

THE CASE OF COLOUR TV's OUTSELLING COLOUR LICENCES

Iain Wakeford 2019



In December 1967, with the launch of BBC2, regular colour broadcasts were able to be seen in this country – if you had a colour television set with which to receive the signals. From the 1st January 1968 you also had to have a colour television licence, but in Woking (at least) according to a local press ‘investigation’ later that month, whilst the town was in the forefront of buying the new televisions, the numbers bothered to buy the relevant colour licence did not match.

‘One dealer tells me that he has sold fifteen sets; another that his sales have come to about twelve. Yet another said cautiously that he had sold “quite a few”. These figures are quite apart from the number of sets that have been rented. However a spokesman for the Woking G.P.O. says that only seventeen licences have been issued in the Woking area’.

Demand for television sets able to receive the colour signal was apparently high, with local company D.W. Hughes & Sons Ltd saying that ‘we placed large orders in the spring last year. We have sold less than we expected, but that’s because we have not been able to get enough sets’.

Mr Hughes had started his business at St Johns in 1948, being joined by the first of his sons in 1950 and the second in 1956. In 1960 a subsidiary company was set up to cater for contract work, carrying out installations on the new office blocks at Ryde House, Premier House, and Albion House. In June 1968, having already set up another branch in Knaphill, they opened a new ‘stereo and colour vision studio’ in the Central Buildings in Chobham Road, Woking, in anticipation of the new televisions becoming available.

Mr Hughes set up shop in St John's in 1948 before opening shops in Knaphill and his 'stereo and colour vision studio' in the Central Buildings, Chobham Road, Woking.

An even longer established family firm, that of Maxwell & Sons (who actually started out selling musical instruments and gramophones, before the invention of radio, let alone television) probably catered for the more up-market customers in the area, a spokesman for the firm noting in January 1968 that ‘he did not think that the high price prevented people from buying colour television’.

Another firm, however, that specialised in renting sets pointed out that ‘colour television is at the moment only within the reach of people with a lot of money’, before adding that in Woking ‘it has already attracted a sizeable market’.



Established before the invention of radio (let alone television), Maxwell's in Guildford Road probably catered for the more up-market customers in the area.

At Shees in Commercial Road there was possibly a partial answer why the number of licences did not match the number of sets, as one customer bought two – but none of the other local outlets reported that practice, so unless Woking's wealthy colour owners were buying more than one set at more than one supplier, it seems that some were probably watching illegally, with just a £5 'Black & White' licence instead of the colour one, which was twice as much.

Of course it wouldn't be until the end of 1969 before all channels in this area would be broadcast in colour - and when I say 'all', I know this is going to be hard for some younger readers to comprehend, but in the late 1960's that actually meant just three!

I think it was not until about 1971 or 72 that my mother rented our first colour set – supplied by McEwan's, who I think by then had moved to Goldsworth Road. I can well remember the poor engineer having to come out on a number of occasions to replace a valve or swap over a set, as to start with the machines were continually breaking down. It was several years before my parents were confident enough to actually

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It was not until the end of 1969 that all three channels broadcast programmes in colour

'invest' in a colour set of our own, with if I remember rightly, an old gentleman in the Chobham Road at Knaphill then being the go-to man for repairs.



Originally in Duke Street, McEwan's later moved to Goldsworth Road.