea to 750 pensioners in the first hour. A number of people over 80 were each given 10s (50p) and a widow of 89 received a £5 note. In fact so many people arrived for the distribution that supplies ran out but more were quickly brought in so that no one went away disappointed.

At the time of Jerry’s death on 3 May, 1984, the firm had given away more than £100,000 worth of tea and sugar over 30 years. That year Leslie decided to discontinue the seasonal distribution. It was the end of an era.

It was the same spirit of helping those less fortunate than himself that had inspired Jerry to stand for Bury Town Council as an Independent in 1959, when he was elected for a three-year term. Members of his staff turned out in force to canvass on his behalf. In an interview, he said: “Being a working class man I wanted to represent the working class on the Mildenhall Road Estate. I wanted the chance to give back to others some of the good things I had got out of life.”

Towards his latter years the day to day running of the business and the development of new ideas were increasingly in the hands of Leslie and Vic who continued to get on well together, their individual expertise complementing each other’s efforts.

The death of Jerry Glasswell in 1984 was the end of an era. It had been largely due to his foresight, drive

and enthusiasm that Glasswells had developed from a tiny second-hand furnishing shop to become one of the largest and most respected furnishing stores in the area. It brought to an end a remarkable father and son partnership, one that had lasted 44 years.

Leslie’s quick insight into national trends and innovative ideas had made an invaluable contribution to the success of their relationship. They had always consulted each other before taking major decisions - and it had sometimes fallen to Leslie to act as diplomat and peacemaker for his father’s bluntness.

In the main they had made the right moves in the right place and at the right time.

Leslie also inherited his father’s concern and affection for the family, a thread that continues to bind members of the family together today now that the third generation, Paul, is in the driving seat.

One of life’s achievers, Jerry was seen as strong and forthright by his employees. Blessed with a robust personality, his word was also his bond - the characteristic hallmark of an English gentleman. He would never purchase anything unless he had the money in the bank and it was his proud boast that he never ever received an “account rendered” from a manufacturer in his life.

To his staff Jerry was known as ‘the Guv’nor’. He always used to enter the St Andrew’s shop by the front door and his sureness of touch made things happen. With eyes like a hawk and an immediate grasp of fine detail he would notice at once any piece of stock among the thousands on display that may have escaped pricing.

Always keen for the business to be led from a position of strength, he was, towards the end of his life, reluctant for Glasswells to grow much larger. He had been concerned about the success of the group’s Kingsbury warehouses in the 1970s fearing they might overshadow the shops, which, for him, were of first importance.

Jerry always appreciated the contribution of the staff in the group’s continuing prosperity. Although on occasions fierce with those who worked for him, his staff were always loyal. At the time of his death many had been with the firm for 20 years and more, some nearing 40 years of service. Every year they enjoyed a Christmas party at a local hotel and an outing to London to the theatre with dinner included. As branches prospered and multiplied

so there was friendly, inter-shop competition to improve sale and service.

Outside of business Jerry was keen on sport. In his London days he had been a regular supporter of the speedway at Romford and in later years was a season ticket holder and ardent fan of Ipswich Town F.C. At Leslie's suggestion he joined the Risbygate Bowls and Tennis Club as a bowling member and was soon elected to the social committee, becoming, in succession, treasurer and chairman. He prevailed on people to make donations and interest free loans to raise funds for an indoor bowls hall and squash courts and he and Leslie guaranteed to give £1 for every £1 loaned or donated by members. He also succeeded in buying adjoining land to provide additional sports areas and a large car park and in 1974 Bury St Edmunds MP, Eldon Griffiths, then Minister of Sport, opened the clubhouse. Jerry's efforts had transformed the club into a major sports organisation in the town. In recognition of his efforts he became the club's first president - an office held for the rest of his life.

For more than 30 years he had supported All Saints Church in Park Road, Bury, both financially and as a member of the parochial church council and a sidesman.

In his will he left sums of money to long serving members of the staff and remembered both All Saints' Church and the Risbygate Bowls and Tennis Club. The funeral took place at All Saints'. It was

packed to overflowing with mourners from all walks of life who came together to pay their last respects to a remarkable man.

"Dad was the most ambitious man I have ever known," says Leslie. "There was no stopping him but he wanted little for himself. I think his hard upbringing made him want to achieve something and be somebody - yet he never wanted to change his way of life."



Jerry and Ethel Glasswell pictured when they celebrated 60 years of marriage in 1981.

Members of the staff of Glasswells always enjoy their annual Christmas party. This picture was taken in 1956 when the seasonal celebration was held at Palmers Restaurant, Bury St Edmunds.





JERRY GLASSWELL

1896 - 1984



“Jerry generated such a fund of good fellowship that people crowded round him eager for his views, advice and assistance.”

- Jerry's Colleague International Stores

CHAPTER TEN: BRANCHING OUT

In 1981 Glasswells bought the business of Ivan Tasker in Norwich. Mr Tasker had started it just after the Second World War and ran it from three separate buildings which included a shop, warehouse and upholstery department.

With a staff of about 23, including French polishers, cabinet makers and upholsterers, Glasswells took over the whole business and bought the stock as well. The premises covered 9,000 to 10,000 sq. ft. of floor space in Fishergate, a somewhat unfashionable part of the city dominated by shoe factories and printing works. There was little car parking and the area did not favour a substantial flow of pedestrian customers. However, Mr Tasker had built up a substantial clientele by providing a high degree of personal service, maintaining both extensive stocks and a fast delivery service.

Despite its disadvantages, Leslie thought it would be a first rate opportunity for Paul to gain further managerial experience and to learn new aspects of the trade. Richard Ball, manager of the Sudbury shop, agreed to relocate to Norwich to look after the new

store. It was a tough assignment for Paul to lick into better shape. Many of the employees had been there for years and found it difficult to adapt to new ways.

As the first move, Glasswells decided to sell the warehouse opposite the shop for housing development. However, the position of the store continued to worsen, becoming increasingly isolated as more factories became established in the area. An opportunity to sell it to Norwich corrugated Boards, a neighbouring firm looking for more space to expand, was, therefore, too good to miss. They agreed to give Glasswells an 18-month lease to provide time in which to find other premises.

After looking at a number of sites, Glasswells decided to take a warehouse previously owned by Wallace King in Ber Street, about 200 yards away from the major city store of Bonds. They bought it for £150,000 and spent a further £250,000 on improvements. Paul engaged the Saunders Design Team from London and spent long hours visiting other furniture stores gathering ideas. The result was a highly attractive store which

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Glasswells Norwich Store, previously Ivan Tasker, 1981.

was to be their largest for some years. After some hectic last days of preparation, just after Christmas, 1984, the new shop was opened by Diana Moran, the popular Green Goddess TV keep fit girl. It covered 12,000 sq. ft. on two floors.

The property also included two small shops which were let, one selling bathroom tiles, the other as a travel agency. The income was useful in view of the large sum of money invested in the venture. "I don't think any of us celebrated Christmas very well that year because we were all working at Norwich right up to Christmas Eve to get the shop ready for opening immediately after the holiday," recalls Leslie. "It turned out to be a very fine shop indeed and was a great credit to the efforts of Paul."

To begin with, the shop did quite well, but after a bit it began to struggle. Although it was the best shop in the group, turnover was insufficient for its size. The problem was really due to location, being just too far away from the town centre for pedestrians to walk to but not far enough for a car park of its own. Low volume customer flow meant that turnover continued to fall and after ten years, in 1994, it had reached the stage where Glasswells felt the time had come to close it down and sell or lease the property.

Glasswells were able to secure a five-year tenancy with Norfolk County Council for a temporary library. The council then spent considerable sums installing lifts and fittings - increasing the value of the property and making it easier to find a tenant in the longer term should the need arise.

It was in 1983 that Glasswells made the decision to move into Braintree. Having been approached by an old established furniture trader, Sid Slater, they decided to buy his business, including stock and premises. Although not ideally sited, being about 200 yards from the town centre, Braintree was within easy travelling distance of Bury, which meant the shop could be serviced from the central warehouse at Bury Tollgate.

With 8,000 sq. ft. of space and some of the original staff retained, the deal was signed the same year. Glasswells immediately spent £30,000 on improvements. The new store quickly became an important part of group operations. Highly successful in sales of furniture, curtains and carpets, turnover increased 50 percent in the first two years, which encouraged Glasswells to expand yet again.

There were high hopes that the development of the town centre would assist business and promises

The Braintree shop where trade has been affected because town centre redevelopment has failed to increase the footfall in the High Street.



were made by both the town council and a firm of developers to improve parking and pedestrian traffic. "While the car park has been built, the rearrangement of the town has created a new development of popular shops, regrettably at the expense of the existing High Street which now suffers from low footfall," says Leslie. "There are now several empty shops there and our previously good position has been ruined."

In the meantime, the Brentgovel Street site in Bury, with its re-development potential, had been proving something of a headache. This was a major job for Leslie. In fact, discussions went on for several years, during which more than 50 drawings and architects plans were submitted. As leases of adjoining properties ran out so Glasswells took them over, but, since the area included listed buildings, re-development plans were more than usually complicated. The result was not exactly what Glasswells wanted for this site that had put them on the road to prosperity nearly 40 years previously.

Initially, Glasswells had three tenants whose leases needed to be terminated before work could go ahead. Talks included protracted negotiations to enable one of them to return to the premises after rebuilding. In addition, there were complications with Tolly Cobbold which wanted to re-negotiate areas as far as they affected the adjoining Griffin public house.

In this case, Glasswells owned a ground floor area while Tolly Cobbold owned a first floor, creating a "flying" freehold. At the same time the brewers were trying to do a deal to re-locate the pub elsewhere and sub-let some of their part of the development. "All these negotiations were highly delicate and very well handled by Baseley Hales, our solicitor at Partridge and Wilson," recalls Leslie.

The Glasswells area included a 17th century listed section where an ancient timber frame and old shop fronts had to be retained. Work involved excavating new basements and foundations and installing a steel frame to shore up the old timbers.



Glasswells Norwich Store Interior, 1984



Leslie Glasswell speaking at the opening of the Norwich Store, 1984

“I don’t think any of us celebrated Christmas very well that year because we were all working at Norwich right up to Christmas Eve to get the shop ready for after the holiday. It turned out to be a very fine shop indeed and was a great credit to the efforts of Paul.”

- Leslie Glasswell

Paul Glasswell speaking at the opening of the Norwich Store, 1984



The Norwich branch in Ber Street which was opened in 1984



On the site of the original Glasswells shop they were able to put up a completely new building on three levels, with basement, ground and first floor areas extending to about 8,000 sq. ft. Tolly Cobbold were engaged in alterations at the same time so it was a very tight site on which to work, with little space for manoeuvre by the builders, Cocksedge, of Mildenhall. The project was designed by Pawling and Durrant Associates, of Bury. During the work some 16th Century timbers were discovered from an original town gateway. These had to be numbered and re-inserted into the new building.



The re-development by Glasswells of a large property in Brentgovel Street, Bury St Edmunds, included the site of their very first shop. The completed project was officially opened in 1985. The picture shows the corner of the new development with St Andrew's Street South.

On completion, Glasswells also had two shops to let fronting Brentgovel Street in the listed part of the property and a first floor restaurant, called Daleys, which was run as an in-house franchise. It is here that timbers can still be seen from what is believed to be the remains of the old Risbygate.

John Adams was manager of the shop before the building work was started and afterwards became manager of the bedding department. Brian Flack, manager at St Andrew's Street, took over additional responsibilities for the new enlarged premises on their completion.

A small curtain department, managed by Eva Ely, had existed at the branch since 1968 and this was greatly enlarged in the new building, along with soft furnishings, which had an excellent position on the ground floor, and a big display of beds in the basement. With beds, bedroom furniture, curtains, linens and soft furnishings in Brentgovel Street, customers had only to walk round the corner to the St Andrew's Street branch to complete their home furnishings with lounge and dining room furniture and carpets.

More space at Brentgovel Street meant Glasswells no longer needed three town centre outlets so it was decided to close the Corn Exchange shop and concentrate on the other two businesses, conveniently placed close to each other.

The new soft furnishings and linens departments at Brentgovel Street quickly proved to be highly successful and similar departments were introduced at other Glasswells stores. The success of the restaurant was also noted for a major development yet to come.

In the meantime, all the remaining furnishing departments flourished at the St Andrew's Street shop, where the group offices were now centralised.

Commenting on the Brentgovel project afterwards, Leslie said: "I would have liked to have created something that was architecturally more interesting for the town but there were a great many problems with it. "There was even a time when I thought I would never live to see the place built." The premises had cost £42,000 and a further £400,000 was spent on rebuilding. The completion of the Brentgovel Street development left Glasswells with a sizeable overdraft which it set about reducing by a period of consolidation.

It was estimated that it would take four or five years to get back into the black but business proved so good it was repaid in two years.

The opening in 1985 caused some deep emotional feelings because the site had included the first Glasswells shop at number 35 which had been opened in 1946. It was decided to make it a special occasion and Sir Eldon Griffiths, MP for Bury, who had been involved in the planning discussions, was invited to perform the ceremony. There were also two preview nights at which 20-year presentations were made to members of the staff.

To interest several hundred invited customers a special treasure chest was displayed with a lock, to which everyone was given a key. If it opened the chest the customer received a bottle of champagne and a voucher for £100 worth of furniture. In two nights 54 furniture vouchers, worth more than £5,000, were given away.

The St Andrew's Street South shop was also specially set out for the occasion and a talk on flower arranging, by Norah Cullen, was organised and wine was served. Hercules the Bear and his Scottish wrestler trainer were engaged and gave a special performance attended by several hundred children and their parents in a wrestling ring set up at the nearby Lacy Scott auction market. A large musical organ was also brought over



GLASSWELLS LEADERSHIP 1985

From Left: Paul Glasswell, George Blowers, Leslie Glasswell, Terry Glasswell and Tim Reardon



BRENTGOVEL STREET

Interior Shop floor post renovation, circa 1983



BRENTGOVEL STREET

Work about to start on the Brentgovel Street re-development scheme carried out by Glasswells.

from Holland and the Sudbury Majorettes completed what was a fantastic opening day.

Both this and the Norwich opening were very successfully organised by John Creed, Susan's husband, who had joined the company in 1983 as personal assistant to his father-in-law, Leslie. John went on to become involved in advertising and also took on responsibilities in overseeing some of the firm's growing number of branches. He organised aerial advertising for the firm and Leslie Glasswell, complete with Biggles helmet, went on a trip round Suffolk in an open aeroplane towing a "Buy from Glasswells" banner. "I think it was the first aerial advertising ever used by anyone in East Anglia," said Leslie.

The same year as they opened the new Brentgovel Street premises Glasswells started another new venture - a discount furniture warehouse called Union Jacks.

A large helium filled balloon was sent up over the warehouse to advertise exactly where it could be found in a large building in Cavendish Road, Bury. However, the budget market at which the business was aimed failed to materialise. Two years after its opening it was closed and the lease sold to Building Scene. John decided to use the knowledge he had gained with the firm to pursue his own business in contract furnishing.

The proposed re-development of the Cattle Market site at Bury St Edmunds was a major talking point in the early 1980's. For Glasswells, along with other local traders, it was to result in years of uncertainty. With their main Bury store right next to the proposed re-development area Glasswells were in a prime position to take advantage of the site's future potential.

In the meantime, however, they were becalmed. How should they continue to develop the business? Should they move to another location or just wait and see what happened? Plans to build another floor on the back of the St Andrew's Street South property were put on ice while talks went on with the developers, Chartwell. But time ticked by and still no decision was made about the scheme.

"We were between the devil and the deep blue sea - just marking time," recalls Leslie. "However, if we carried on waiting it would have been disastrous. Of course, we would have continued to make a living but it would only have been second best as far as the business was concerned." In the end Glasswells decided to look at possible expansion in another part of town. It proved to be a wise decision, for the re-development scheme was eventually abandoned.

In 1988 Glasswells reinstated its Contracts Department within Glasswells Ltd. The firm had been in the business of contract furnishing some years previously with a separate company called St Edmunds Contracts. This had been run by Ian Ellis, who was followed by Colin Eke.



Handing over - Leslie Glasswell and his son Paul who took over as managing director of Glasswells in 1989. Leslie remains chairman of the family company.

Subsequently, the business was taken over by Colin Fayers who incorporated it into his responsibilities as manager of outside rounds but the name St Edmunds Contracts disappeared in 1974 when it was closed. The re-launched contracts department has grown steadily since the late 1980s, providing a service aimed at trade and business customers, supplying furniture, carpets, curtains and linens. It has consistently achieved double digit increases to a point where its turnover is now nearly £1m.

Currently run by Peter Bailey, assisted by Jim Mitchell and Nigel Talbot, the majority of its work comes from builders, shop-fitters and nursing homes. Every year the department exhibits at the Nursing Home Exhibition at Earls Court, London, which is beginning to spread the name of Glasswells nationwide. One of its major coups recently was securing contracts worth up to £100,000 for the complete fitting out of all the furnishings at a nursing home in Lincolnshire.

When Paul became managing director in 1989, Leslie, who was then 65, was able to slow down after many years shouldering the responsibilities of joint chairman and managing director. However, Leslie continues to retain considerable involvement with Glasswells as its chairman and maintains his interest in Associated Independent Stores.

By the time Paul succeeded to the post of managing director he was also benefiting from the expertise of George Blowers, who had joined the firm in 1986. George had come to Glasswells from the Wallace King Group where he had been for 12

years, starting as transport manager for removals.

When this side of the business was sold he moved into retailing as their branch manager of a shop in Hitchin. After managing various branches of Wallace King, George became Sales Director, moving to Bury St Edmunds because of its central location. He joined Glasswells as area manager and was promoted to Sales Director in 1990, having played a major role in the development of branch businesses. George said he felt it was a great privilege to be asked to join the board of directors. "Although not family, I certainly feel as though I am," he said.

In 1985 Glasswells had seven branches - Haverhill, Saffron Walden, Braintree, Norwich, Sudbury and two at Bury. They employed a total staff of about 100 and had a combined annual turnover of £3.5m. The latter part of the 1980s was a good time for Glasswells. Trade was helped by the economic climate and turnover soared.

In 1989, the Sudbury shop was completely updated. Work included building a small extension and the installation of new shop fronts facing North Street and the car park at the rear. Along with new electrics, suspended ceilings and re-decoration, the shop was given a completely modern appearance. It had also been possible to extend the selling area by 1,500 sq. ft.

But bigger things were yet to come. They had yet to make the decision to join the giants.



Every year Glasswells Contracts Department takes a stand at the Nursing Home Exhibition in London - a move that is helping to spread the name of Glasswells nationwide. Left, their display at a recent exhibition.

CHAPTER ELEVEN: A WORLD OF FURNITURE

The early 1990s saw some major developments in the Glasswell group. To begin with, important improvements were put in hand at the Haverhill and Braintree branches. Insight Designs were employed to provide the Haverhill shop with a more up-to-date feel. A new carpet was fitted, the décor was changed, and new screens, suspended ceilings and light fittings installed. The curtain and carpet departments were refurbished at the same time. The Braintree store was also updated when a listed building at the rear of the property was refurbished with the aid of a grant. The store was redecorated and new carpets, screens, lighting and a suspended ceiling were installed.

But all this was small work compared with the giant step forward being considered by Paul and his father, Leslie - for they believed they could “see the writing on the wall” as far as their main bury stores were concerned. The problems were space and car parking.

Although Glasswells had a total of 16,000 sq. ft. between the St Andrew’s Street South and Brentgovel Street branches, they realised this was no longer enough. Not only was the shopping

public demanding bigger and better furniture displays, more car parking was also urgently needed.

It was really the rapidly changing marketplace that brought it all to a head. After years of comfortable ascendancy in the furniture trade locally, new names began appearing on the scene and market share for Glasswells began to fall. “We knew we would always be able to make a living in Bury and across the region, but, so it seemed, so could everyone else,” said Paul. “Somehow we had taken our eye off the competition. New retailers were coming in to better locations and often their trading offers were more appealing to customers than our own.”

Between 1983 and 1991 in-town retail space in Bury increased by 23% but out of town space jumped by 227%. It was small wonder that Glasswells were losing their niche in the marketplace, for it was impossible to maintain market share against such competition.

Looking back, Paul says it was only in recent years they realised that their success in the late 1980s had been a great deal to do with consumer confidence and public willingness to borrow money. In 1990, Glasswells management team decided the time had come to stand back and take a long, hard look at the situation.

Glasswells World of Furniture which opened in Newmarket Road, Bury St Edmunds in 1992. On a 4.5 acre site, there remains plenty of space for further expansion





The former Fiat building in Newmarket Road, Bury St Edmunds, before it was converted to Glasswells World of Furniture.

They came up with interesting facts. For a start, they found that the most successful furniture retailers did not usually pay rent. In this respect Glasswells were in a very strong position, for not only did they own shops, they also had income from rents.

Their policy of having shops to rent to other retailers had started by accident at Haverhill in 1977 when the council had suggested they should build five additional units in addition to the two shops they had planned to rent out as part of their original project. "The rent produced by these extra shops cushioned against hard times in the furniture trade and have since provided a good asset base," says Leslie.

Glasswells also looked at their own position relative to the competition, thought about why people shopped

elsewhere, analysed their strengths and weaknesses, and compared their store appeal with that of their competitors. They came to one conclusion: The time had come for change. But the problems were not the kind that could be solved overnight.

"Although suitable retail space became available in Bury from time to time, it was not a price we were prepared to pay," remembers Paul. "While we had always leaned towards owning the freehold of our properties, I could not see that our business was big enough to grow at a pace to match the resources of the multiples - the really big boys who were continuing to set the benchmark for property prices," he continued.

However, Glasswells began considering the possibilities of expansion on the edge of town.



Under construction, the World of Furniture store was refurbished in just 10 weeks.



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Members of the senior management team pictured at a recent meeting. From left: Richard Ball, George Blowers, Tim Reardon, Leslie Glasswell, Terry Glasswell, Paul Glasswell and Fred Raison.

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Easy to get to, the Moreton Hall Industrial Estate was looked at, along with sites off the Parkway. Because of the boom in trade generally, commercial property prices had risen fast. Houses had also gone through the roof and there was keen competition for any kind of building land.

On a number of occasions Glasswells were outbid for premises and developers often seemed to prefer dealing with public companies rather than a firm that was privately owned. Substantial residential development in the borough made Leslie and Paul even more convinced they needed to move to an edge of town location.

In no position to compete with out of town stores, they were worried in case serious competition should move in and exploit these sites. They needed to be able to compete on the same level, but, being in the fortunate position of owning most of their properties, Leslie and Paul found it difficult to take on board the idea of becoming a tenant.

Then, the property market suddenly peaked. Enthusiasm for large sites began to wane and there was a general slide in confidence. With the market changing rapidly, commercial property prices dipped steeply as companies battened down the hatches to ride out the storm. Bury St Edmunds, which had seen one of the biggest increases in residential prices, was to suffer

one of the biggest falls in house prices nationwide. The slow-down in property sales had a knock-on effect to businesses, including, of course, the furniture trade.

It was early in 1992 that Glasswells first had the opportunity to acquire the 4.5 acre site and former Fiat buildings just off Newmarket Road, in Bury, one of the main routes in and out of town. The management of Glasswells is not prone to making rash decisions. The opportunity was just what they had been looking for and too good a deal to be missed.

They also had the benefit of a steadily accumulating cash pile which had done very well indeed during the high interest years. In fact, at one time it was earning nearly 15% on deposit - far better than they could hope to achieve by selling furniture.

“It’s frightening to look back and think we spent £1.6m on a property that at the time didn’t even have planning permission.”

- Paul Glasswell

With business in the grip of recession, the risks were also clear. However, Leslie remembered what had been achieved with their edge-of-town Kingsbury warehouses and Paul was keen to make a move that would increase potential. The Newmarket Road site had been a distribution centre for Fiat Tractors. It included a large suite of offices, a 34,000 sq. ft. building and masses of space for future expansion. When it came on the market it had been valued at £2.5m but by the time Glasswells were interested the price had dropped to £1.6m for the total 40,000 sq. ft. of buildings and land.

Because the commercial market was at such a low ebb, few competitors were interested in the site and Glasswells were greatly encouraged by St Edmundsbury Council, which wanted careful development of the industrial building that fronted one of the town's major roads.

Glasswells bought the freehold. The purchase was agreed in February but it took until July to complete the legal work. Although Glasswells acquired the property as warehousing - making it less expensive - they had a shrewd idea they would obtain planning permission for a store. Mr Jonathan Burroughs, of Bidwells, acted on Glasswells behalf. "It's frightening to look back and think we spent £1.6m on a property that at the time didn't even have planning permission," says Paul. "We could have wound up with the most modern and luxurious storage warehouse in the country if things had not worked out the way they did.

"But I am certainly very glad we did not make a move before. After weathering four recessionary years in the furniture trade, we were able to find a site twice as large as we had planned and a building twice as big - at much less than we would have had to pay if we had purchased earlier."

The development of Glasswells World of Furniture needed a lot of thought. Their town centre stores had always been designed to make them "female friendly" and this was top of the agenda for designing the new store. Prime requirements were to create a shop with the right atmosphere and to fill it with



Aerial photo of the World of Furniture, Bury St Edmunds.



Construction of the new customer entrance.

A much larger number of beds were available for customers to try.



the right goods at the right prices, a combination for which there is no unique formula for success.

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They planned to open at the beginning of October - leaving just ten weeks to refurbish the property. Architect Ray Durrant was engaged and contracts were placed with local W. J. Baker who completed on time. "It was a very good building and well designed. We felt it would make a much better store than a warehouse," recalls Paul. "Access was excellent from all directions and it had an unusual position standing all alone on a site without any other retailers close by. We took a calculated risk - one of the biggest Glasswells has ever taken."

The directors immediately went on a fact finding tour around the country visiting other furniture retailers such as Sterling Warehouse, the largest furnishing company in Scotland. A further six or seven out of town sites were also visited in trying to decide what kind of atmosphere to create at the new store. Leslie recalls: "We were trying to find a formula which we thought would be suitable for a large furniture store, not a warehouse operating in mid-Suffolk. "Obviously what would work in Scotland or Manchester would not necessarily work here. We wanted to find the right environment and with the help of David Appleby, a design consultant from Panache Designs, Nottingham, we succeeded

“We took a calculated risk - one of the biggest Glasswells has ever taken.”

- Paul Glasswell

in creating a large store where customers can see displays of furnishings as they might look at home. "We also added complementary departments, such as gifts and an in-store restaurant."

Glasswells original plan had been for a substantially larger shop than they had in St Andrew's Street and they had not expected to end up with a giant 30,000 sq. ft. store nearly twice the size of their combined Bury retail operation. Panache Designs also helped to ensure that the new building had the style of a shop rather than a warehouse. Although the roof, steel work and the main fabric of the premises were all in good condition, the entire inside needed to be stripped out and re-fitted.

A big advantage in moving to the site proved to be the larger offices which greatly improved the working environment for the staff. Wall papered screens ensured a domestic feel to displays and an attractive reception desk was installed as a feature in the entrance foyer where trained staff would be able to make contact with customers passing in and out of the store via automatic doors.

A genuine welcome and "thank-you for coming" is regarded by Glasswells as the first major step in customer care and more effective than a hard-nosed approach by a salesperson. The reception area was also a single cash point for the whole shop, serving at the same time as an information desk to help visitors find their way around the store.

From a bespoke entrance carpet to bring added personality to the foyer to special textured ceilings for a domestic look, no stone was left unturned in creating a store to provide customers with the

ultimate shopping experience - an environment in which decisions about home décor and furnishing can be made in comfort and at leisure.

Knowing that many of these decisions are matters for the whole family to discuss, a children's playroom was installed and nappy changing facilities provided.

The benefits of a restaurant had become obvious from Glasswells experience with the in-store franchise at the Brentgovel Street shop and providing an attractive place for customers to eat more frequently than just on shopping expeditions became a major consideration in planning the new store. A restaurant was also seen as a way of keeping in touch with customers and the decision was taken to provide much more than just a coffee bar - an attractive 42-seat restaurant was designed instead.

Called The Place To Eat, it cost £34,000 to set up and became an integral part of the store's immediate success. With a turnover of more than £1,500 a week, Paul's wife, Fiona, oversees the restaurant which makes a comfortable profit as well as enhancing the store's image. Serving a full luncheon menu, it has attracted people from all walks of life - including many businessmen who enjoy its quality cuisine and appreciate the easy car parking. There is also a comfortable boardroom available, making it an excellent venue for business meetings.

Fiona and Paul had met while doing A-levels at Culford School. Leaving in 1974 she joined the John Lewis Partnership in Oxford Street, London, as a trainee. She became assistant manager of teenage fashion in 1977 and department manager of the

children's wear section a year later. She was then only 21. Her career continued as manager of other fashion departments, including bridal, lingerie and knitwear.

They were married in 1981 and while living at Gazeley, near Newmarket, Fiona continued to travel to work in London. However, in 1983 she transferred to Robert Sayle, in Cambridge, part of the same group, becoming manager of menswear, luggage and boyswear. She left in 1984 to have Samuel, followed by Freddie in 1986.

Fiona organised the décor, kitchen equipment and staff for the World of Furniture restaurant with the help of the manager who was then Sally Ryan. On the first day the shop opened, The Place To Eat was so busy that Fiona helped out as a waitress. Terry Glasswell's wife, Jean, George Blower's wife, Jane, and Fred Raison's wife, Joan, all helped by loading the dishwasher and drying up. While Fiona continues to oversee the general running of the restaurant she does not work on a daily basis and Jean, Jane, and Joan no longer do the washing up!

When Paul decided they needed to add more accessories to their furniture display area Fiona and Leslie went with David Warren to the Gift Fair where they saw so many good lines they decided to increase their buying to stock 1,000 sq. ft. of space and turn it into a gift department and picture gallery. This added so much to the general 'feel' of the store it was decided to add lighting two years later, helping to create a department store atmosphere. Fiona continues to help David, who is manager of these departments, with buying at the Gift Fairs.

With furniture no longer stocked at the St Andrew's Street South store, the carpet and curtain departments

The Place to Eat in-store restaurant at Glasswells World of Furniture has proved popular with a wide cross section of people who find its cuisine and ease of parking preferable to travelling into town.



were combined on the premises, the curtains being moved from the nearby Brentgovel Street shop. A selection of beds was also displayed at the shop, which Glasswells believed should be retained after more than 40 years of trading in the centre of the town.

Alterations were then carried out to the Brentgovel Street property to enable it to be let to three separate tenants - William Hill, the bookmakers, Choices Video and Daleys, the restaurant which had previously operated under an in-store franchise. When the decision was made soon afterwards to move the carpets, curtains and beds departments to the World of Furniture, the St Andrew's Street store was turned into a special low price furniture "Clearance Centre".

The first part of the Newmarket Road venture in the early 1990s cost over £2m - a huge sum to find at a time when trade was not very buoyant. It was a risky move too, but with a good turnover at the old town centre shop it required only a small increase in sales for the new store to become profitable.

In the event, Glasswells World of Furniture doubled turnover in the first year and has continued to show a significant growth year on year ever since. The store obviously benefited from the huge choice of furnishings that could all be displayed at ground floor level. Easy accessibility and ample free car parking also proved to be plus points that helped to attract the extra trade generated by the introduction of Sunday opening.

Able to display 100 three-piece suites, 40 divans, 50 dining room groups, 50 beds and

40 bedroom settings under one roof, the choice is now three times that of their former town centre premises where goods had to be displayed on five different floors. Wide gangways make it easy for people with prams and wheelchairs to move around the store where the new departments - particularly the gift section - have proved highly popular.

The opening of the World of Furniture in 1992 was a very big affair - one that needed planning over several days. A special evening for staff and a number of customer nights were included. Among those invited were people who had been loyal to the firm for over 40 years and had watched the growth of the company with interest. More than 600 people attended functions at the store during its opening period. Looking back on

An interior picture of Glasswells World of Furniture, Bury St Edmunds, showing the extensive Carpet department.





Customers gather for opening day at the World of Furniture, 1992.

the event, Paul said: "It was nice to see so many people that my father had sold furnishings to in the early days and we both felt proud that we had retained this kind of connection with our customers." During the proceedings Paul made a point of thanking councillors and officials of St Edmundsbury Council for their support in "making our dream possible."

Realising that the size of the shop now meant they needed to draw customers from an even wider area, new catchment districts were targeted, including Newmarket, Ely and Cambridge. Extensive advertising was supported by a special 12-page tabloid newspaper in colour which was distributed to 200,000 households. The A14 dual carriageway also proved of great benefit in bringing people to the town from even further away. Within 18 months Glasswells knew they had done the right thing.

Success breeds success and a decision quickly followed to extend the building by adding a further 21,000 sq. ft. to accommodate the St Andrew's Street curtain and carpet departments. Extended by the Jackson Group between July and November, 1994, Glasswells were able to match carpeting, lighting and layout to the original store in such a way that the addition was not noticeable.

The 7,000 sq. ft. carpet area was four times the size of the previous town centre space and Glasswells were able to bring in roll-end displays and a substantial collection of rugs, as well as increase the overall selection of fitted carpets. Linens and curtains also gained by the extended space with much wider choices being made available. Both departments have significantly increased turnover since the move. As well as a new lighting department, Glasswells provided even more space for furniture and added new storage facilities.

The total size of the building, including offices, now extends to more than 60,000 sq. ft. making it the largest furniture store on one level in East Anglia. The total cost of the second phase worked out at around £1m.

The new Soft Furnishings department provided more choice and space for displays.



Exterior of the World of Furniture in Bury St Edmunds, 2005



Leslie Glasswell breaks through to the new extension of The World of Furniture at a party to celebrate its completion in 1994.





The new Glasswells World of Furniture store which opened at Martlesham Heath, Ipswich on Boxing Day 1995.

Running a business the size of the World of Furniture requires careful and detailed monitoring. Regular reviews of policy are made at meetings involving the managers of all departments, each department having its own budget and its results analysed in detail. The relationship of gross profit to stock is watched carefully, right down to the sales performance of individual manufacturers.

“It is true to say that our trading results have not been outstanding when looked at alongside some of the high-flyers in the industry,” said Paul. “However, our return has been steady.” The success of the World of Furniture, where the main furniture department is managed by Brian Flack, in no way diminished the importance of other branches of Glasswells to the continued financial wellbeing of the group. However, believing that the future lay in out-of-town retailing Paul was soon thinking about a site for a World of Furniture Two.

His quest led him to Beardmore Park, Martlesham Heath, Ipswich, when a suitable property came on the market. The retail park had been developed on the east side of Ipswich in 1989 by Churchmanor Estates and the main tenant had been Brights Furnishers who had relocated from Ipswich town centre and established a significant turnover there.

Glasswells had looked at the business in 1992 with a view to taking it over but had been unable to reach an agreement with Brights’ directors. The shop was experiencing cash flow difficulties.

With no pick-up in consumer demand in the first half of the 1990s Brights were unable to correct the position and the store went out of business in the autumn of 1995. Having already looked at the premises, Glasswells

were convinced the site offered considerable potential.

In fact, it had been improved in the meantime by the construction of a new Tesco store nearby. It also had the added advantage of being a fully fitted shop.

Reservations centred on the amount of rent that was payable and the fact that it would be down to Glasswells, as premier retail park tenant, to draw in a large number of customers. However, opening at Ipswich presented an opportunity to gain new customers in the east of the country and the store was sufficiently far away from Bury not to interfere with its existing catchment area.

Able to achieve extra turnover from a big new branch by incorporating it into the business generally and with very little increase in administrative expenses, Glasswells directors were confident that a branch at Ipswich would be profitable in both short and long terms. Their decision to go ahead was unanimous.

As far as attracting customers were concerned, they were also confident that the power of Glasswells advertising would achieve the right flow of customers. The initial results at the new store have proved their judgement right and turnover to date far exceeded expectations. As Eddie Gayfer, the manager of Glasswells World of Furniture at Bury, was an Ipswich man, he was the natural choice to run the new branch.

“We felt that all the omens were in our favour and supported him by moving Peter Woodward, who was the manager of our smaller Sudbury shop, to assist Eddie at Ipswich,” said Paul. “It took only six weeks of shop fitting and decorating to convert the branch into a World of Furniture and we were able to begin trading from the new 20,000 sq. ft. building on Boxing Day, 1995.”

CHAPTER TWELVE: THE WAY AHEAD

The continuing success of Glasswells as it approaches the millennium is based on the imagination and flexibility of its management team and staff. It has come a long way in the last 50 years and plans to go much further by the time the century is up.

Life has changed dramatically since the early days when Jerry and his son, Leslie, opened the door of their tiny shop in Brentgovel Street, Bury St Edmunds, to sell second-hand furniture they bought at local auctions. In those days, £100 was a lot of money. After deciding to go for it selling new furniture, it was a nail-biting decision to spend such a huge sum on the hire of a public hall to display the latest stock. They took the risk and the venture paid off handsomely.

Today, in 1996, Glasswells is a multi-million pound business incorporating almost every aspect of the home furnishing trade. It operates in six towns and has 140 employees.

But what of the future?

The history of Glasswells has been one of steady progress in the marketplace, with continual re-investment of resources and tight management control proving to be the seedbed of growth. It remains a family firm. Paul Glasswell, the third generation, is now in the driving seat, with a fourth generation waiting in the wings. Every member of the family has worked hard at “growing” their company,

making sure not too much is taken out and that assets increase and multiply.

But all their efforts would have been to no avail without an army of staff that has served Glasswells loyally over the years - not forgetting equally loyal customers, many of whom are now third and even fourth generations of some of the first families to shop at Glasswells. “We have always tried to treat our customers and our staff fairly. Good service and competitive pricing have been our watchwords,” said Paul. “Of course you cannot please all the people all of the time, but the continued growth of the company indicates that we have been consistently successful in maintaining high levels of customer satisfaction.”

The 50th year of the firm promises yet more records in sales and profits. But, as is usually the case with Glasswells, important decisions are just around the corner.

For a start, the Tollgate warehouse, which for four decades has been the hub of the business, is now bursting at the seams. Every possible extension has been added to the building and mezzanine floors have been installed to maximise every inch of space. Even so, more floor area is urgently needed to cope with the way business is expanding.

Discussions are now taking place to find ways of improving storage, handling and transportation of goods, with outside consultants being called in for the latest ideas. A decision will have to be taken soon whether to acquire a second warehouse for removals storage, or whether to build a completely new state-of-the-art facility to take the company into the next century.

Glasswells’ faithful computer system, which was started in the 1970s and has been regularly upgraded, now needs replacing. Terry Glasswell is currently researching the market for new systems that will be compatible with the Glasswells way of doing business, as well as providing more comprehensive reports and management information. “We recognise that we need to be at the forefront of technology using the

Glasswells 50th Anniversary Celebrations, 1996.





Glasswells computer system circa 1995.

most up to date communications and programs available," said Paul. "However, it's a project we are approaching with some trepidation as it is so fundamental to our business - not to mention the £100,000 it will cost!"

The latest World of Furniture store at Ipswich has got off to a highly promising start and the results of the first ten weeks trading have exceeded all expectations. The next few months are expected to be equally successful and will provide a pointer to the development of Glasswells into the next century.

Furniture is a bulky commodity and requires a great deal of space to show it off to its best advantage. It needs to be seen in large buildings on the outskirts of towns, that are easy to reach and car parking must be free. The stores have to be open at weekends and provide all the conveniences for family shopping - children's play areas, modern lavatories, nappy changing facilities, a comfortable restaurant and a gift department for browsing smaller things. Above all, it

must have an ambience in which the whole family can enjoy the experience of shopping together, with no need to rush or worry about the car.

But some things have not changed over the past half century - customer service and attractive displays of furniture in room settings, providing prospective buyers with an impression of what items would look like at home. Both have been at the top of Glasswells own shopping list of trading priorities since the very beginning.

The latest venture at Ipswich is the second in what it is hoped will be a long line of World of Furniture stores throughout East Anglia. Winning new customers to the Glasswells way of shopping will be seen as expanding and renewing the very basis on which the firm has been able to continue to grow even in difficult times.

It is part of what Paul Glasswell sees as a rich seam of gold, one that is often hidden in long established businesses. "Built over decades, this seam is sometimes never mined at all. Left untouched for too long its value becomes worthless and buried so deep it becomes lost for ever," says Paul. "The gold in the business of Glasswells has been deposited over a period of half a century of hard work and self-sacrifice. We decided to begin mining that gold a few years ago when we launched out with the first World of Furniture.

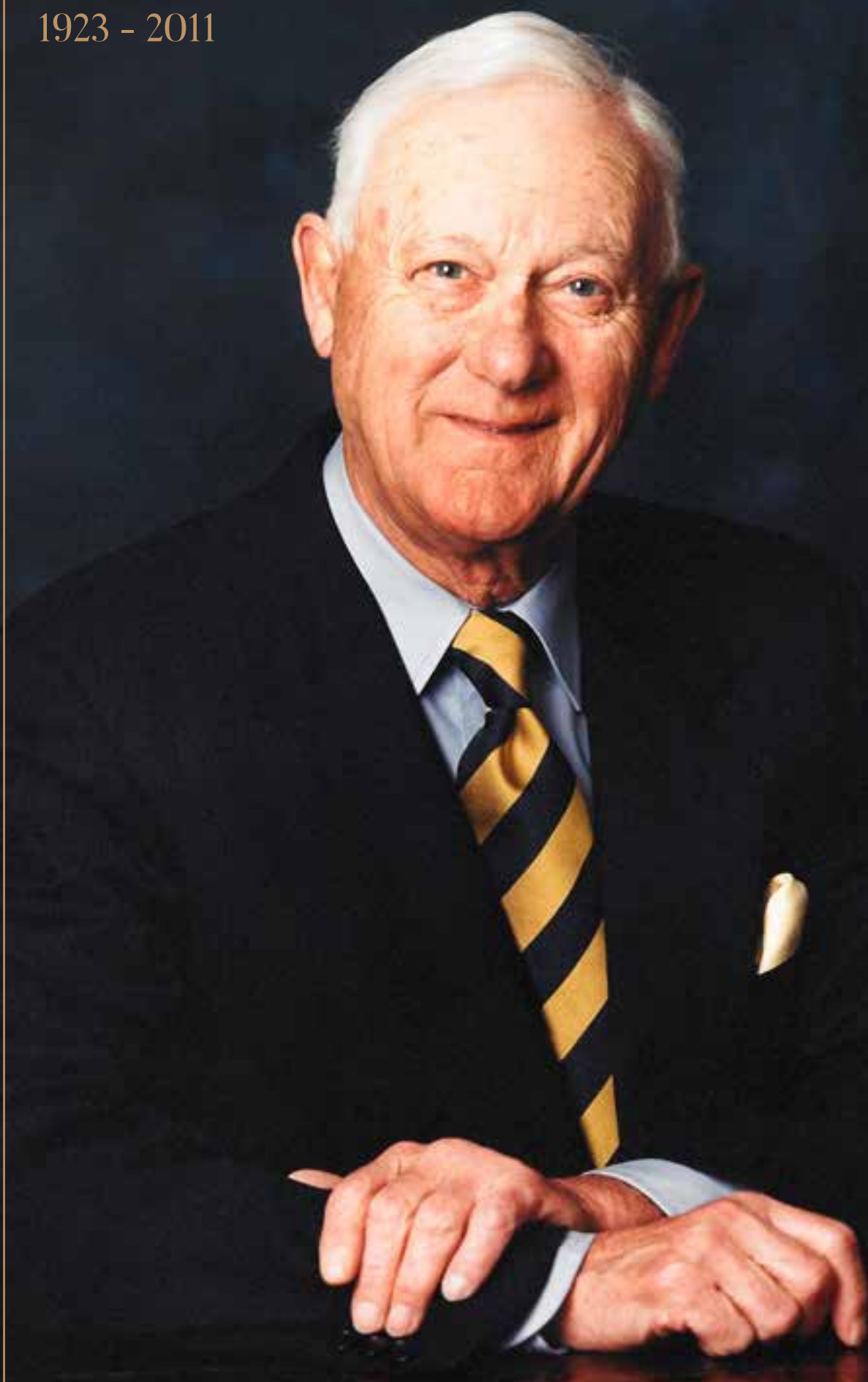
"We shall continue to excavate that potential and the goodwill that has been built up in the name of Glasswells. "Our aim will be to continue to develop a prosperous family business - an enterprise that we hope makes a real contribution to the comfort and wellbeing of the community it serves."

Members of the Glasswell family regularly gather together for annual family meetings at which shareholders and adult members of the family review the trading and profit performances of the company that bears their name. These meetings have been taking place for 15 years and help to ensure that every member of the Glasswell family is fully informed about the progress of individual departments, any problems that may arise and of developments for the future.



LESLIE GLASSWELL

1923 - 2011



A remarkably
hard working
man and natural
retailer, Leslie
dedicated over
65 years to
Glasswells



PART TWO

75 YEARS OF SUCCESS

Part two of the Glasswells History book was completed in 2021 to celebrate our 75th Anniversary.

AN INTERVIEW WITH PAUL GLASSWELL

It was the year when the Spaghetti Junction was opened in Birmingham, the UK opted out of the Space Race and Sesame Street aired in the UK for the first time. But 1971 was also a very special time in the history of Glasswells, as a 13-year-old Paul Glasswell started working for the family business for the first time.

From those fledgling steps in the warehouse, during his holidays from Culford School, Paul went on to complete a Diploma in Retail Management and gained valuable experience over 18 months working for high street furniture retailer, Perrings, a large family business with around 40 stores. In 1977 his father, Leslie, began talks with Haverhill Town Council about redeveloping a site in Haverhill and, the following year, Paul was invited to join the family business to help manage this huge project.

Working closely with his father, Leslie, Paul quickly learned all about the business – and how to manage people. “It was very interesting working so closely with my father,” he explained. “He was a good communicator and he liked to work with groups of people rather than on his own. He spent most of his time managing people – that was good training for me. He didn’t really get involved in doing things, he just made sure they could get done by somebody.”

Paul learned the importance of a loyal and rewarded workforce from his father and has maintained the tradition of giving of long service awards and gifts to all staff at Christmas. Whilst he visits some departments more regularly than others, for example the warehousing functions of furniture, carpets and third-party storage, his door is always open.

After becoming Managing Director in 1989, Paul had a responsibility and an obligation to not change too much and make sensible decisions to improve the wellbeing of the company. Every expansion whether a new shop or a new sector within the existing business, has been well thought out and carefully executed. “I am certainly conservative in business,” he said. “I need to think things through rather than being rash or impulsive. There is an excuse in that thought – if you have something that has been built over 75 years, you have quite a responsibility to try and keep that going in the right way. I wasn’t the one who started the business, I have very big footsteps to follow.



“It is an obligation as well as for the 260 people who are employed and whose livelihood is reliant on me making sensible decisions to improve the wellbeing of the company. My father, and also my grandfather Jerry, led by example, setting a very high standard for everyone to achieve. It is this attention to detail that has enabled Glasswells to reach its very special milestone of 75 years.”

Paul was fortunate to work alongside his father for another ten years before Leslie took a step back and retired. However, that was not the end of his father’s involvement in the business and Leslie continued to regularly visit the stores and offer guidance. A remarkably hard working man and natural retailer, Leslie dedicated over 65 years to Glasswells before he sadly passed away in 2011.

Although this left a massive void, Paul’s wife Fiona, mother Heather and Leslie’s sister Peggy, all sit on the board of directors and have been instrumental in the progression of the family business. His sisters, Susan and Judy, meet regularly, along with the team of senior managers, who provide expertise and support in the day-to-day operations.

Outside of work, Paul has proudly seen his two sons, Sam and Freddie, grow up and carve very successful careers for themselves outside of the family business.

His oldest son, Sam, is Founder and CEO at Arbolus, an online marketplace for independent consultants. Sam married his wife, Anna Brooksbank, in 2015 and now lives in London with their two children Zadie and Iris. Freddie is Assistant Manager at Rothschild & Co, one of the world's largest independent financial advisor groups. He and Georgina Ackner were married in 2017, they have two children Frances and Alfie and also live in London.

Paul makes no secret – nor apology – that his main interest, away from his family, is the business. “For me, the business has always been encompassing,” he said. I do have other interests but I won't pursue those to the detriment of my business. I am close

to spending 85-90% of my time making this as successful as it can be”.

Paul has calmly steered the company through the lows and the highs - from national recessions and the Covid pandemic, to property developments, online trading and diversification into catering and third-party storage. These new chapters of the Glasswells history are only a brief summary of the extensive efforts and achievements that have been made over the last 25 years by Paul and the very unique team at Glasswells.

Special thanks to David Gooderham for his help in bringing the Glasswells story up to date.

To mark the 75th anniversary of Glasswells, we sat down with Managing Director, Paul Glasswell, to discuss the big changes over the last 25 years, the significant decisions and his plans for the future.

65

75 YEARS

How did the move to Newmarket Road come about and what was the thinking behind the change in direction to opening big out-of-town stores?

Glasswells had enjoyed a long period of High Street success. During the mid-1980s, we tried to move into as many East Anglian towns as possible, often taking over existing businesses. At that time, we had three stores in Bury St Edmunds, but one was rented and all three had run out of space.

We had started to see that customers' shopping habits were changing. They wanted more choice and more space and we felt we had to expand the business to acknowledge that. The Newmarket Road site had previously been a Fiat Tractor centre before becoming vacant in 1992. Because of the recession at the time, there wasn't much interest in the site – which gave us a big advantage.

Was there any risk in purchasing the Newmarket Road site?

We pushed ahead with Newmarket Road even though we didn't have planning permission for retail at that stage. Our back up plan was that we could always use it as a warehouse if we had to, as our Tollgate site had reached full capacity.

We acquired the four-and-a-half acre site for £1.6 million. It was a risk without planning permission – something that took us several months to achieve. That said, gaining planning permission was fairly straightforward,

if a little time consuming, as the local government wanted to give businesses the opportunity to grow and subsequently increase employment.

The acquisition of Newmarket Road signalled the end of our expansion into the High Streets. The larger premises offered customers a 'World of Furniture' – an out-of-town destination home department store, that customers would travel to and spend a few hours at. We refined our offer and expanded the different product groups, favouring quality over quantity.

When we purchased the site, the building was a third of the size that it is now - but double what we had over the three existing shops in the town centre. We were obviously looking ahead and wanted a site that we could develop and increase in size.

My father and I haggled over the price and we actually walked away from the deal as the seller was not prepared to move. The agent suggested one more conversation and eventually we agreed on a sum that was higher than we first offered, but with the proviso that we could pay the extra in two years' time. Once we got the retail planning permission, the site was suddenly worth a lot more than £1.6 million price tag and that final negotiation is one of the biggest, riskiest and most fruitful decisions I have ever made.

How significant was the move for the business and for you, personally, as Managing Director?

The move was a huge catalyst for the company. Prior to that, we had been a fairly modest family business. But we instantly became one of the biggest multi-

branch furniture companies in the East of England. We leapfrogged into the big leagues across the entire furniture trade.

I think purchasing Newmarket Road was the biggest professional decision of my career and also the riskiest. It was certainly the most significant in the company's history. Quite a lot could have gone wrong but the opportunities were massive. Because it was during a recession, it was actually a great time for us to purchase the site.

We had expanded steadily and built up an impressive portfolio of properties, but this was a big leap.

As always, we were incredibly well supported by the family members who had a stake in the business and who respected and trusted my decision-making.

When did you know you had made the right decision?

It was soon after opening to be honest. Turnover went up immediately and I knew it was the right decision.

Four years later, the site doubled in size to incorporate the Curtain and Carpet departments. Conversely, the fact that customers could shop in a spacious environment and see detailed and inspiring room sets arguably spelled the death knell for the town centre shops in Braintree and Sudbury. The exceptions were Saffron Walden and Haverhill, both still running to this day and both currently trading well, despite the decline of the High Street.

At the same time, we moved away from running our own HP business and the associated risk of debt, which was worth around £1 million to Glasswells. This was replaced by a third party credit scheme.

How did the expansion into Ipswich, three years later, come about?

We knew we would have success in Ipswich and East Suffolk based on how well the shops were doing elsewhere and we had been looking for opportunities for some time. Brights in Martlesham Heath had ceased trading and so we took over the 20,000 sq. ft. property selling furniture only. Though we were renting the property, it got us into Ipswich as well as us having another sizeable furniture store in Suffolk.

We felt it was another calculated risk. Furniture stores don't need lots of staff, so it was fairly straightforward to run and quite profitable.

The Tollgate warehouse could service the store easily from Bury St Edmunds and, we had Eddie Gayfer to manage the shop, whose local knowledge and retailing skills helped to make us a household name in East Suffolk. Which, again, presented us with the opportunity to expand and seek a larger store.

Why did you decide on the Ranelagh Road site for the next big store in Ipswich and what challenges did you need to overcome?

The Ranelagh Road site was owned by the Threadneedle pension fund who originally wanted to sell the whole site, which included a couple of premises to the back of the main building. This was a fantastic opportunity for the business, but again, came about at a time when the country was facing recession. It involved a huge investment of £10 million, the biggest to date, but the site offered not only a shop for us, but two other large retail units that had tenants in place which would generate rental income.

We calculated that we would save £200,000 a year not paying the rent in Martlesham Heath and we were also going to receive around £250,000 a year from the new rental units. We took out a £6 million loan from the bank on very favourable terms and the deal was done.

We successfully attracted a new long term tenant, Wickes, but part of their terms to take on the 20 year lease was for us to spend £750,000 on improvements to their shop. This caused us a problem because the bank wouldn't let us extend our loan under the current terms, even though we had our large property portfolio as collateral. Our original loan with Natwest saw us have a very small interest rate and, because of the banking crisis at the time, asking Natwest to borrow a bit more actually became quite awkward. They would lend us the extra money, but only if we took out a new loan agreement for the entire amount, which would mean much higher interest rates.

I like the negotiating aspect of business, but these were nerve-racking times as we needed the extra money to ensure Wickes became a long-term tenant. In the end, I had to re-mortgage my house and ask family members to lend against their share of the business before we could get the deal over the line.

What brought about the Kempson Way Warehouse development in 1999?

This was another big decision and a significant change for us. We had reached capacity at Tollgate and the investment in Kempson Way is another example of forward thinking and planning. The four and a half acre site presented us with a massive opportunity for different types of growth in the warehousing, removals and distribution sectors.

It also meant we could import furniture in far greater quantities and buy direct from abroad, cutting out the middle man and improving our margins. This allowed us to offer a wider choice of products and faster delivery times than our competitors.

It facilitated the launch of our garden furniture ranges, which was a new venture at the time and

has become a really successful part of the business. Historically, spring is a quiet time for furnishers, with homeowners diverting their attention and spend to the garden. Stocking our own range of garden furniture allowed us to compete with the garden centre and draw valuable footfall to our stores.

We started third party storage, which is now worth around £1 million each year, and our removals and domestic storage service was transformed due to the height of the new facility – 10.4 metres high – which allowed us to store our customers' possessions in containers and pack them four high.

Glasswells has always had a lot of different aspects to the business and Kempson Way allowed us to explore a number of new lucrative avenues.

This diversification was always important to us. But, during the recent pandemic, it became even more significant. For instance, although the shops and restaurants were closed, we were able to continue trading our contract flooring division and commercial storage and generate vital income.

How valuable is Kempson Way Warehouse to the business?

We didn't build Kempson Way for today, or even a year or two down the line. We were thinking much further down the track. We have already extended the building twice and are currently negotiating a third extension to make use of the last available space – back in 2002 we had the foresight to buy enough land to do that.

Kempson Way is very valuable to us, so much so, that we are always looking at new warehousing opportunities, but the demand and price of land has increased. I would estimate that any new investment would cost around the £15 million mark.

Away from acquisitions, how important is the team that you have built around you?

We are very fortunate that we have a strong mix of skills and expertise across the Management Team. Some have grown through the business and some have been brought in from the outside. Either way, the company is run by professionals who know what they are doing and who complement each other very well.

We are unique due to the fact that we have so many long-serving members of staff and everyone is made to feel part of the team. Given the size of the business, no one is left to do a job on their own – they are always supported. And we have always been proud to give people opportunities to improve themselves and their careers within the business. I made a conscious decision to get to know everyone's job, so I can step in and help when needed.

I have the responsibility of finding the next set of talent that will continue to drive the business forward. I try to find the right role for staff members who really want to progress and deserve that opportunity; and then offer some guidance and support along the way. I enjoy sharing my knowledge and experience, but am also inspired by the enthusiasm and creativity that others bring to the business – it is very rewarding to see.

We set very high standards and it is fair to say that I am always looking to push a little bit further. I don't give out praise lightly - if things are going right, that's what I would expect. My job is to be critical and to ensure that everything runs smoothly; if anyone is not doing the right thing, I need show them how they can do better. That way, everyone is constantly improving and refining the way they work all the time.

One difficulty about being a MD is you don't have time to get involved in the minute detail of everything, but you still need to know everything that is going on. That's why you need a good team around you.

How important is your family to the successful running of the business today?

My wife, Fiona, has always played an important supportive role and, like myself, knows the business inside out. She started in the mid-1980s after gaining a retail background with John Lewis. She became involved more greatly when we moved to Newmarket Road and was instrumental in setting up the new restaurant and homewares departments. Fiona and I used to go on annual buying trips to the Far East, visiting furniture factories and selecting products to import and sell in the stores. Fiona was appointed Director in 2009 and mainly works closely with our Gift and Homewares buyers, visiting shows, selecting products and ensuring the quality of our displays and store presentation.

My father's sister, Peggy, joined the business back in 1948, running the Brentgovel Street shop with her husband Tim - as detailed by my father in the first part of the history book. Peggy is still on the Board today, along with my mother, Heather, as a non-executive director. Peggy's eldest daughter, Shelley O'Sullivan, helped out in various roles over the years, including Reception and Administration, Contracts and latterly assisting with the production of in-house point of sale. Shelley was very dependable and got on well with the staff, her hands-on experience across different areas of the business was very useful to us. Peggy's younger daughter, Sarah, works in an advisory capacity, providing valuable insights for the Cambridge area and strategy from a shopping perspective, for both the in store experience and online.



From left: Judy Beaney, Fiona Glasswell, Paul Glasswell, Peggy Reardon, Sarah Reardon, Heather Glasswell and Susan Glasswell.

My two sisters have a non-executive role, advising and helping to determine the future of the business; they both worked for the company before starting their families. Susan was secretary to my father, so has excellent knowledge of how the business should be run, and Judy has an accounting background and provides guidance on assets and investments.

The family members offer wider views and outside knowledge, which combined with the experience of the executives, help us come to the correct decisions speedily for the benefit of the future of the business.

How do you think Glasswells is perceived in the industry?

I think it is fair to say that the Glasswells name has always been well respected by other retailers and the suppliers we deal with. In 1981, we joined the Associated Independent Stores (AIS), a buying group for mainly large independent furniture stores. This enabled us to take advantage of a much bigger buying power as part of an established and impartial body. With around 200 members, this is a great way to share with peers and learn lessons from others. We have been awarded Member of the Year on multiple occasions, which is voted by other members and the suppliers on all aspects of how our business is run, from sales and purchasing, to accounts and administration.

We are very much viewed as pioneers by others in the trade – of everything - from solar panels and eco-friendly trucks, to technology and store refurbishments. We are not afraid to take the plunge and go first, it gives us an advantage. We are very proud of this reputation and it is not something we take lightly.

AIS remains an important voice within the industry and we have been members for more than 40 years. On two separate occasions, I was invited onto the board at AIS. I had the privilege of being chairman between 2007 and 2009; a role which acts as something of a guardian and it was my responsibility to ensure decisions were made for the greater good of the members. I was much closer to the decision-making process, with store visits and chairing numerous board meetings. These appointments were significant milestones in my own personal career, recognising my strengths as a successful business owner and leader, and I was very proud to be asked.

How would you describe yourself in business and in the negotiations that come with expansion?

I think I am decisive and confident, even if a decision has a degree of risk attached to it. I will always listen to my colleagues and respect their input.

I am also always looking to the future. Throughout our history, we have always been a business that reinvests profits back into the company. We have built up something of a war chest, with the aim of growing the business further, whether with increased warehousing, another big out-of-town retail outlet or adapting to any new or growing trends, a more digital focus, for example.

We are nicely placed to take advantage of the right investment, we just haven't found the right place or opportunity yet, but I am confident that the next exciting project is just around the corner.

CHAPTER ONE:

THE PLACE TO EAT

The sweeping success of an in-store restaurant happened almost by accident. It started in 1984 when Glasswells rebuilt Brentgovell Street and found there was a small part of the building that was not of use to any selling department. The management team decided to fill the space with a small 20-seater restaurant offering simple light lunches, coffee and cake.



Little did they know that this would pave the way for a part of the business that now takes more than £1 million annually, with a menu that includes baking around 35,000 famous secret recipe scones every year.

Back in the early 1990s, the next logical step was to expand a side of the business that was growing in popularity year-on-year. Moving to Newmarket Road gave Glasswells the perfect chance to create a full in-store restaurant.

Paul Glasswell said: “We hoped a bigger restaurant would be a great way to ensure customers stayed with us for longer. What perhaps we didn’t anticipate, was how successful The Place to Eat would be in its own right. It quickly became a big footfall driver and we were shrewd to operate the restaurant ourselves rather than bring a third party in.

“In the past, one of our biggest problems was actually the length of the queue. We had regular discussions

The Place to Eat, Newmarket Road 1992.





Outside patio dining area at Bury.

how to speed up service, without losing any quality, to allow for more people to be served and smaller queues. In one sense, it was a nice problem to have. We provided a comfortable environment and great food and it meant customers stayed in the shop for longer. Indeed, some customers would have two meals there in a single day.”

Part of the success of The Place to Eat was because many competing stores didn't have a fully functioning restaurant at that time, opting to serve a cup of coffee and a pack of biscuits at best. It was not the only time Glasswells was forward-thinking in its approach.

Paul explained: “When the restaurant was first opened, customers were allowed to smoke inside. In fact, we had some customers who smoked more than they ate. The general feeling among staff and the directors was that it wasn't a nice environment so we decided to ban smoking – this was a good five years before the national ban came into place. I was a little concerned that banning smoking would hit our sales, but actually customers preferred it.”

The move to Newmarket Road allowed Glasswells to increase the size of the restaurant to 46 seats, with a proper waitress service. With this came greater expense, especially in providing

the right kitchen equipment to the right standard, but the restaurant quickly paid for itself. When Glasswells decided to move their Curtain and Carpet departments to Newmarket Road, The Place to Eat really did become a place to go.

In 2002, it enjoyed a second extension – from 46 seats to 96 seats – and a new position in the store next to the Gift department. The improvements cost a total of £220,000 but, once again, this was quickly recouped by the success of the department. It also benefited from a new conservatory-style interior to add to the feeling of comfort, calm and relaxation. In keeping



The Place to Eat, Newmarket Road, 2005.

with the family business's ethos, there was no rush. The Place to Eat was a place to sit back, enjoy and catch-up.

Ahead of the move, consideration was given to whether the restaurant should retain its own separate entrance, but the positive decision was taken to remove this access and have customers walk through the store to get to the restaurant. This extra footfall that the restaurants bring, as much as 50% a day, has proven to support the smaller homewares departments, with customers making impulse purchases.



Building of the restaurant extension at Bury in 2016.

When Glasswells decided to open their next big out-of-town store in Ipswich in 2008, the decision to mirror The Place to Eat – even as far as an identical menu and in-store location – came easily. The success of the two restaurants has been overseen by Catering Manager, Tina Janes, who said the busy environment is one that is enjoyed equally by staff, while also earning five stars for cleanliness and quality from Environmental Health. When asked what she looked for in her staff, many of whom are still at college, Tina replied “a smiley face and being approachable”.

She added: “A lot of customers will come to Glasswells firstly for lunch in The Place to Eat, followed by a stroll around the store afterwards. We are lucky to have

regular clientele, some of which have been coming to us since we opened. We have the same menu at both stores and, over time, we have learned what works and what people like. The menu features good quality home-baked food and fresh scones and cakes, and we have a specials board where we try different ideas. If people like the specials, they might be added to the main menu. We have also adapted to people's changing tastes to include, for example, more options for vegetarians and vegans.”

In 2016, and as part of Glasswells extensive program of refurbishment works at the Bury store, the restaurant was extended further to 120 seats with a conservatory style seating area and fully modernised, which included a new servery.

The Place to Eat at the Ipswich store, 2011.





“We hoped a bigger restaurant would be a great way to ensure customers stayed with us for longer. What perhaps we didn’t anticipate, was how successful The Place to Eat would be in its own right.”

- Paul Glasswell

The Place to Eat was the best performing department in 2018, when it was awarded the Department of the Year trophy at the company’s annual dinner dance.

Paul said: “It is quite amazing that we opened a restaurant as just an ‘add-on’ and it now has £1.25 million in sales. We originally thought that if all the restaurant provided was an attraction to get customers into Glasswells, that would suffice. If it actually made money, that would be a benefit. The Place to Eat has been a big part of the company’s growth over the last 25 years. Customers have stayed in store for a much longer time because they can enjoy good food, a hot drink and also free parking, which has played a part. There is no time pressure on them and this goes hand-in-hand with the customer experience we have always prided ourselves in.”



CHAPTER TWO: IPSWICH EXPANSION

Fresh from the success of their new out-of-town store in Bury St Edmunds, which included extending Newmarket Road to 100,000sq ft in 2002, thoughts quickly turned to replicating that elsewhere in the county.

The most obvious town was Ipswich, where Glasswells already had a furniture presence at the Martlesham Heath retail park. It didn't come without challenges though. Glasswells may have had an existing store and was slowly carving out a strong name in Ipswich, but there was much more competition in Suffolk's biggest town. A decision to look for a bigger premises was something of a risk. With Martlesham Heath only a leasehold, and costing £200,000 a year, the board of directors knew they were looking for something to buy outright. But even they didn't envisage the size and opportunity presented to them with the Ranelagh Road Retail Park, which included the old Courts site and two further retail units.

Paul said: "We viewed Martlesham Heath as a stepping stone to bigger and better things. We looked at other sites in Ipswich, but Ranelagh Road represented a huge and significant investment for us. It was on a much bigger scale than anything we had ever done before and represented quite a risk.



Paul Glasswell with builders, Barnes Construction.

New store at Ranelagh Road, Ipswich, 2008.



Installation of the escalator.



Our philosophy has always been to own rather than rent, where possible, and that has served us well for many years.

“We viewed Ranelagh Road as a good location because a lot of people lived that side of Ipswich. It was also close to the train station and football ground and it was also quite near to the A14. And the possibility of tenants in close proximity appealed to us as that would help us recoup some of our initial outlay.”

With a £10 million agreement in place in 2008 to purchase the site, thoughts quickly turned to the tenants, both current and future. While Pets at Home

was a stable tenant, the outlook for Focus was far more problematic. The DIY company was having some well-publicised financial problems and their lease on the site was – perhaps fortuitously - coming to an end.

Glasswells was able to secure Wickes on a 20-year lease, and invested £750,000 in getting their retail unit up to modern standards. An intentional consequence of this was making the entire retail park a more desirable place to visit.

“In the end, it all knitted together rather well,” reflected Paul. “We had enjoyed success in a number of Suffolk towns and the next logical extension

was the big store in Ipswich as we tried to make Glasswells a household name throughout East Anglia. Once we paid off the mortgage on Ranelagh Road, we were left with three stores across significant acreage and the rental income from two tenants.

“Our move to Ranelagh Road didn’t come without problems though. In Bury St Edmunds, we were a dominant retail force and the number one carpet retailer. Whereas in Ipswich, there was some intense competition from a lot more multiples and the name of Glasswells was less known compared to others who had been in the town for a lot longer.”

Andrea Johnston and Leslie Glasswell at the Grand Opening.



The impressive atrium at Ipswich offers a bright and spacious area.



75

75 YEARS

Slowly, Glasswells started to chip away at some of the competition. As with Bury, the fact that everything was under one roof was a big selling point. Ipswich's The Place to Eat restaurant was also enjoying great success, mirroring the menu and popularity found in Bury.

But given all the factors of competition and history, Paul admitted that it has taken time for the Ipswich store to start cornering the market. It has benefited from strong staff retention - with some

starting at Glasswells on day one of Ranelagh Road being opened and remaining with the company to this day.

The customer loyalty enjoyed in Bury has also begun to be seen in the larger Suffolk town, with generations of families becoming regular customers in Ipswich. Feedback from customers is acquired and has been overwhelmingly positive in terms of service and product. One area over the last 12 years where Glasswells has not had to concern itself in Ipswich



Ipswich staff at the opening of the store in 2008.



is physical growth. Paul explained: “We wanted to make the building nice and modern when we first bought it, and it remains an impressive size, one that offers us everything we need.”

Andrea Johnston, General Manager at Ipswich, added: “While we are a relatively new name in Ipswich, we still have the Glasswells company reputation that is largely unmatched. We are unique in what we offer and the service we can provide to customers. Everything we do is very personal and we pride ourselves on relationship-building with customers - some of the bigger companies are unable to match that. Customers also like the fact we are a family business. We will continue to work hard to make sure Glasswells is the first name on the lips of residents in and around Ipswich.”



Paul Glasswell, Andrea Johnston and the Mayor of Ipswich celebrate the store's 10th Anniversary.

“The Ranelagh Road investment was on a much bigger scale than anything we had done before and represented quite a risk.”

- Paul Glasswell

CHAPTER THREE: THE DIGITAL AGE

With so many digital advancements in the last 25 years, the website is just one example of how Glasswells has embraced the digital world for the benefit of its staff and customers.

“One of the biggest steps forward in technology has been the company-wide computer system,” explained Paul Glasswell. “Staff have benefited from computers for the last 30 years, but we introduced the Swan Retail system 10 years ago and it has been a game changer.”

Replacing the company’s previous computer system, which had become difficult to adapt and advance, Swan was originally designed for a department store business selling clothes.

In keeping with their reputation as a market leader, Glasswells was one of the first companies to get on board with the Swan software. So much so that the business worked closely with the developers to ensure the system was bespoke to the needs of their own staff and customers.

Starting slowly across certain areas of the company, departments over time migrated to the new system and quickly saw the benefits. Before long, it had expanded to incorporate the likes of carpets and all component parts before becoming fully integrated covering almost every aspect of the business – from tenants to tills.

At a cost of around £1 million since its purchase in 2008, the success of the Swan computer programme soon became apparent, offering a wider delivery system and a great degree of flexibility to the stock system. Other areas of the business also had bespoke technological



The tills and website are fully integrated with the Swan stock system.

developments including warehouse and contracts.

It was available across the whole business to provide fully up-to-date stock data and back-up plans were devised and developed in case of any connection issues in an individual store. The success of the new system saw Glasswells approached by other retailers asking for both their advice on Swan and, on some occasions, asked to give a tour of the system.

Graham Oliver, Financial Controller who heads up systems and administration, said: “We were originally a big fish in a small pond, which meant we could drive change within the Swan system. The company wanted to keep us happy to help sell the system to others and we were even contacted and visited by other businesses looking to get our views on it. Now that Swan has become a big player and sold their product to a lot of companies, our influence has reduced.”

“Staff have benefited from computers for the last 30 years, but we introduced the Swan system 10 years ago and it has been a game changer.”

- Paul Glasswell

A vital component behind the scenes, with an estimated 100 Swan users, staff quickly got over any scepticism – something in keeping with any new system – and are now “completely sold” on the software, which also allows for complex and bespoke reports to ensure every aspect of the business is scrutinised.

Paul Glasswell said: “While customers are unaware of what systems we use, I would say their experience of Glasswells

has improved since we got a fully integrated system. It helps us be more efficient and customers can come in, look at products, raise orders, pay deposits and update orders. Customers expect a fast service and an accurate response and Swan has helped provide that. I know that when it doesn't run properly, it gives us a big problem."

Ensuring it does run smoothly means there are strong back-ups in place which include external IT support. Within Glasswells itself, the mammoth operation includes ensuring 30 servers are maintained on a day-to-day basis and it is not unheard of for technical staff to work through the night to ensure the system is back up and running for the next day's trading.

Gone are the days of the flooring department using graph paper to work out the exact size and shapes required by a customer. Graham Vale, Deputy Flooring Manager, who has spent almost 50 years with the business, said: "One of our biggest changes has been the increased use of technology. It was more labour intensive when we had no assistance from the computer; one estimator would go out and measure and then draw up all the plans themselves on site using pencil and paper, before passing the documentation to the salesperson.

"But, as with every aspect of the company, we wanted to move with the times and adapt to our customers' needs. The department was transformed by technology, especially through the Masterpiece flooring estimating software."

Masterpiece, which is fully integrated with the Swan system, allows the team to work out dimensions and requirements on screen – meaning they can often show customers their estimates within the comfort of their own home. Plans can be tweaked and changed quickly and it gives customers a greater understanding of what they are actually getting, while also gently encouraging them to make a decision then and there. Masterpiece also allows for more estimates in a day, sometimes as many as double the amount that could be done using the old graph paper method.

Graham said: "You still need good knowledge to get the most out of the system but it has certainly impressed customers. They saw that Glasswells was investing in an expensive and impressive piece of kit and it gave them confidence that we were the right company to go with. As we know, customers use the internet more and more and so they are usually better educated about what they want to purchase. Fortunately, we have a lot of information to give them and customers tell us that they don't get this level of expertise or service anywhere else."

While the impact and advantages of technology is clear throughout the company, how has this impacted on staff numbers? A lot of the purchase ledger accounting is now handled externally through the AIS

The Masterpiece estimating system.



Cenpac scheme, meaning one person can now do what was three or four people's work. But in newer areas, such as the website, more staff are needed to maintain and manage products digitally. Savings have also been made in the marketing team by the acquisition of a large printing machine, which allows posters and other point of sale to be made to any size and printed in house, something that would have been outsourced a decade ago.

In the world of interiors, the way customers use their digital devices has changed so much for all retail teams. Paul explained: "There is so much information available to our potential customers now online, whereas in the past, the main source of inspiration was on the pages of glossy magazines. You can get an awful lot of ideas and influence from the internet and social media. We are also considering how we can better communicate with our customers, and have learnt through the recent lockdowns how video chats can be really useful where a customer might not be able to visit the store. Most people come in looking for the knowledge, confidence and comfort you get from a one-to-one service. And we still pride ourselves on offering a truly personal service catering for every individual need."



CHAPTER FOUR: FIRST FOR FLOORING

For more than 60 years, carpets have been a massive part of the company's success. When the team were still based in St Andrew's Street, over 30 years ago now, it was estimated that around half of the houses in Bury St Edmunds had carpet installed by Glasswells. It is little surprise that this amounted to around a third of the company's annual turnover at that time.

As Glasswells looked towards opening an out-of-town store in Bury in the early 1990s, carpet remained a big part of the St Andrew's Street building. There was around 100 different stock samples, rolls and styles, all carefully managed by "carpet supremo" Peter Parish and Richard Ball. They were both experts in scrutinising what worked and, just as important, discontinuing any products that were not as appealing to customers. The fact that St Andrew's Street had the space to incorporate a lot of stock sped up supply and it was little wonder that Glasswells dominated the market.

In keeping with other areas of the business, the move to Newmarket Road in 1992 caused a degree of trepidation among the team. Despite the fact it would double the size of the carpet department in an instant and allow for today's choice of over 10,000 flooring

options to be shown, would the lack of town centre footfall impact on the business and would customers be willing to get in their cars and travel for the best carpet in town?

Paul Glasswell explained: "Carpets were incredibly successful in St Andrew's Street so when we moved them into Newmarket Road, we were nervous that they wouldn't be as popular and we would lose some of our dominance in this retail space. But we had nothing to worry about. We had built up 50 to 60 years of success and Newmarket Road allowed us to display more carpet than any other competitor. It was more successful than ever."

Moving with the times, and in keeping with their new environment, in 2011 the flooring team embraced technology in the shape of the Masterpiece estimating and contract flooring software and also a shift in customers' habits. The software offered even more efficient and accurate integration, as well as the ability to offer customers' quotes direct in their own home.

Carpets remained popular but they were joined by some modern alternatives on the block. For instance, over the last decade, there has been a great emphasis on Karndean and Amtico luxury vinyl tiles, as well as



Glasswells now has over 10,000 flooring choices, including a large stock selection with express fitting service.



The Flooring department at Bury after its refurbishment in 2019.

laminated and real wood, as people look to update their lounge and dining rooms in different ways. Reacting to this, Glasswells ensured there was a bigger in-store focus of these products and larger overall range than any other competitor, who often were restricted to focusing simply on neutral colours due to smaller premises.

Creating the “home” environment within the store was another way Glasswells set itself apart, alongside a significant investment in Visual Mine, a computer programme where customers can upload a photo of their own room and apply the carpet or flooring sample and really see what it would look like with their existing décor.

The greater array of flooring options, and the advent of online research, also made the customer much more knowledgeable in what they were looking for. Paul said: “Everything moves on, including how customers want to buy items, but flooring is one area you can’t really buy online and will normally necessitate a visit to a shop. Customers want to see and touch the samples, and Visual Mine gives us an edge and marries well with the knowledge of the team.”

So how big can the flooring side of Glasswells grow?

One limitation actually comes with personnel, as carpet fitters often gain experience within the company and then leave to start their own business. To compensate this, Glasswells has started its own successful apprenticeship scheme and has reaped the rewards in recent years.

Explaining the sweeping success of the department, Paul added: “From Glasswells, you get expertise and experience. We are not someone



who turns up at a job and tries to get it done quickly. Lots of things need to be discussed and decided and we are on hand to support the customer every step of the way. These conversations happen naturally and any potential pitfalls are explained – we put in the time to give them the best advice. So much so, that I don’t look at our team as just ‘salespeople’, to me, they are ‘experts’ in their field, on hand to offer customers valuable advice to ensure they buy exactly what they need.”



The Flooring department at Ipswich, when the store opened in 2008.

CHAPTER FIVE:

HUGE GROWTH FOR CONTRACT FLOORING

While traditional flooring has played a big part in helping Glasswells become a household name, sales of contract flooring to the commercial sector has grown significantly over recent years.

The Contracts department came about when Glasswells acquired Jimmy Mitchell's business, Burnett James Curtains and Interiors, which had built up a strong base of commercial work for the likes of Greene King.

Working out of a small office, no bigger than a broom cupboard, Jimmy and Peter Bailey sought new customers to expand the business and partnered with Paul James, a local contractor who mainly sold furniture, curtains and carpets to nursing homes. Whilst Paul provided the contacts and did the selling, Glasswells sourced the products and provided the labour.

During the early 1990s, Glasswells Contracts began exhibiting at London Earls Court and it was at one of these shows that the team met Mr and Mrs Shelbourne, who were in the process of building 10

nursing homes in Lincolnshire, each with 50 bedrooms. Glasswells won the contract and this was a defining moment in the division's history and growth, allowing them to move away from the trading relationship with Paul James and go it alone. More nursing homes followed from the shows, including some as far away as Newcastle and the Isle of Wight.

Over time, the department moved away from nursing homes and started doing main contracting with builders, specialising in the supply and installation of flooring, rather than furniture and curtains. This included working on new schools, hospital buildings and hotels. They also worked with house builders, including the likes of Bloor Homes and Hopkins Homes, where they supplied and fitted carpets, vinyl and Amtico to new-build housing estates. The team have also developed a strong customer base of clients that come to Glasswells directly when they need flooring, including some of the local schools and, under Peter Bailey, Contracts Manager for more than 25 years, the company has built up a strong reputation for great service and competitive prices that has led to a lot of repeat business.

Peter Bailey and Jimmy Mitchell in the mid-90s.



Now turning over more than £2 million a year, the division is a significant part of the overall Glasswells business, requiring very little marketing activity. Instead, it is often a case of seeing what is being developed while out on the road and then making a telephone call to see if they can tender for the job.

Peter Bailey explained that organising fitters and labour is one of the most challenging aspects of the job, with flooring fitters having to



Glasswells carpet fitters in 2005.

work alongside other trades – and balance competing work schedules - on new developments. Inevitably, this means things can sometimes go wrong and delay access to the site.

Thanks to positive and close working relationships with local builders, Glasswells usually get an opportunity to tender for work. “One of my favourite parts of the job is actually at the start of the process,” Peter Bailey explained. “We have tendered for a job, maybe against four or five other businesses, and we secure the contract. It is very satisfying to know that I have managed to negotiate and secure the contract at a margin that I am happy with. It is also very rewarding seeing a project finished, on time and on budget.”

This involves getting the plans, estimating a price for materials and labour and then submitting a tender. There are often negotiations and feedback from both sides and most local builders know they will get a trusted, competitive and bespoke service from the specialist team of three full-time estimators and a Contract Manager. But there is no guarantee Glasswells will get the work, with many clients preferring to spread flooring contracts around. And, while each tender is usually quite close in terms of cost, it often comes down to who can get the job done most efficiently and within the desired time frame.

In a competitive market, Glasswells sits in the top five of local flooring contractors in terms of size and the number of fitters, with around 12-15 self-employed fitters working each day. Over the years they have got to know their competitors quite well

and they actually help each other out on jobs when it comes to a shortage of labour or materials. The mantra being that you never know when you might need a favour, so it is worth being helpful when they can.

Memorable jobs have included the Premier Inn, Cambridge, a £100,000 contract which was stressful for the team, with strict deadlines, but rewarding to then drive past and think ‘we did that’. The biggest value job to date was an apartment development for Hills Partnership, at the back of Addenbrooke’s Hospital in Cambridge, which was worth £400,000. While the strangest was probably installing specialist materials to the floors, walls and ceilings of seclusion rooms at a psychiatric ward, which meant working in what was a very different environment to normal, with a different set of strict health and safety rules.



LVT flooring installed to a show home.

CHAPTER SIX: A MOVING STORY

Expertise, hard work, reliability – and even the occasional mediation - the Removals team requires all of these skills, and more, to handle one of the most stressful things we can do in life – moving house.

For around 65 years, Glasswells has built up a strong reputation, at home and abroad, in the removal industry. It all began, according to Paul Glasswell, because there was a logical connection with the renowned high street shops.

He explained: “We viewed removals as going hand-in-hand with retail. We have always done house removals alongside the shops and not everyone can say that – I don’t think there is another retailer of our size that actually does removals.

“Over the years, we have built up a strong name and reputation across removals. We also came with a seal of approval as we were one of the first to join the British Association of Removers (BAR). We had to sign up to, and adhere to, a code of conduct and we are audited every year. If we have any problems, they are on hand with advice and we have an area meeting every month. It is a good way to network with competitors and peers and it

gives us a mark of competence as well as ensuring customers have confidence in our work.”

In keeping with most aspects of the business, Paul said the removal teams are now supporting generations of the same family.



DAF Euro 6 Removal Truck, purchases in 2014 at a cost of £80,000.



He added: “We have built up a very good name and reputation for price and the service we offer. When we opened our store in Ipswich, it gave us the opportunity to spread our name and reputation even more and we could push the removals side of the business further.

“For instance, we have enjoyed success in the Woodbridge area which is quite an affluent part of Suffolk. We constantly look at potential areas of growth. There has been a lot of housebuilding in recent years in Bury St Edmunds, Cambridge and Stowmarket and so we have focused some of our advertising and marketing in those areas.”

While never standing still, growth is carefully managed. Glasswells have opted against a multi-depot approach across the country but have always invested at the right time in the right equipment. At the time of writing, Glasswells have six purpose built HGV removal trucks, plus seven half-tonne vehicles on the retail side of the business, which can be used when required.

While a large part of the business centres around East Anglia, the nature of it means the Glasswells removal trucks can be seen anywhere from London to Scotland – and even further afield, recently the team travelled to Italy for a 12-day job. Crews still have to sometimes sleep in their Lorries, but the days of having frozen boots when they woke up in the morning are long gone. The fleet of DAF Euro 6 Lorries are designed with sleeping compartments to ensure a comfortable night’s rest.

Moving house is said to be one of the most stressful things anyone can do in life and this places the Removal team front and centre of that. So how

“We try and build a rapport with customers and do all we can to make their big moving day as stress free and happy as possible.”

- Paul Glasswell



The crew at Kempson Way in 2016 with fleet of vehicles in the background.

does the team deal with a contrast of emotions which can range from tears, anger and elation during any one job?

Paul said: “We try and build a rapport with customers and do all we can to make their big moving day as stress-free and happy as possible. We always want to do our job quickly, load the goods up and unload, and get out of the way, but it doesn’t always work out like that.

“We might do a pick-up at 8am but then we have to wait until the sale is fully completed and we have the keys to the new property.”

The intricacies of house sales and house purchases means, on occasions, the removals team might have no choice but to bring the house contents back to the Glasswells warehouse and deliver back out whenever they can.

Paul said: “We’ve had every emotion you can imagine - irate, tearful, upset and even customers begging us to have a word with the estate agents for them, though obviously we can’t get involved in that. But no matter what happens before we start our work, if we do a good and professional job and are cheerful with the customers and treat their belongings with respect, it can make all the difference and take away some of the stress for the customer.” It all comes down to tried and trusted customer service that Glasswells offers.

Paul added: “Customers still prefer the personal service that we can offer, it gives them confidence to see a removals crew turn up on time, looking smart, with the knowledge of how the removal process works and the experience of how to handle possessions carefully.”

CHAPTER SEVEN: STORAGE SOLUTIONS

All businesses have to be agile and adapt with the times to be successful.

A prime example of this is within the storage team, an area of the business that has grown considerably over the last 20 years to now become a valuable and large part of Glasswells. The Tollgate warehouse was built by Jerry Glasswell in the 1950s to allow manufacturers a space to deliver goods without having to take them to a shop first and then have the goods delivered to a customer. This simplified process freed up more space in the shops. In the case of removals, furniture would often just be placed in a “heap”. A tidy and safe heap, but a heap nevertheless. The new warehouse brought a more professional edge to storage. Tollgate operated very successfully until Kempson Way was built in 1999, allowing third-party storage to become an even bigger part of the business.

Paul Glasswell said: “When we moved to Kempson Way, we were blessed with this 10-metre high roof which enabled us to instantly store customers’ goods in containers, which could be taken off by forklift

Mezzanine document archive facility added in 2015.



truck and straight into a designated area where it would be kept safe and more protected. It is an ideal venue for us. We are situated very close to the A14 which makes it well suited for both Bury and Ipswich and also Felixstowe, where we get a lot of our commercial containers from. We have adapted our warehouse to ensure we can offer customers a very high level of service.”

A further upgrade came in 2008 when a £750,000, 10,000 sq. ft. extension was added alongside the purchase of three extra narrow forklift trucks. With vastly improved facilities comes greater expectations with commercial customers auditing the storage facilities from a safety, ethical and moral point of view. In November 2020, the Commercial Storage and Warehousing facility achieved ISO 9001:2015 certification for quality management systems.

There is also the significant problem of outgrowing the imposing Kempson Way building. The warehouse has been extended three or four times since it was originally built with two significant expansions – one by 20,000 sq. ft. and another 10,000 sq. ft. - and a mezzanine floor added in January 2015. This increased storage space



Paul Glasswell and the team celebrate the 20 year anniversary of the opening of Kempson Way Warehouse in 2019.

by a further 9,000 sq. ft. for customers that use the archiving service. But there is now little room for growth prompting the company to start looking at other premises. But that in itself poses a problem.

Paul explained: "The fact we have been able to grow around the requirements of customers is a reason why they have stayed with us. We are now faced with a decision about moving premises, something that would take a lot of money. You can't just add 10%, we are talking about an additional 50%, 60% or maybe even 100% extra. We are confident there is a demand for additional warehouse space. Since we moved into Ipswich, we have noticed an even greater volume of demand, so we are looking at ways to expand our storage income. But how we go about that is something of a leap of faith."

Any new building would need to be well in excess of 100,000 sq. ft. Fortunately, the only potential reason to move is expansion rather than the age and state of Kempson Way. It remains perfectly fit for purpose due to how it was built more than 20 years ago. The right height loading bays and how containers can be moved onto the site are prime examples. If Glasswells did look to move to new premises, one option would be to sub-let Kempson Way but Paul admitted it was built to company specifications and therefore may not suit everyone.

Offering third-party storage, warehousing and distribution to businesses across the UK, the division has seen significant growth over the last five years with turnover in excess of £700,000 last year.

2020 was the company's biggest year for Commercial Storage, as a result of new racking being installed – doubling capacity to 3,000 pallet spaces - and requirements growing, pre-Brexit.



The first national lockdown also made a difference – as shown by one customer, XPO, a distributor for Dulux paint. At the start of the first lockdown, Glasswells had around 500 pallets of stock. But this quickly went to virtually zero as many homeowners spent lockdown decorating their homes. Because of the level of service, XPO then increased the range to 700 pallets when they got back into full production.

This is a perfect example of the company's customer-focused, flexibility and personal and prompt service for all commercial storage customers. While decisions are made about future facilities, 2021 is more about consolidating existing customers.

Kempson Way Warehouse aerial view in 2014.



CHAPTER EIGHT:

HIGHS & LOWS OF HIGH STREET RETAILING

Glasswells has always looked to branch out to other corners of Suffolk and beyond. The first seeds were sown as early as 1949 with a furniture exhibition in Haverhill and the success in this neighbouring town led to Glasswells choosing Haverhill as the location to open their second shop in 1951. Within 20 years, the Glasswells name would be adorned across seven shops while other town centre businesses were bought out in Sudbury, Norwich and Braintree.

By the early 1990s, the dilemma was how much to invest in town centre shops against the new demand for big out-of-town stores that had the ability and capacity to house everything under one roof. While ensuring each individual shop remained profitable, they all play a special part within their respective communities.

Today, Glasswells still has High Street shops in Haverhill and Saffron Walden and has temporarily traded out of the Sudbury building for three years as a Clearance outlet.

Kevin Robertson, Sales Director, explained: “We still have lots of lovely and loyal customers in the smaller towns. Generations of the same family have shopped in Haverhill or Saffron Walden and we even have people look around the Bury St Edmunds store before returning to Haverhill, for example, to place their order. We feel they are all very important parts of the local community.”

Each store has undergone a number of refurbishments over the last 20 years – often marked by an in-store refurbishment sale – and although they might be smaller in size, the expertise of the staff at all of the shops is the same.

Lighting, flooring and a full redecoration took place in Saffron Walden in 2015 while the decision was made to remove around 30% of

the stock to ensure a better customer experience and more space to browse. The biggest regret, conceded Paul Glasswell, came in 1992 when the business opted against buying the site in King Street. It was felt to be one risk too many, coming at the same time as they prepared to open the vast Newmarket Road store. But Paul said, in hindsight, it was the wrong decision. While enjoying strong sales in the town, Glasswells continue to rent the Saffron Walden shop to this day.

In Haverhill, lighting and room sets were upgraded and the building was extended when the Woolwich Building Society ended their lease and it became vacant. The end result was turning the new space into a clearance centre. The end of a tenancy agreement was also the reason behind reopening the Sudbury store as a clearance centre in 2017. Sports Direct decided not to extend its lease on the North Street site and Glasswells has had success in the town reopening three days a week. Future plans include converting the site into residential flats and a small shop.

Paul Glasswell's vision for the town centre stores is for them to hold a special place in the local community, while also linking to the bigger out-of-town sites.



The Sudbury shop in 2002.



The Saffron Walden Carpet shop in 2006, with entrance to the Furniture shop in the background.

“We have lots of lovely and loyal customers in the smaller towns. Generations of the same family have shopped in Haverhill or Saffron Walden.”

- Kevin Robertson

The Haverhill shop in 2021.



CHAPTER NINE: RIVALLING THE BEST

When Glasswells first started selling curtains in 1968, they could never have imagined that, 50 years later, it would lead to creating a design studio to rival the best Chelsea Harbour has to offer.

After starting in St Andrew's Street, and then significantly expanding when the Brentgovel Street site was rebuilt, the Soft Furnishings department moved to Newmarket Road in 1996.

There was some initial concern around the lack of a presence in Bury St Edmunds town centre, but they quickly enjoyed an increase in shop footfall and business. The magnet was having every aspect of Glasswell furnishings under one roof and in an environment that could replicate a customer's home.

Perfectly placed to explain the growth, and success, of the department is Sarah Woodvine, who started with the company in 2000 while she was still at school working on reception, before selling carpets. A brief hiatus away from the company saw Sarah return just four months later, becoming assistant manager for

the lighting and linens department, which enhanced further her knowledge of product ranges.

Now Buyer for the Soft Furnishings department, Sarah said: "I think one of the reasons why the department has done so well, and Glasswells overall, is because we are able to offer everything under one roof, free parking and a great restaurant. Whether you already have an idea about interior design or are looking for inspiration, you can't come to a better place."

Whilst every customer, in every department can expect a personal service, 15 years ago a professional Interior Design Service was launched, headed up by Debbie Cram. Debbie's flair for interior design was born as a window dresser for Peter Jones in Sloane Square, before she studied at the London College of Furniture. Debbie brings an exceptional eye for detail to the department, and has been the driving force behind the Design centre at both Bury and Ipswich. The steady year-on-year growth, with jobs ranging from £2,000 to £70,000, has necessitated a further two Interior Designers and led to a renovation of the

The Design Centre located in the Bury St Edmunds store following its refurbishment in 2019.



Soft Furnishings department and in-store Design Centre at Bury St Edmunds last year.

Sarah explained the thought process: “We pride ourselves on being a destination store and so when we started thinking about renovation, we looked at lots of design studios in London for inspiration. We have something to rival Chelsea Harbour and customers have complimented us on the selection, layout and space – all that’s missing is a glass of champagne!”

Sarah admitted the intricacies of their home county has presented the team with “exciting” challenges with Glasswells asked to help transform everything from old barns with gable ends, to small 17th Century cottages where a straight line doesn’t exist. In keeping with the environment, staff have to keep on top of developments within the industry – and also how the perception and habits of customers have changed over the years.

Debbie Cram, said: “A big thing at the moment is sustainability and upcycling but themes often move in circles. Certainly customers are more aware and knowledgeable of current trends as there is a lot more out there for people to access. Everyone can go on Pinterest and come into store with a phone full of pictures. This can really help, but occasionally this can be a hindrance as the products the customer desires might not actually be suitable for what they need.”

“Our Design Centre is an inspiration hub, full of ideas to spark the customer’s imagination.”

- Sarah Woodvine



Debbie Cram and Helen Moss, Interior Designers at Bury St Edmunds in 2021.

Sarah added: “We are not just a decorating service but a fully-fledged interior design service. We now have a big physical presence within Glasswells and it has made a lot of difference. The area allows us to really enhance how we display our stock – for instance, we can showcase full length wallpaper designs, which is quite rare among our competitors, and have thousands of fabric swatches – our Design Centre is an inspiration hub, full of ideas to spark the customer’s imagination.”



CHAPTER TEN:

ALL UNDER ONE ROOF

The opening of the larger destination stores in Bury and Ipswich allowed Glasswells to extend its offer beyond the furniture, carpets and curtains that it was already known for. The extra space gave room for a larger Bedding department, which incorporates Bathroom Accessories, extensive Lighting and Cookshop departments, as well as those all-important finishing touches and Giftware.

The Bedding department offer has evolved over time to compete with online retailing and the convenience factors of now being able to pick up basic items at the Supermarkets. Glasswells moved away from the lower end products, with today's customer desiring designer labels and happy to pay designer prices. From traditional brands, such as Sanderson, to fashion labels including Ted Baker and FatFace, the bedding department has benefited from the advancement of the website and is one of the best performing departments online.



Cookshop is another area that has seen significant growth, providing shoppers with a choice of quality bakeware, saucepans and small electrical items. The latter are the most challenging when it comes to balancing margin and being competitive online.

The Lighting department was a new edition when the store moved to Newmarket Road in 1992 and now, 20 years later, is well established as having one of the largest selections in the County. A full refurbishment is planned for the department next year.





The newly renovated Atrium at Bury in 2020, which includes a feature wall.

Seasonal Giftware and Home Accessories are the final piece to the puzzle. These departments offer customers wonderful displays to browse and are incorporated into the larger room sets around the store, offering inspiration on current style trends.

The homewares departments turnover £1.5million a year and are an important part of the overall shopping experience that Glasswells offers. “We have designed our stores so that customers will enjoy spending a few hours with us,” Paul Glasswell explained. “We have customers that travel for up to an hour to get here and the draw for them is the wonderful environment that we provide – an in-store restaurant, free parking and, of course, the vast array of departments and products for them to shop. Our shops are our crowning glory and a lot of work goes into ensuring they look fantastic.”



CHAPTER ELEVEN:

BALANCING FOOTFALL & ONLINE SHOPPING

Ask Paul Glasswell what has been the most significant development for Glasswells in the last decade and he doesn't hesitate in answering. Even prior to the 2020 national lockdowns, online shopping behaviour had played a big part in every retail decision, with more customers turning to digital devices for both inspiration and purchasing.

For Glasswells, and others, this posed a very real dilemma – how do you create a website that works hard to convert an online sale, whilst still needing the majority of customers to actually come into store? Paul admits it is a juggling act that still hasn't been fully mastered.

He said: "Both browsing online and then actually spending online has been the biggest change. We have tried to create a website that is excellent at making online sales for those that would prefer to shop that way. However, it has a second – and just as important - function of promoting the environment in our shops, to encourage people to come in and see products in person.

"Wonderful displays, having everything under one roof and a hugely popular restaurant all help us stand up as a retailer, and is a message that our online competitors don't have. But alongside that, we've ensured our website is modern and easily accessible.

The new open plan Reception area at Bury St Edmunds in 2019.





An example of our social media posts and advertising for the 75th Summer Sale in 2021.

The two things work hand-in-hand; use the website to shop online, but also to window shop and then go into the store to try and buy.”

One thing the website struggles to offer is the company’s famed customer service; however the introduction of live chat across all stores and departments has helped to overcome this and puts customers in touch with an expert to help with their query.

The experience of slowly walking around the store, trying out furniture, browsing, enjoying a relaxing cup of tea and so on hard to mimic online, but Glasswells quickly realised the importance of a strong website and digital presence as part of its overall marketing strategy. Paul said: “We fully appreciate the importance of a good website and how it offers a great chance to broadcast to a potentially much bigger audience.”

Glasswells launched its first website in 2009, but the fact that it was non-transactional – and largely a virtual shop window - quickly made it redundant as customer habits began to change.

Three years later, the company’s first transactional website went live, but its templated platform soon made it quite limited and prevented online business from growing. In 2015, the website was

upgraded to a platform developed by Iconography, who were then partners of Swan Retail.

While the new site integrated more smoothly with the company’s stocks and sales system, it was also templated and, within five years, had been outgrown by the business.

In 2020, Glasswells upgraded to a modern Woo Commerce website, developed by Swan Retail. The new incarnation was much more customisable, powerful and future-proof.

Explaining the process, Paul said: “The first two websites were quite restrictive and we quickly outgrew them. Rather than buying something ‘off the shelf’, we then decided to work with a company to design our own semi-bespoke website and this current version can do so much more. We wanted something that would evolve and change with different trends and we carried out a lot of research about what a modern website should look like – including with staff and customers.

“It was a case of using the old websites, and their limitations, to help work out what we needed and wanted from a new website. We now have a website that will grow with us and not get out of date.”

As the bricks-and-mortar retail world grappled with this new way of shopping and lost market share to online competitors that seemingly popped up overnight, Glasswells was a touch fortunate to be in an industry where products did not migrate online quite as quickly. “You can buy beds and furniture sets online, but many still preferred the ‘try before you buy’ philosophy,” Paul said. “The main thing was to try and create a website that showcased products in an easy to shop way. We tried to look at it from both an internal perspective and also from the eyes of customers and we are pleased with the end result.”

Online revenue has escalated from £300,000 to £1 million in the year ending February 2021. When asked whether the website was there to drive footfall to the stores or make sales in its own right, Paul admitted: “It is a difficult one. Ideally, you want both things. You want a website that is going to achieve good sales but also drive people to your stores by showcasing the huge choice and quality of products we have available to browse. We have invested huge amounts into making our stores a pleasure to visit and shopping is still a past time that most people like to do.”

During the pandemic and subsequent lockdowns, the website experienced record-breaking statistics for traffic and online orders. Paul said: “This really became

useful during the pandemic, when there was a much greater emphasis on shopping online and consumers were prevented from visiting a shop.”

Another way of communication quickly and cost-effectively with customers has been the advent of social media. Glasswells now has a presence on all of the platforms, speaking to customers in a slightly different way to generate engagement with the brand.

Jade Marshall, Marketing Manager, said: “Social media allows us to be more creative with our messaging and have some fun with our followers. It’s instant - if the sun is shining we can talk about garden furniture – we don’t have to rely on anyone else to broadcast our message. Our audience is the biggest it has ever been; we can target individuals based on the location, age and interests and get into thousands of new prospective homes.”

In the ever-changing world of media, Glasswells have also not forgotten the value of local newspapers, both in editorial and advertising, but they complement this with digital advertising as well as eye-catching in-store marketing. It all makes up a general marketing mix to help continue and enhance Glasswells as a household name.

Glasswells website homepage in August 2021.





An example of a local newspaper advert for the 75th Summer Sale in 2021.

“We fully appreciate the importance of a good website and how it offers a great chance to broadcast to a potentially much bigger audience.”

- Paul Glasswell

CHAPTER TWELVE: A BIG HEARTED TEAM

The company's commitment to its local community and charitable causes can be traced back to 1954. It was then that Jerry Glasswell instigated the Christmas distribution of tea and sugar to pensioners in the area as a way of saying thank you.

As documented earlier in this book, thousands of pensioners across Bury St Edmunds, Haverhill, Saffron Walden and Stowmarket benefited from this generosity - estimated at more than £100,000 worth of tea and sugar over a 30-year period. In 2006 Glasswells revisited this as part of the 60th anniversary promotions. Nearly 70 years on and this community spirit has always run through the heart of the business. Glasswells has always been keen to support charities - big and small, national and local - with fancy dress days at work and taking part in the Accumulator Challenge, run by St Nicholas Hospice Care.

The Glasswells charity quiz night was first held in 2006 and soon became a popular annual event in the company's social calendar. A great chance to mix out of work also became a fantastic fundraiser for a host of local charities.

It was started by Robert Hawkins, then Sales Director, with staff nominating chosen local charities to support.

Display for the Tea and sugar giveaway in 2006.



Held in The Place to Eat restaurant after work, teams of four battled it out for the coveted trophy. More than £13,000 has been raised in total from the quiz nights with charities supported including the My WiSH Charity, supporting West Suffolk Hospital, and the hospital's Forget-Me-Not Dementia Campaign. The East Anglian Air Ambulance and the Teenage Cancer Trust have also benefited from the fun evenings.

In 2016, the quiz night supported The Brain Tumour Charity in memory of much-loved and well-respected Robert after he sadly passed away following a short illness earlier in the year. The poignant evening



Staff dress up in pink for Breast Cancer fundraiser in 2010.



Robert Hawkins presents funds raised to St Nicholas Hospice.



Staff present funds raised for East Anglia Air Ambulance at the annual quiz night in 2018.

recognised Robert's dedication to Glasswells and also the fundraising evening that has raised so much to support so many.

Speaking at the time, Buying Director Richard Ball, who took over the mantle of quiz master, said: "I was honoured to be able to continue this fundraising tradition and the support from all the staff here at Glasswells was tremendous. I know Robert would have been incredibly proud with everyone's efforts and generosity."

But the quiz night was only one way Robert wanted to make a difference and give back. In 2015, he organised a lunch for 60 local residents who would have otherwise been on their own on Christmas Day. Entitled 'Big Hearted Bury', more than 50 members of staff and their friends and family volunteers while fantastic support was also received from restaurant suppliers, local food companies and supermarkets. Glasswells also worked closely with Gatehouse, Age UK and Community Christmas to make the event a big success.

Colleagues recall Robert saying that he was at home at Christmas with his family and it made him think about

people who were alone during the festive season. Touched by this, he wanted to organise something that was not about Glasswells. The company name was dropped from the fundraising event which turned out to be an incredibly special event – and a testimony to Robert.

Paul Glasswell said: "Robert was instrumental in making the quiz night very successful. He made it all work and the evenings were great fun for all the staff and raised an amazing amount of money for charity. When he suggested the Christmas lunch, we weren't sure if it would work. But he used all his enthusiasm and got momentum behind it and it was immensely successful."

Alongside also getting involved in national events, Paul and the company also organise an annual golf day to raise money for the Furniture Trades Benevolent Association.

Paul added: "Glasswells has always been proud to be a strong part of their local community. We have enjoyed such great loyalty from our customers and we always try to give something back to the community that has supported us."



'Big Hearted Bury' Christmas day charitable lunch in 2015, organised by Robert Hawkins for local residents that would have been alone.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN: PANDEMIC & BREXIT POSE IMPORTING ISSUES

The twin issues of the Covid-19 pandemic and Brexit has brought about some of the biggest challenges facing Glasswells over the last few years. Happening at largely the same time, both have adversely affected the company's importing division – but for differing reasons.

Glasswells has actually been importing furniture for around the last 25 years. The Kempson Way warehouse gave them the opportunity to take advantage of greater quantities and variety of product.

Importing within Glasswells has grown in recent years due to the sad decline in the number of UK furniture manufacturers. This gave the company no choice but to look further afield in search of the best quality products at the right price.

This started with Paul Glasswell visiting the Far East furniture shows to search for suitable products. The

company would order a selection of products, picking up new lines of furniture to offer customers greater choice and better value for money.

Beds were very popular as they were easy to put into containers and shipping costs were not overly high. It also meant Glasswells were able to offer products that the public could not buy anywhere else. With raw materials a lot cheaper in the Far East, the UK manufacturers would, unfortunately, struggle to compete.

The whole importing process would take around 12 weeks from manufacturer to delivery and the fact the warehouse had good links to the A14, and Felixstowe Docks, was particularly advantageous.

On occasions, the quality was not what was expected, but that was a simple lesson learned and the company would not rush back to order any more of that particular product. These buying trips lasted for about a decade,

The world's biggest container ship, Ever Ace, which arrived in Felixstowe September 2021. Credit: Peet de Rouw.





before Paul decided it was becoming more difficult to import products that his buyers had not actually seen. Since then, imported product has largely been selected through visiting furniture shows across the UK and in association with AIS.

Up until the last year, the importing process was smooth, according to Buyer and Import Manager, Julie Valentine: "It's important to get the planning and exact timings of the importing process right, from when the order is placed, right up until the container arrives – this helps to keep avoidable delays and costs down to a minimum. Our imports steadily increased and peaked in 2014, when we ordered 70 containers direct with the factories, with products worth around £1 million."

Brexit was always likely to cause problems. But even before that, the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic began during the second quarter of 2020 and has continued since. Julie explained: "We have experienced many challenges with container delays from the Far East in recent months. The demand remains high but there are supply issues - there have not been enough available containers or vessels operating, to get the container orders shipped. The knock-on effect is that delays are occurring and therefore delivery times are having to be extended. There has also been a traffic jam of containers to deal with at the ports which means we are placing

orders, but arrival dates have been repeatedly extended. This has a knock-on effect to customers, who rightly want to know when they will get their order."

Glasswells also deals with imports from European countries such as France, Spain and Germany – which is where problems caused by Brexit comes into play.

Julie said: "Whether it is stylish gloss furniture from Italy or semi-fitted bedroom furniture from Germany, the European market helps us stand out from the crowd. Before Brexit, the goods came over the border with relative ease. Brexit now means that every European import must have a customs declaration. This has been a big administrative change. While Glasswells has been committed to do everything possible to be prepared, our European suppliers have also had to be ready. It has been a steep learning curve for us all, and some of our suppliers have been more prepared than others.

"Because of Brexit, we have had individual conversations with 30 different suppliers throughout Europe. Going forward, some European suppliers might overcome the problem by having UK warehouses but that isn't going to be sustainable for everyone. It does make for a few uncertain issues going forward. Fortunately, however, we are pleased to have continued to receive deliveries from our European suppliers with very little disruption."

CHAPTER FOURTEEN:

LIVING WITH THE LOCKDOWNS

On March 23rd 2020, the lives of staff and customers – and indeed the entire country – changed overnight. Prime Minister Boris Johnson sent the entire country into a national lockdown with the threat of Covid-19 becoming more and more real.

Little did anyone know that this scourge would see different variants, more lockdowns and an unprecedented vaccination effort go on for over a year and beyond. The entire retail sector shuddered to a halt.

Just 12 hours after Boris Johnson's Monday night announcement, Glasswells closed all its doors. They would not reopen to customers again for 10 weeks. While the shop floors were empty, it didn't mean business had completely stopped. Staff were able to liaise with customers through the website and online chat – something that became more and more important as the months went on and more people turned to digital shopping.

In the removals team, regular dialogue was taking place with customers until such time that it was safe to return to people's homes. That time was the start of June when stores were given the go-ahead to open once again. Summer sales, with unprecedented low prices, were launched to try and encourage customers back into the stores – and as a way of saying thank you for their continued loyalty. The reaction from customers was hugely encouraging and reassuring.

Andrea Johnston, General Manager at the Ipswich store, said: "As soon as customers started to return, they all said how safe they felt. They could see how much work we had put in place for the safety of staff and customers alike and how serious we were taking everything. Their shopping experience was different but it was never difficult. The feedback was hugely positive."

Hand sanitiser, masks and screens quickly became second nature to staff and customers alike. Society



may have been searching for a new normal but the same traditions remained at Glasswells – and consumer confidence quickly followed.

Virtually every department within the business recorded a quick and positive turnaround in sales once the stores were reopened in June. The reasons behind this have been well documented. With many families either unable or unwilling to travel abroad for their summer holidays, they quickly looked upon their own home for salvation. This started during the first lockdown and continued strongly throughout 2020. Money saved from not having holidays, and even savings made by working from home, was spent on improving one's own surroundings.

Andrew Boreham, Flooring Buyer, said they had to postpone around 300 fitting jobs in Bury and Ipswich as a result of the first lockdown. But he added: "When we came back in June, we bounced back within weeks



as people were keen to spend money on their homes. Instead of going on holiday, they were decorating their homes. We had lots of new developments which were worth significant amounts and we quickly caught up to normal levels. In the November lockdown we were able to continue fitting and estimating, so it was much more like business as usual."

From a company-wide perspective, Paul Glasswell said the main thing was making staff and customers feel as safe as possible. One-way systems, social distancing and directional signs and divider screens quickly became familiar in society and Glasswells was no different.

New strains of the virus emerged and, on one occasion, a decision was quickly made to close the restaurant in Bury for a few days to ensure there was no spread after three members of the team became unwell. While ensuring the safety of staff and customers, the short break also allowed Glasswells to run their own 'track and trace' to identify any other staff who may be at risk, in line with national guidelines around the precautionary isolation period.

"I think the pandemic also created a vacuum in the shopping habits of our customers," said Paul Glasswell.

"We had people who would often visit us two or three times a week who were no longer able to. We missed them as much as they had missed us."

A new, more contagious strain of the virus, caused a third national lockdown at the start of January 2021. This was a huge blow, with stores unable to open during the busy Winter Sale period. However, when the shops reopened on the 12th April, there was lots of pent up demand and consumer confidence was high.



CHAPTER FIFTEEN: GREEN INITIATIVE & SUSTAINABILITY

With any new investment, the environmental impact is always high on the agenda. Regular store refurbishments have given Glasswells the opportunity to drive home its green initiative, with a switch to energy efficient LED lighting a prime example. The first installation of a low energy lighting system was in 2013 at the Bury store and involved replacing 4,500 light fitting and bulbs.

As well as low energy lighting, in 2014 the company invested £200,000 in a 250kW solar panel system at Bury, which covered 20,000 sq. ft. of roof space. An additional 110kW was added the following year, plus installations of the same size at Ipswich and Kempson Way.

On a good day, the system can generate enough electricity to run the buildings during the summer months, with any excess being exported and sold to the national grid. Paul Glasswell, explained the reasons behind the move to renewable energy: “The

Solar panels being lifted onto the roof.



360kW solar panel installation on the roof of the Newmarket Road store in Bury St Edmunds.



New DAF Euro 6 Removal truck, purchased for £80,000 as part of the fleet upgrade in 2014.



panels significantly reduce the amount of electricity we consume from the national grid. This was a large investment for the Company, however, the long term benefits to the environment and the reduction in our Carbon Footprint over the next thirty years are certainly worth the initial outlay. This venture identifies Glasswells as a forward thinking, progressive and environmentally responsible organisation within East Anglia.”

In 2014 Glasswells started replacing their fleet of removal trucks, with six low emission, ultra-efficient DAF Euro 6 Removal trucks at a cost of £80,000 each. The 15 tonne HGVs can take up to five containers and have been specially developed for maximum transport efficiency offering low operational costs, optimum vehicle performance and an even higher level of driver safety.

To top it off, Glasswells appointed Hatcher, a cab conversion specialist in Framlingham, to provide the crew with two separate sleeping areas, delivering a much better level of comfort and privacy for those overnight jobs. Environmentally, the trucks satisfy the EU Directive on low emissions and, therefore,

can be used to enter low-emission zones throughout Europe such as London and Paris.

Bob Allen, Removal and Transport Manager explained: “This particular type of lorry is very good news for our customers. We can safely pack possessions directly into containers which are then simply loaded on and off the vehicle, greatly reducing the risk of any breakages or losses.

“The extra sleeping space means that the drivers not only get good night’s sleep, but are also able to stay on board with our customers belongings from the moment they leave our warehouse until they arrive at the new home.”

The first fully electric company car has been leased and there are plans to add charging points to the head office site in Bury St Edmunds.

The most recent initiative, in 2021, involved replacing the air conditioning system at Newmarket Road. The £250,000 investment provided a more efficient cooling and heating system, which has reduced the use of gas for heating and is projected to cut costs by 14%.

As well as these large investments, recycling of cardboard, plastic, mattresses, carpets and underlay is pursued at every opportunity. The rising costs of landfill tax means that Glasswells needs to continually find new ways of reducing what ends up in the compactor.

“This venture identifies Glasswells as a forward thinking, progressive and environmentally responsible organisation in East Anglia.”

- Paul Glasswell

CHAPTER SIXTEEN:

THE FUTURE IS BRIGHT

Marrying the huge advancement in online shopping with encouraging shoppers into stores – whether out-of-town or in the heart of a town centre – will be the biggest conundrum for all retailers in the years to come.

Even prior to the pandemic, more and more people were opting for the instant ‘Buy Now’ button on a website rather than paying a visit to the shops. In some ways, Glasswells is fortunate. Furniture and beds does have a place online, but many people would still prefer to adopt a ‘try before you buy’ policy.

Paul Glasswell remains confident about the future – and in particular the role physical shops still have to play in the shopping experience. So much so, that the company is always on the look-out for potential opportunities in East Anglia. Paul said: “We do have a big requirement when it comes to potential opportunities – for instance, any new store must be a freehold with around 100,000 sq. ft. and four acres needed in space.

“We will always look at opportunities for further expansion including the demise of certain companies which might inadvertently open up space. The website has shown you don’t always need face-to-face interaction, but I do think there will always be value in seeing and talking to customers. Customers still want to see products for themselves and try them in good-size spaces that resemble their own homes.”

Paul believes independent businesses have an important role to play – though most will need to adapt and be agile going forward. Another thing in the company’s favour is that they own the vast majority of their buildings and they are always looking for opportunities to expand; be it a new destination store or larger warehousing facilities to grow third-party storage and removals .

Another reason for optimism is the quality of the 280 employees and strength of the Senior Management Team, which Paul and Sales Director, Kevin Robertson,

The team at Bury St Edmunds, having been awarded Member of the Year by AIS in 2014.





both paid tribute to. Kevin said: "Glasswells is a proud family-run business. In recent years, there have been some key retirements and it is important, as a business, that we inject fresh ideas. Our managers have all brought new ways of doing things, modernising systems and processes. Bringing new people into the team has helped move the business forward.

"The last year just highlighted what amazing people we have in the business. We didn't only have to deal with Covid, we had a major flood and throughout it all, every single member of staff worked tirelessly, going above and beyond to do whatever was needed. We knew we had a fantastic team and great camaraderie but this has now been emphasised even more."

Paul added: "There are lots of reasons to be excited going forward. I have two sons who have a future in the business and we have a strong nucleus of talent and experience within the Senior Management Team. It means they don't need as much input from me and we want to maximise their potential. Where possible, we want to promote from within and offer career opportunities."

And, while Paul admits that the strength of the Management Team means the business is in very safe hands, he will remain a constant figure across all aspects of the business. He said: "We have a fantastic team of staff and they know the rewards and success is there if they do their job well. If you enjoy what you are doing and want to do it well, there is nothing wrong with giving it your all.

"My main focus has always been on making this business as successful

as possible. I don't just want to do an ordinary job, I have always wanted to do an excellent job and see everything run smoothly and efficiently."

"I don't just want to do an ordinary job, I have always wanted to do an excellent job."

- Paul Glasswell



The Senior Management team in 2020. From left, back row: Kevin Robertson, Graham Oliver, Peter Holland and Andrew Sneddon; from left, front Row: Julie Valentine, Paul Glasswell and Jade Marshall.

PEOPLE WHO MATTER

The success of Glasswells over the past 75 years has been due to the dedication of its loyal staff. Today, 96 people have achieved 20 years of service and are recorded on the Long Service board at Head Office. This milestone is still recognised with the presentation of a watch.

Glasswells employs over 260 people, from school leavers and apprentices, to professionally qualified executives. Plus over 50 staff work on a self-employed

basis in the carpet fitting and curtain making areas. All, to varying degrees, have contributed to the story of Glasswells.

Spanning three-quarters of a century, it has not been possible to mention everyone by name, but this part of the story cannot end without special reference to some of those who have served the family business loyally over the years and made a significant contribution to its success.

FRANK GLASSWELL enjoyed 50 years in the business, having worked for his brother, Jerry, at the first shop opened in 1946 in Brentgovel Street, Bury. He had many recollections of the past, among them travelling to Ilford in Essex to take old mattresses to a firm that specialised in remaking them. On business trips to London his day would last from six in the morning to eight at night. He also remembered the huge display that Glasswells staged at the Suffolk Show in 1950, when they took one of the biggest marquees on the showground. During his career, Frank started the removals side of the business and later became manager of the Tollgate warehouse, Bury, where he stayed for 30 years. When he reached 60, Leslie Glasswell suggested that Frank's role had become physically too active for him. Frank agreed, and decided to take semi-retirement, moving across to help out in the second-hand furniture store, until he fully retired in 2000.

DON BOUGHTON joined Glasswells as a clerk in August, 1953, and quickly showed an aptitude for selling, becoming their top salesman. Later he took over as manager of their largest and busiest store in St Andrew's Street, Bury St Edmunds, and often accompanied Leslie Glasswell on buying trips to furniture trade exhibitions. He was also Leslie's right-hand man in a variety of ways, including helping to organise and lay out the exhibitions for nearly 20 years. He became group furniture buyer during the 1970's when Leslie was involved with the rapid growth of Kingsbury Warehouses and remained in that position until he took early retirement in 1988. Don was given a surprise dinner at the Angel Hotel where he was greeted by about 80 of his friends and business contacts in the furniture trade. He was given a silver salver and a Stewart crystal decanter and glasses on behalf of members of the

furniture trade, while the Glasswell family presented him with a fine carriage clock. The company gave him a new Vauxhall car. Don said he was "totally taken aback" by the generosity. He continued to work for Glasswells on a part time basis until 2000, managing the second-hand shop.

CLAUDE LONG joined Glasswells in 1954. He had been in the furniture trade for several years, first with Pretty's, of Bury St Edmunds, and then Haywards. He served his apprentice as a boy and was a qualified carpet fitter and expert in soft furnishings. Claude obtained his Furnishing Certificate and lectured in the subject at the College of Further Education, Bury. In 1956 he became manager of the Bury Corn Exchange Showrooms, where he remained until retiring in 1976. One of the most experienced managers Glasswells has had, he was for several years their training officer. "Claude's determination to always do everything in the best possible way stood the company in good stead," said Leslie Glasswell.

COLIN FAYERS joined Glasswells in 1957 after completing his National Service. He worked in the St Andrew's Street shop for about three months and then moved across to the Corn Exchange showrooms. In 1962 he moved to outside rounds which involved collecting hire purchase payments and selling to customers in the outlying towns of Thetford, Newmarket and Mildenhall. For several years he managed the outside rounds business which incorporated contracts and in 1992 transferred to the World of Furniture in Newmarket Road to work in customer service as manager. Colin retired after 50 years' service in 2007, with a celebratory meal at Theobald's restaurant.

JOHN ADAMS spent 30 years with Glasswells, having joined the firm in June 1958. He came from another Bury store, Pretty's, and was already fully experienced in the furniture trade. Within three months he was promoted by Glasswells to manage the Brentgovel Street shop. He recalls: "We were always well dressed with a black coat and pinstripe trousers provided by the firm." He also has happy memories of staff parties and outings to the theatre in London. "In the early days when the Brentgovel Street premises were just a collection of tin roofs the rain often came in," he said. "We used to place tin buckets under the leaks to avoid the furniture getting damp. In cold weather various heating stoves were placed about the place to keep it warm." John continued as manager after the shop became the Bedding Centre and remained as deputy after Brian Flack became manager of the enlarged premises on completion of the rebuilding. John retired in 1989, living a full and active life.

LESLIE MOATE joined the company in 1959 at a small shop in Queen Street, Haverhill, where Glasswells eventually finished up with three shops in 1960, before moving to a new High Street store in 1978. At Glasswells 50th Anniversary he recollected the distributions of tea and sugar to pensioners at Christmas, which, he said, was "a great event when some great window displays were also put on. It was always a treat to have the company of Mr Jerry, Mr Leslie and Mr Paul, who helped to give away the tea and sugar to the many hundreds of pensioners. Mr Jerry and Mr Leslie laid a good foundation to the business which has enabled it to be so successful. It is a great pleasure to see Mr Paul carrying on in his father's footsteps, I am sure Mr Leslie must be very proud of him, as I am in the way he has shown the future of Glasswells to be in safe hands. Here's to the next 50 years and good trading. No doubt Mr Jerry is still keeping an eye on them all and I can still hear him saying 'well done boy'." Leslie also has happy memories of the old days of furniture exhibitions which were "very hard work but very good". He retired in 1985 and at his retirement party Leslie Glasswell presented him with a car, "It was an occasion I shall never forget," he said.

VIC BREGA joined Glasswells in 1960 as general manager and during the next few years was responsible for all the improvements that took place at branches and the development of the Tollgate warehouse. Having been friends for many years, Leslie and Vic were able to continue their close relationship. Leslie said that in business Vic's personality was so good that, although a newcomer, he was able to gain the respect and cooperation of all the staff. Together they moved the company rapidly forward in the 1960s, Vic becoming director in 1969. Vic was involved in the Floreat Buying Group and was a member of the committee. He also became area chairman of the Furniture Trade Benevolent Association and was responsible for fund raising in East Anglia becoming national president of the association in 1982. He was also social organiser for Glasswells and

organised many customer trips to Earls Court furniture exhibitions, resulting in very good business for the company. He also arranged staff outings to London theatres and the Talk of the Town. On the formation of the first Kingsbury Warehouse in 1972, he became sales director and rapidly built the new company to seven outlets by 1976, when Kingsbury was sold to Combined English Stores. Vic then left Glasswells to become Kingsbury managing director. Leslie and Vic, and their wives, Heather and Pat, remained very good friends.

BRIAN FLACK joined Glasswells in 1962, worked at the Corn Exchange shop when the manager there was Claude Long. He had previously worked for Plumpton's, another Bury St Edmunds store. In 1972 he was promoted furniture manager of the St Andrew's Street South shop, moving to the Brentgovel Street branch in 1985 as manager specialising in bedroom furniture and beds, with a larger soft furnishing department and a new linen section. Brian moved to the World of Furniture in 1992, where he was manager of the extensive furniture department. He retired in 2009 and has happy recollections of the days when tea and sugar used to be distributed to pensioners and recalls that members of the Corn Exchange staff would often walk with customers to the St Andrew's Street store to sell furniture.

TERRY GLASSWELL spent a total of 50 years at the company. A cousin of Leslie Glasswell, he came to Glasswells in 1963 as a stock-taking clerk and always possessed a good head for figures. He progressed through the business as Office manager at St Andrew's Street in charge of hire purchase, Financial Controller and ultimately was appointed Financial Director in 1991.



Terry was very passionate about Glasswells and always said he treated the business like it was his own. During the five decades he also had a spell in charge of running branches and his tidy mind and organised way meant he was able to encourage some very good habits. Terry's administrative strengths

meant that he skilfully introduced computerisation to the company. He was intent on doing things the correct way and brought a very disciplined approach to everything he touched. Terry retired in 2013 to spend more time with his wife Jeannie and his family.

RICHARD BALL joined Glasswells after leaving school in 1968 to work as a shop junior at the Brentgovel Street store, moving to St Andrew's Street shop and then the Corn Exchange in 1970 to work as a junior salesman. He was transferred back to St Andrew's Street in 1974 and appointed caretaker manager of the Saffron Walden branch the following year, being promoted to manager of the Bury Corn Exchange shop in 1976. In 1979 he was appointed store manager of the newly opened Sudbury shop, with Graham Vale as carpet manager. Two years later in 1981 he relocated to the recently acquired Norwich store, Taskers in Fishergate, transferring later to the newly developed Glasswells store in Ber Street, Norwich. Richard returned to head office in 1988 as curtain, linens and carpet buying supervisor, taking on the additional responsibility of bedding buyer in 1992. He was responsible for setting up the new bed department at the World of Furniture and in the planning and relocation of carpets and curtains to the store in 1994.



Richard was a valued member of the senior management team and joined the Board of Directors in 2012 as buying director, ultimately responsible for buying Beds, Upholstery and Dining categories. Richard dedicated his whole working life to Glasswells, achieving a remarkable 50 years of loyal service before retiring in 2018. Richard brought something very special to Glasswells, he cared deeply for the business and had the ability, vision and energy to bring in changes for the better - his contribution, impact and influence over five decades was immense and Richard played no small part in making Glasswells the successful business it is today.

FRED RAISON was a significant person in our removals team. He started as a removal driver in 1969, before being invited to become manager of the



removals department at the Tollgate warehouse and played an important part in Glasswells decision to take over Howard and Moss, another local firm of removers, in 1988. He was responsible for the transport fleet of removal and delivery trucks, which meant looking after all the inspections and assessments to make sure

the Lorries were safe on the road. He eventually became warehouse manager at Tollgate and was instrumental in the move to Kempson Way in 1999, which meant being in charge of around 40 members of staff. Fred was a member of the senior management team until he retired in 2008.

GRAHAM VALE began his career at Glasswells as a 'shifter' in 1973; wearing a long white coat, he moved furniture around the St Andrew's Street shop. Soon he joined the Carpet department and has been selling carpet and flooring ever since. In 1979 Graham helped open a new shop in Sudbury and was appointed Carpet Manager, before moving back to St Andrew's Street and growing the department there. When Carpets moved up to the World of Furniture, Graham became deputy manager of the much larger department. He is a problem solver and a flooring expert through and through; there is nothing he does not know about carpets. Graham has been invaluable to Glasswells success in becoming the largest carpet retailer in Suffolk.



RICHARD HODGKISS was Manager of the Stowmarket and Saffron Walden branches between 1975 – 1980, before retiring and moving to Norfolk. He was enticed out of retirement in the mid-80s to join the Norwich store on a part time basis, carrying out the measuring of carpets and curtains. Richard was very enthusiastic and so versatile, he had a positive 'can do' attitude and there was nothing that he wouldn't offer to undertake. After a few years he moved back to Suffolk and, once again, came back to work at Glasswells, as the main cleaner at the newly opened World of Furniture, a job he did with his usual enthusiasm.

GARY KING joined the company shortly after leaving school in 1977 and began his career working as a junior in the carpet shop in Queen's Square, Haverhill where he learned the many complexities of the carpet trade. Gary's accuracy and thoroughness played a major part

in his success as a carpet salesperson and he was soon promoted to Carpet Department Manager in 1983. Over his career, Gary has managed the Saffron Walden store, as well as the Bury Flooring department between 1995 and 2000, before moving to Haverhill as Branch Manager in December 2000. Gary's quality of work was second to none and he was an incredibly reliable, loyal and hardworking man. Gary retired after over 40 years service in 2020.



went under the bed; the customer did not want to pay for something he couldn't see! In 2001 Ian moved to the Bury branch and was appointed Flooring Buyer. Ian grew the department significantly and the decisive way he managed this role was essential to achieving a smooth running department. It was a full on, demanding job, but one that Ian carried out impeccably and with good humour. Ian was a huge asset to the growth and success of Glasswells, before he retired in 2016.

DAVID WARREN came to Glasswells in 1978 as a Sales Adviser at the Corn Exchange and was soon promoted to Display Manager, making use of his creativity and excellent eye for merchandising. David went on to become Buyer of Homewares, Lighting and Giftware, which expanded greatly with the opening of the Ipswich store in 2008 and the growth of online sales. David retired in 2020 after 42 years service.



PETER BAILEY joined Glasswells in 1979 at the Tollgate warehouse. However, he left in the spring of the following year to hitch-hike around Europe. Returning to England, he was persuaded to come back to his former job with Glasswells, where he remained until 1989. Also helping out at the St Andrew's Street store, where he became involved with measuring and estimating, customer service, coordinating fitting, stock control and sales. In 1989 he joined the Contracts department, working with Jimmy Mitchell. Steady growth



saw Nigel Talbot joining the team in 1994, with Peter himself appointed Contracts Manager the following year. Peter's firm but fair approach has been perfect for managing the team of flooring fitters and liaising with site managers and third-party contractors. He has been instrumental in growing the division to a multi-million pound business.

IAN ROBERTSON joined as assistant manager at the St Andrew's Street shop in 1979, becoming display manager the following year and joint manager at the Corn Exchange shop exclusively selling Schreiber furniture. In 1982 he became manager of the Sudbury branch and the following year assisted at the new Braintree store, introducing staff to Glasswells company systems. Becoming temporary credit controller in 1984, he took over as manager of the Haverhill branch soon after and also became temporary area manager from 1985 to 1986. Under his guidance, the soft furnishings department at Haverhill was extended in 1987 and the year after the store achieved a £1m turnover for the first time. In 1992 the shop was extensively refurbished



and in 1995 he added to his Haverhill management role by taking on the additional responsibilities of branch controller. He has many amusing stories to tell. Apart from one customer who argued that 'pm' began at 1.30pm, he recalls delivering a bedroom carpet to an elderly man who asked them to cut out the piece that

BRIAN BUGG started his long career at Glasswells in 1982 as a Carpet administrator, progressing to Carpet Manager of both Braintree and Haverhill, before becoming store Manager at Sudbury in the mid-nineties. Brian came and joined the team at Bury in 1998, and was appointed Furniture Manager in 2008. Always dependable in a crisis, Brian has come to the rescue many times and is incredibly helpful and dedicated; his positive 'can do' attitude has been a massive benefit to the company and he tackles all tasks with pride. He holds the record for longest period of time without a sick day, an impressive 33 years, but most importantly he is an excellent retailer and manager of people. He leads by setting the highest example and, so it appears, effortlessly motivates his team to get the best out of them, with his infectious enthusiasm encouraging everyone to go the extra mile and always offer customers a first class service.



STEVE MILLER joined Glasswells in 1983 as manager of Saffron Walden. Extensive renovations were made providing a larger sales area, a separate carpet showroom and a small curtain section. In 1993 he moved to St Andrew's Street South as manager of Soft Furnishings, moving on to the World of Furniture the next year. The size of his department doubled to include linens, plus readymade and made-to-measure curtains and was the fastest growing area of the business. Steve was made Soft Furnishings Buyer, before leaving Glasswells in 2002.

BOB ALLEN has played an important role in the warehousing and home removals side of the business. Starting as a removals driver in 1984, Bob then went on to spend nearly 10 years in Furniture sales and retail management, before being appointed Deliveries Manager in 1997 at the Tollgate warehouse. Expansion to Kempson Way saw a much busier operation, with a larger fleet of vehicles and crews to manage. When Fred Raison retired in 2008, Bob's knowledge and expertise of transport and distribution made him the perfect choice to take over as Removals and Transport Manager. 13 years later, Bob has a team of six removal crews, a surveyor and an administrator. He is responsible for the maintenance and safety of Glasswells full fleet of 13 vehicles, including specialist HGV Removal Trucks and 7.5 tonne Lorries. Bob also oversees the annual BAR)audit and ensures the code of conduct is adhered to.



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EDDIE GAYFER was Ipswich born and a furniture man through and through. He joined Glasswells from Wallace King in 1987 and managed St Andrew's Street until 1992 when he moved to World of Furniture, as Furniture Manager. Having lived in Ipswich all his life, and with a great approach to customers, he was the natural choice to become store manager of the new World of Furniture branch at Martlesham Heath, Ipswich in 1995. Eddie helped lay the foundations for the big move to Ranelagh Road in Ipswich, before retiring in 2012

GEORGE BLOWERS worked for Wallace King in Norwich before joining Glasswells as Regional Branch Manager in 1988. He was a very personable communicator, energetic and well suited to the position. During a 12-year career with Glasswells, he became Sales Director responsible for buying of upholstery. He later came back for a second spell as a cabinet buyer before retiring in 2009.

TERRY BROUGHTON started in the Carpet department in St Andrew's Street in 1989. Terry has been very versatile and has moved around the business, managing many branches and departments including Furniture, Curtains, Estimating and Customer Service. His adaptability and excellent man management skills have been very useful to Glasswells. Today, Terry is Carpet Manager at Ipswich, where he helped open the new store in Ipswich in 2008 and has worked hard to make Glasswells the place to go for flooring in Ipswich.



JULIE VALENTINE came to Glasswells in 1992 as personal assistant to George Blowers and was responsible for the sales administration of all furniture departments. During this time she also worked closely with Paul Glasswell on the importation of goods from the Far East and took on the buying and selection of Garden furniture. When George retired in 2009, Julie added Bedroom buying to her duties and, more latterly, Beds. Julie's thoroughness and excellent organisational skills make her an important addition to the senior management team.



ADRIAN BYFORD was first a Sales Adviser in the St Andrew's Street clearance shop, when he joined in 1995, and moved to Saffron Walden as Branch Manager a couple of years later. Working as part of a very small team, with Robert Mead running the carpet side of the shop for many years, Ady has continued to do some excellent business and has fought back against the decline of the High Street. His friendly and helpful demeanour has helped to build strong relationships with the people of Saffron Walden and he has made his shop the place to go for furniture, beds and flooring. Ady is an excellent all-rounder and his commitment to Glasswells is admirable.



RICK HALE began working at Glasswells as a Carpet Sales adviser in Sudbury. This followed with various roles, which made good use of his excellent product knowledge and adaptability, including managing Braintree and Customer Services, a spell in Contracts and Deputy Manager of Furniture at Bury. In 2017, Rick took over as Furniture Manager at Ipswich and has worked hard to build a strong and motivated team and is eager to grow the department.



JADE MARSHALL was first a Saturday girl in the Soft Furnishings department at Bury, when she joined in 1999. After completing a Law degree, she opted for a career in retail and returned to Glasswells as Assistant Manager of the Homewares department, before becoming Paul Glasswell's P.A. when Gill Moore retired in 2008. Jade's energy, clarity of thought and willingness first to learn and then to teach meant she was perfectly suited to assist with the implementation, training and development of the Swan system, giving her valuable insight into the many different areas of the Glasswells' business. In 2013 she took on the role of Marketing Manager, planning promotions and advertising and overseeing the website and online activity and joined the senior management team in 2018.



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SARAH NORRIS was first a Furniture Sales Adviser at Bury, when she joined Glasswells having completed a Fine Art degree in 2000. It wasn't long before her natural creativity and artistic flair saw her move into display, heading up visual merchandising and display, responsible for room sets, point of sale and dressing all four stores. Sarah has been instrumental in the design, planning and project management of recent store refurbishments, including the Place to Eat Restaurants. In 2018, Sarah began buying Garden Furniture and added Lighting and Giftware selection to her responsibilities, when David Warren retired in 2020.



SARAH WOODVINE started at Glasswells in 2000 as a Saturday girl on Reception at Bury, before moving to Carpets. After a brief spell at a High Street Bank in 2004, Sarah returned to Glasswells as Assistant Manager of the Homewares department. Her decisiveness and excellent management skills placed her perfectly to become Buyer for Soft Furnishings, which incorporates the two Interior Design Centres at Bury and Ipswich. Sarah has grown the department significantly over the last five years, adapting the offer as customers moved away from off-the-shelf readymade products and desired a more bespoke and design led service. Sarah now also oversees any Contract sales of Curtains and Blinds for businesses across the region.



RACHEL GREATBANKS joined in 2000 as Linens Manager at Bury, with a proven retail management background from Marks and Spencer, incorporating Cookshop, Lighting and Gifts. In 2014 Rachel was appointed Linens Buyer, responsible for product selection, display and promotions at Bury, Ipswich and Haverhill. Rachel's product knowledge and good understanding of what customers desire has seen online sales grow significantly, with high demand for brands and designer labels. When David Warren retired in 2020, Rachel also took on the additional buying responsibility for Cookshop.



DAVID SHEPHEARD spent ten years at Glasswells as the Financial Controller, taking over from Terry Glasswell when he retired. David was a practical accountant; as well as understanding the intricacies of accounts and taxation, he looked after stocktaking and computer software, which included the development and implementation of Swan Retail in 2008, hardware and network maintenance, communications and business administration. David was very orderly and accurate



and played an important role in the senior management team before retiring in 2012.

ROBERT HAWKINS dedicated his career to retail and the furnishing industries; in the early days he was central buyer for Binns, a store group in the North East. Later he worked as national non-food retail manager for the Co-op, which meant directing and controlling retail strategy throughout the UK.



Robert was appointed as Sales Director at Glasswells in 2002. As well as taking control of the retailing side of the business, Robert helped to grow the store's Place to Eat restaurant business and Commercial Flooring and Interiors division. Robert was very highly thought of by everyone at the Company, he was a very thorough and most excellent business manager. Robert set very high standards for himself and successfully engendered dedication, effort and loyalty from all who worked under his direction. His knowledge of shops, merchandise, buying, selling, promotions, and general business skills made him the consummate retail professional.

Robert's gregarious nature was well suited to a career where good, clear communications are essential. Robert's passion away from retail was horse racing and he made an annual pilgrimage to the Cheltenham week and very much enjoyed seeing his own horses run and his chats with his co-owners. Sadly Robert passed away after a short illness in 2015.



CHRIS FORDHAM was appointed Carpet Warehouse manager in 2002, at a time when the sales of flooring began to pick up at quite a pace. Also responsible for goods in and transfers of Small Ticket goods, plus display Furniture, the department became

even busier when the new store in Ipswich was opened. Chris became the go to man for anything maintenance wise relating the infrastructure of the Bury store and embraced every challenge positively. Chris retired in 2018 to spend more time with his family and wife, Carol, who worked as a Receptionist at the Bury store for over 20 years.

PETER HOLLAND came to Glasswells with a retail background after working at Curry's and Dixon's. He joined the company as a Customer Services



Manager in 2005 and his big strength was his open and friendly personality and how well he worked with people. He moved on to become Facilities Manager, a multi-faceted role that means looking after all tenants, maintenance of the buildings, utilities and health and safety, as well as being in overall

charge of catering and the restaurants. He was a valued member of the Senior Management Team, offering excellent negotiation and communication skills, and was a positive driving force, motivating everyone that he worked with seemingly effortlessly. Peter retired in 2021.

TINA JANES joined Glasswells in 2006 as Restaurant Manager at Bury, bringing with her a wealth of experience organising both front of house and the kitchen. When the new Ipswich store opened, the catering function doubled and Tina became Catering Manager, overseeing both sites and responsible for sourcing local produce and devising tempting menus, as well as managing the team of over 40 members of staff. Tina really helped to make the restaurants a success and a destination in their own right, before she retired in 2021.



GRAEME SIMKINS joined Glasswells in 2006 as Warehouse and Distribution manager at Kempson Way, bringing with him lots of new ideas, efficiencies and expertise to the distribution and storage side of the business. He is incredibly reliable and has built a strong and motivated hard working team. Responsible for the warehouse facility as a whole, which incorporates retail deliveries and commercial

storage, Graeme manages a team of 30 staff, from forklift truck operators and administrators, to HGV drivers and furniture repairers. Third-party commercial storage has grown significantly under his positive leadership and new facilities are currently being sought to enable further expansion in this area.



GRAHAM OLIVER joined in 2012 as financial controller, to replace David Shephard. An experienced professional accountant, Graham possesses the qualities needed to undertake this diverse role, which includes overseeing the accounts department, stock control, IT and administration of the company. Graham has been instrumental in developing the Swan system and improving efficiencies of our purchase ledger, payroll and storage departments utilising integrated software and technology. Graham is a very adaptable all-rounder and an important member of the senior management team.



KEVIN ROBERTSON joined Glasswells in 2008 after working for Alders in Croydon, the third largest Department Store in the country for nearly 14 years. Kevin managed a number of departments including Furniture, Lighting and Soft Furnishings, before being promoted to Merchandise Controller looking after departments with a combined turnover of £25 million.



In 1996 he was approached by DFS Furniture to help them with their expansion plans in and around the London area. Kevin opened a number of DFS Stores and was responsible for recruitment, training and store management, before overseeing them in an Area Manager capacity from 2004.

Keen to get back to working across a diverse business, he initially became Sales Manager at Glasswells, moving to Suffolk with his family, and worked under Robert Hawkins to learn all about the business. Focusing on the newly opened Ipswich Store, he began to take more responsibilities before being appointed Sales Director in 2010. Kevin has been instrumental in the growth of Glasswells online business and the commercial flooring division. Kevin's wealth of retail experience has significantly modernised the Glasswells shopping experience and he has been responsible for the planning and execution of store refurbishments to provide an exceptional environment for the customers. Kevin believes in investing in people and organises regular training sessions for the team, as well employing apprentices to develop new young talent in the business.

ANDREA JOHNSTON was recruited to open and manage the new Ipswich store in 2008. Andrea's previous experience at Homebase, where she was a Regional Manager responsible for 42 stores, brought some external retailing expertise to the project. Andrea's team now exceeds 60 people and her excellent organisational and management skills, along with a competitive drive to hit targets, has helped to make Glasswells a household name for home furnishings in East Suffolk.



ANDREW SNEDDON started his career at Marks and Spencer, gaining valuable retail experience across many different areas. He then joined the Co-op trainee buyer scheme, learning about textiles and product selection. Andrew went on to have a 25 year career with Anglia Home Furnishings, starting as a store manager and progressing to Buying Director. Andrew joined Glasswells in 2016 as Flooring Buyer and moved to Upholstery and Dining Buyer in 2018. Andrew's enthusiasm and excellent negotiation skills makes him a valued member of the senior management team.



JOE GROOM Manager of Haverhill then Saffron Walden
12 years: 1949-1961

TED CROUCH Warehouseman
52 years: 1956-2008

HARRY COTTERELL Removals
41 years: 1957-1998

BOBBY LAST Deliveries
24 years: 1960-1984

BILL KING Office Manager and Accountant
19 years: 1960-1973 Glasswells and 1973-1979 Kingsbury

STAN LEEDER Furniture Sales at St Andrew's Street
20 years: 1961-1981

JOHN COOPER Deliveries
43 years: 1962-2005

BARRY EASTWOOD Self-employed Carpet Fitter
29 years, 1968-1997

JOHN MORTLOCK Removals
38 years: 1964-2002

LIZ CLARKSON Removals Administrator
45 years: 1964-2009

ROGER TRICKER Fitter then Carpet Warehouse Manager
55 years: 1965-2020

HARRY DAWSON Manager at Saffron Walden
10 years: 1966-1976

FRED STEARN Removals and Deliveries
23 years: 1967-1990

SHEILA ZDRENKA Sales at St Andrew's and Brentgovel Street
28 years: 1968-1996

EVA ELEY Curtain Manager at St Andrew's Street
22 years: 1968-1990

GEORGE TURNER Deliveries
27 years: 1972-1999

MICK HAYWARD Upholsterer and French Polisher
47 years: 1973-2020

PETER PARRISH General Manager of Glasswells
8 years: 1974-1982

GEOFF IDLE Furniture Sales at St Andrew's Street
20 years: 1974-1994

FRED ROBINSON Deliveries
29 years: 1974-2003

MARGARET BAILEY Accounts Clerk
46 years: 1975-2021

ROBERT MEAD Carpet Sales at Saffron and Haverhill
43 years: 1976-2019

DAVID LAFLIN Stock Control at Tollgate and Kempson
27 years: 1977-2004

RAY MIZON Furniture Sales at Haverhill
38 years: 1977-2015

NIGEL TALBOT Contract Sales
30 years: 1978-2008

BARRY BURCH Removals
35 years: 1978-2013

JENNY BRISTOW Computer Operator
24 years: 1979-2003

MIKE PHILLIPS Carpet Manager at Haverhill
26 years: 1979-2005

AMANDA WALLACE Accounts Clerk
42 years to date: started 1979

RITA MAYES Curtain Manager at Haverhill
16 years: 1980-1996

MALCOLM CANNELL Warehouseman
29 years: 1980-2009

PAT COLE Curtain Sales then Manager at Bury
32 years: 1981-2013

JOHN FORD Carpet Sales at Bury
36 years: 1981-2017

SHARON DAVEY Cashier at Saffron Walden
39 years: 1981-2020

VINCE DORAN Furniture Manager at Bury
27 years: 1981-2008

MIKE BEARMAN Manager at Braintree
10 years: 1984-1994 and Furniture sales at Bury 1999-2013

JANET PEAD Curtain Manager at Haverhill
36 years to date: started 1985

RUTH NUNN Cleaner at Haverhill
25 years: 1985-2010

MARGARET FLETCHER Secretary to the Directors
34 years: 1986-2020

DAVID CLOVER Removals
25 years: 1986-2011

FRANK ZDRENKA Furniture Sales at Bury
23 years: 1986-2009

ALISON TOOKE Curtains Stock Control
34 years: 1986-2020

COLIN HOUGHTON Company Accountant
30 years: 1987-2017

PETER WOODWARD Furniture Manager and Sales
28 years: 1988-2016

COLIN DEVEREUX Removals
33 years to date: started 1988

DAVID KING Bedroom Sales at Bury
31 years: 1989-2020

PETER RAMSBOTTOM Deliveries
24 years: 1990-2014

GRAHAM ROBINSON Removals
24 years: 1990-2014

GILL MOORE Secretary to the Directors
18 years: 1990-2008

PETER HOWARD Removals
19 years: 1990-2009

HELEN ATHERTON Interior Designer and Estimator
26 years: 1991-2017

PENNY MAYSTRE Cleaner at Saffron Walden
22 years: 1991-2013

CLARE TAYLOR Receptionist and Administrator
17 years: 1991-2008

JO BISHOP-APSEY Accounts Clerk
29 years to date: started 1992

PETER HALLS Removals
23 years: 1993-2016

PAM BRAFIELD Cleaner at Newmarket Road
24 years: 1993-2017

RACHEL PHILLIPS Curtains at Haverhill
26 years to date: started 1995

LAURA PRICE Sales Administration and Graphic Designer
19 years: 1995-2014 and then Receptionist 2016-2018

CAROL FORDHAM Receptionist at Newmarket Road
21 years: 1996-2017

LINDA ROGERS Cashier and Sales at Haverhill
25 years to date: started 1996

SALLY BLAKE Waitress at Bury Restaurant
21 years: 1996-2017

WENDY MOORE Curtains at Newmarket Road
24 years to date: started 1997

ROBERT OLD Removals
24 years to date: started 1997

STEPHEN RAYSON Carpet Warehouse
24 years: 1997-2021

DANIEL RAYSON Kempson Way Warehouse
24 years to date: started 1997

SUE BURGESS Assistant Manager at Bury Restaurant
22 years: 1997-2019

CHRIS DODSON Curtain Maker
23 years to date: started 1997

TRACEY CARTER Accounts Office Manager
19 years: 1998-2017

AVRIL SOUTHGATE Supervisor at Bury Restaurant
23 years to date: 1998

SAM BOND Customer Service at Ipswich
23 years to date: started 1998

MARK NUNN Kempson Way Warehouse
22 years to date: started 1999

STEVE FAIRGRIEVE Kempson Way Warehouse
20 years: 1999-2019

JAMES LAFLIN Bed Sales at Newmarket Road
21 years to date: started 2000

NIGEL GLADWIN Furniture Sale at Newmarket Road
21 years to date: started 2000

MICHAEL WARNES Removals
21 years to date: started 2000

CAROLINE BOREHAM Purchase Ledger Clerk
21 years to date: started 2000

MANDY JAGGARD Lighting Sales at Newmarket Road
21 years to date: started 2000

PATSY CROSS Furniture Sales at Newmarket Road
20 years to date: started 2001

CHRISTINA RODMAN Assistant at Saffron Walden
20 years to date: started 2001

SAM POTTER Customer Service Manager at Bury
18 years to date: started 2003

WILL MILLER IT Manager
9 years: 2006-2015

DEBBIE CRAM Interior Designer at Bury
15 years to date: started 2006

VIKKI CRANE Reception Supervisor at Bury
13 years to date: started 2008

SHERRELL PATTON Reception Manager at Ipswich
13 years to date: started 2008

STEVE HATTERSLEY Warehouse Manager at Ipswich
10 years to date: started 2010

LORNA AVES Website Manager
11 years to date: started 2010

HEIDI ANDRADE Secretary to the Directors
9 years to date: started 2012

IAN BREEZE Furniture Sales, Bury, then Manager of Haverhill
8 years to date: started 2013

NATASHA BENTLEY Restaurant Manager at Ipswich
8 years to date: started 2013

ANDREW BOREHAM Flooring Buyer
6 years to date: started 2014

BEN CRISSALL IT Manager
6 years to date: started 2015

LUKE HAYES Homewares Manager at Ipswich
5 years to date: started 2016

SAMANTHA REILLY Commercial Storage Manager
4 years to date: started 2016

NICKY ELSTONE Company Accountant
4 years to date: started 2017

JACK TOTTIE Lead Graphic Designer
3 years to date: started 2018

MARC MARTIN Carpet Warehouse Manager
3 years to date: started 2018

“It’s the people that makes Glasswells such a special place.”

- Paul Glasswell



THE HISTORY OF GLASSWELLS

TIMELINE 1946 - 2021

1940

1946 - FIRST SHOP OPENED AT 35 BRENTGOVEL STREET, BURY ST EDMUNDS

1947 - Second shop opened at 36 Brentgovell Street

1948 - First furniture van built

1949 - First furniture exhibition at Haverhill and Bury Trade Fairs

1950

1950 - First furniture exhibition at the Old Town Hall, Bury

1951 - OPENED FIRST SHOP AT HAVERHILL

- Exhibition in marquee at the Suffolk Show, Rougham
- First exhibition in Bury Corn Exchange

1952 - Exhibitions at Saffron Walden and Bury Corn Exchange

1953 - SAFFRON WALDEN SHOP OPENED IN KING STREET

1954 - Built and opened shop at St Andrew's Street South, Bury

1954 - Jerry Glasswell provided free tea and sugar to pensioners at Christmas, a tradition that ran until 1984

1955 - BUILDING STARTED ON TOLLGATE WAREHOUSE, BURY ST EDMUNDS

1956 - Completed first 10,000 sq. ft. of Tollgate warehouse

1957 - Corn Exchange showroom opened in Bury

1959 - Tollgate Warehouse extended to 15,000 sq. ft.

1960

1960 - New store opened at Queen's Square, Haverhill

1961 - Number of removal vans reaches seven, including three at Stowmarket

1962 - Glasswells opens in Stowmarket

1963 - Glasswells staff totals 84

1964 - Brentgovell Street premises refurbished and opened as Bury Bedding Centre

- Added mezzanine floor to Corn Exchange shop

1964 - Additional shop opened at Haverhill

1965 - Carpet shop opened in Queens Square, Haverhill

1966 - Tollgate Warehouse extended 20,000 sq. ft.

1967 - Started work on £68,000 store extension in St Andrew's Street South, Bury St Edmunds

1968 - St Andrew's Street South shop extension completed and store opened

1970

1970 - Extended Tollgate Warehouse to 30,000 sq. ft.

1971 - FIRST KINGSBURY WAREHOUSE OPENED IN BURY

1972 - Kingsbury Warehouses have grown three branches

1973 - Kingsbury has four branches

1974 - Kingsbury grows to five branches

1975 - Kingsbury Warehouses now total seven branches

1975 - Glasswells buy St Andrew's and Brentgovell Street properties

1976 - Kingsbury Warehouses sold to Combined English Stores

1977 - MAJOR DEVELOPMENT AT HAVERHILL WITH NEW GLASSWELLS STORE AND SEVEN OTHER SHOPS

1978 - New Haverhill branch opened

1979 - Acquired Alstons of Sudbury

1980

- 1980** - Taskers bought at Norwich
- 1981** - Acquired Slaters at Braintree
- 1982** - Glasswells joins Associated Independent Stores group
- 1983** - Paul Glasswell appointed to the Board of Directors
- 1984** - New 11,000 sq. ft. store opened at Norwich, with two other shops to let
- 1985** - Complete re-building of Brentgovel Street premises at cost of £400,000. Opened in September, with three other shops to let
 - Opened Union Jacks Discount Warehouse, Bury St Edmunds

- 1986** - Leslie Glasswell elected to the Board of Associated Independent Stores
- 1987** - Terry Glasswell appointed to the Board of Directors
 - Union Jacks closed
- 1989** - **LESLIE GLASSWELL RETIRES AS MANAGING DIRECTOR AND BECOMES CHAIRMAN. PAUL GLASSWELL APPOINTED MANAGING DIRECTOR.**
 - Complete refurbishment of Sudbury shop
 - **NEW CARPET SHOP OPENED AT SAFFRON WALDEN**

1990

- 1990** - Refurbishment schemes at Saffron Walden, Haverhill and Braintree stores
 - George Blowers appointed Sales Director
- 1992** - **4½ ACRE SITE ACQUIRED IN BURY, NEWMARKET ROAD AND LARGE DESTINATION STORE 'WORLD OF FURNITURE' WAS OPENED**

- 1995** - Opened second 'World of Furniture' at Martlesham Heath, Ipswich
- 1996** - 50th anniversary of Glasswells
 - Bury store extended to 60,000 sq. ft.
- 1999** - **BUILT NEW 34,000 SQ. FT. WAREHOUSE AT KEMPSON WAY, BURY, TO HOUSE STOCK, THIRD PARTY STORAGE AND REMOVALS**

2000

- 2002** - Extended Bury store to 100,000 sq. ft.
 - Extended Kempson to 56,000 sq. ft.
 - Robert Hawkins appointed as Sales Director
- 2003** - Refurbished offices and original part of the store at Bury and Extended Restaurant to 94 seats
- 2004** - The Design Centre was opened at Bury, offering a professional Interior design service
- 2005** - Refurbished Haverhill branch
- 2006** - 60th Anniversary of Glasswells, which included a revisit to the 'Great Tea and Sugar' giveaway
- 2007** - An ice skating rink was installed at Christmas in the Bury store for a special customer weekend
- 2008** - **OPENED NEW 70,000 SQ. FT. DESTINATION STORE IN RANELAGH ROAD, IPSWICH**

- Invested £150k in new computer system, Swan Retail, for sales, stock and accounting
- Flood at Bury store takes staff by surprise, with evacuation of over 100 people
- A £750k 10,000 sq. ft. extension was added to Kempson Way Warehouse, plus the purchase of three extra narrow forklift trucks
- 2009** - Kevin Robertson was appointed Sales Director, Robert Hawkins semi-retired and took on a new role of Operations Director.
 - Fiona Glasswell was appointed to the Board of Directors.
 - Refurbished Bury store
 - Closed Martlesham Heath, Ipswich
 - Santa's Reindeer visit Bury and Ipswich for a special customer weekend at Christmas

THE HISTORY OF GLASSWELLS

TIMELINE 1946 - 2021

2010

- 2010** - Glasswells begins annual exhibitions at the Suffolk Show
- 2010** - Flooring estimating system, Masterpiece, was introduced to offer estimates in the home and improve efficiencies
- 2012** - **LAUNCHED NEW TRANSACTIONAL WEBSITE BY LIQUIDSHOP**
 - Richard Ball was appointed Buying Director
 - Substantial flood at Ipswich store damages furniture and fittings
 - £100,000 investment in low energy LED lighting at Bury and Kempson Way

- 2014** - £200k investment in 250kW solar panel system at Bury
 - New phase of six low emission, ultra-efficient, DAF Euro 6 Removal trucks at a cost of £80k each

- 2015** - Extended Kempson Way to 80,000 sq. ft. with mezzanine floor Archive Storage facility
 - Upgraded website to new platform created by Iconography, partner of Swan Retail
 - Added 110kW to solar panels at Bury, and installed the same at Ipswich and Kempson Way

- 2015** - Saffron Walden store refurbished
 - A charitable Christmas lunch for people that would be alone on Christmas day was organised by Robert Hawkins

- 2016** - 70th Anniversary of Glasswells celebrated with gala dinner for staff and suppliers in the Bury store
 - A £150k refurbishment of the Bury Restaurant, with new conservatory style extension, increasing capacity to 120 seats

- 2017** - An extensive program of £1million refurbishments started at the Bury and Ipswich stores, with a massive Furniture Clearance Sale
 - Sudbury store temporarily reopened as a Clearance Outlet

- 2018** - Ipswich's 10th Anniversary was celebrated with in store customer events

- At Bury, a new open plan Reception area was created and refurbishment of the flooring department completed
- Richard Ball retired after 50 years

- 2019** - The Soft Furnishing department and Design Centre fully refurbished at Bury

2020

- 2020** - Upgraded website to Wordpress platform created by and fully integrated with Swan Retail
 - The Covid-19 pandemic caused a series of national lockdowns, starting in March, which meant shops and restaurants had to close for the first time in Glasswells history
 - Atrium at Bury impressively refurbished with new signage, feature wall and display units
 - A massive flood at Bury in August caused over £500k of damage and the store was closed for five days

- 2021** - All stores reopened in April following a third national lockdown, which lasted 10 weeks
 - Glasswells celebrated its 75th Anniversary, which included updating the history book
 - Pallet storage capacity at Kempson Way was doubled to 3,000 with the installation of some new racking
 - The Ipswich Restaurant was refurbished with updated seating and a new contemporary colour scheme



75
YEARS

Est. 1946

THE HISTORY OF **GLASSWELLS**

The story of the Glasswells family from Bury St Edmunds, celebrating 75 years in the home furnishings trade.

The first Glasswells shop was opened in 1946 by father and son team, Jerry and Leslie Glasswell. Now, 75 years later, under the leadership of Leslie's son, Paul, Glasswells has grown to be the largest family-run home furnishings store in East Anglia.

Part one of the story was completed by Leslie Glasswell in 1996 to celebrate Glasswells 50th Anniversary. It looks in detail at the life and achievements of Jerry and Leslie in the early years of business, all the way through to the mid-90s, with the opening of the World of Furniture destination store in Bury St Edmunds.

25 years later, Paul Glasswell has brought the story up to date, to mark the celebration of Glasswells 75th Anniversary in 2021. Part two of the book examines more recent accomplishments and the diverse nature of the Glasswells business today. From the opening of a new store in Ipswich and online retailing, to commercial storage and catering, the Glasswells name is firmly established as offering expertise and a trusted service across all areas of the business.