

# TRIM AND UPHOLSTERY MEISTERS

With lots of soft trim parts for older classics becoming harder to find, WOOLIES is the number one place to source such items as not only will they probably have it on the shelf they'll be able to identify and advise too...

# WOOLIES

Tel: 01778 347347

**A** company that often flies 'under the radar' for restorers and kitcar builders, but one we almost all definitely have used the services of at least once, is Woolies Trim.

The company celebrated forty-one years of trading in October 2017, a marvellous milestone by any measure. If you want a rubber grommet, a few yards of 'Wigan' cloth, or a tin of adhesive, then Woolies is where you need to head.

Times have changed greatly since husband and wife team Ian and Caroline Woolstenholmes decided to set up in business. Caroline had been running a driving school in Peterborough, while Ian had latterly been working for the redoubtable Colin Crabbe. Never a dull moment



there, he reckons.

Prior to that Ian had worked in the magazine publishing game for EMAP as circulation manager on *Motorcycle News* until he was poached one day by Crabbe for his Antique Automobiles operation, where Alexander 'Sandy' Fraser of AF three-wheeler fame also worked. Actually, Ian was tasked with sorting out Colin's The Complete Automobilist department, a monumental task, but one that would stand him in good stead for his future career.

As Alvis enthusiasts, Ian and Caroline had identified that certain trim parts were becoming quite hard to source even for The Complete Automobilist, and feeling the desire for a new challenge Ian decided to use his nickname 'Woolie' for his fledgling operation.

They originally worked out of their





**Woolies founders, Caroline and Ian Woolstenholmes**

garage. Thus Woolies was born.

Ian and Caroline remember the first trade order they placed, very clearly, and also the first customer order received, which called for their part number 'SRS2' a perfect example of a product that has made Woolies great, a black Neoprene sponge extrusion that is still available today incidentally at £3.50 per linear metre.

Actually, think of any extrusion made from Neoprene used on a classic car, along with moulded sponge strip, window channelling, pipings and well, you name it really, and you'll find it at Woolies.

If it's available they'll have it. If it's not there's a good chance they'll have recreated it, as it's indicative of the approach that Woolies has always taken. They want to be able to give their customers what they want. Tooling up for obsolete parts doesn't come cheap but it does make a massive difference.

Clearly, Ian and Caroline had struck a chord with the classic car fraternity when they began because within 18-months they'd outgrown their double garage at home. A move to a spare workshop at Mike Pilbeam's place in Bourne (the old BRM HQ) gave them extra room, until they moved to their current site in Market Deeping in 1979.

In 1980 the building was re-built to better suit their purposes and a further extension was added in 1984.

Duncan Allen joined the company in 1990 and he was joined by Ian and Caroline's daughter, Louise and they run the company on a day-to-day basis nowadays with the co-founders having taken a well earned step back, although you're still very likely to see them about the place, if you visit the company's onsite retail counter.

Although the very nature of the way they sell to their customers has changed, courtesy of the internet, they really do still welcome personal callers to their HQ, which is always recommended really as then you can almost definitely have that hitherto unknown piece of piping identified by Duncan or one of the team.

Not only do they know where everything is located on their shelves but they will almost definitely be able to solve a trim-related problem you may have. Duncan tells me that he hears 'I expect you won't be able to help me as this is an old part' at least once a week. Imagine the delight of the customer when he usually can.

A lot of trim parts were shared by car manufacturers back in the day, either by sister companies like Austin and Morris or totally un-related makes



and the skillsets that Woolies have in knowing who shared what and when. Real problem solving.

They still never knowingly buy from overseas suppliers, not for any other reason than they are proud to source from British companies.

I always enjoy my visits to Woolies. Old school yes, but right up to date at the same time. I look forward to receiving a copy of their catalogue whenever they release one – currently on their 21st edition – every couple of years although the full inventory is now available to buy at the click of a mouse button, online.

They really are a heartwarming emporium and regardless of whether you want a single grommet costing a few pence to a large order you'll be treated just the same, plus you'll be enveloped by forty-one years of knowledge and the same enthusiasm that they've always had.

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