



Mrs. Mona Chesterfield stands by the plaque in the new bakery telling how the business began in 1928

IN DECEMBER 1928 a young housewife and mother opened a small home-made cake shop at 23, The Parade, Leamington Spa. Her name was Mona Chesterfield and she had long been interested in cooking good food. The cakes she baked on a domestic gas cooker in the kitchen of her flat above the shop were good too.

Mrs. Chesterfield called her little business "Elisabeth the Chef." But soon it was not so little. Demand for Elisabeth's cakes grew so rapidly that Mrs. Chesterfield's husband John, an engineer, gave up his interest in a motor business to work with his wife.

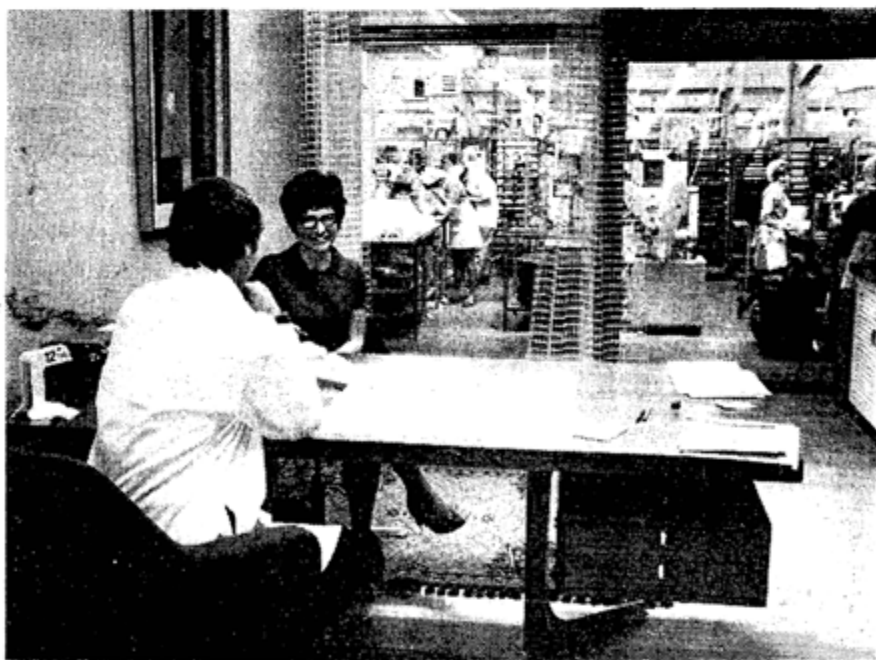
Over the years the business grew  
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## Where high quality is a moral ingredient

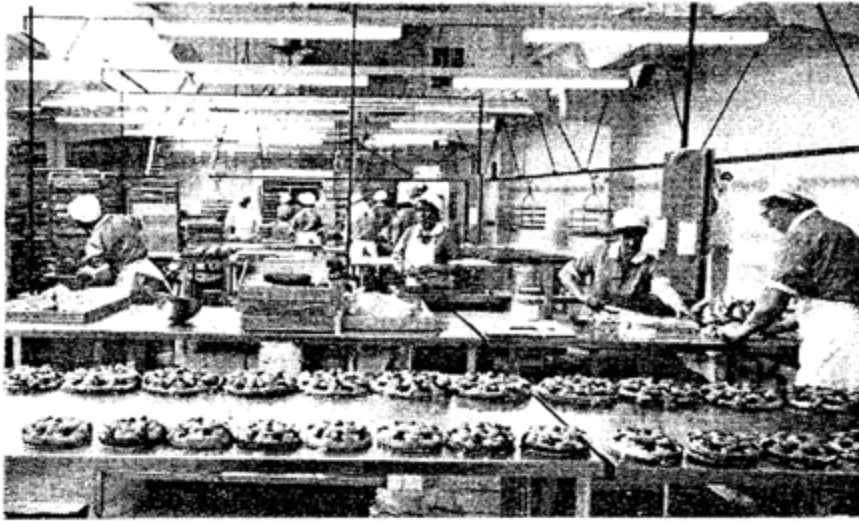
By RONALD SHEPPARD



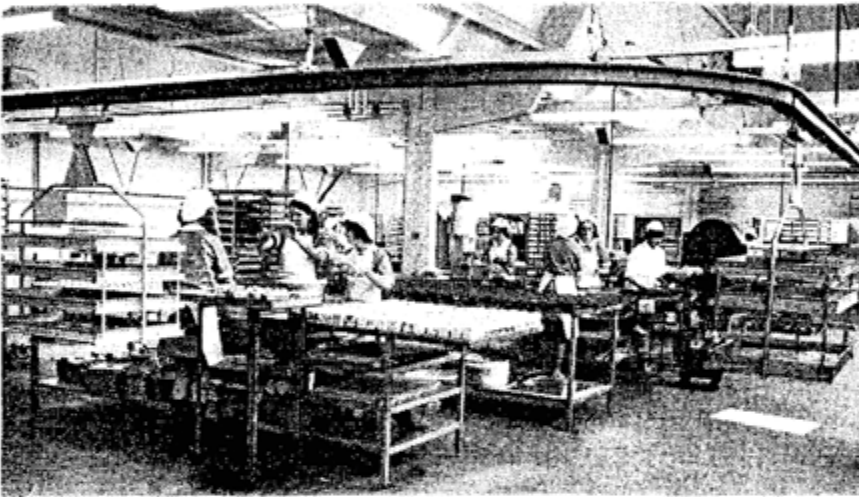
Managing director Peter Chesterfield (left) with production manager Christopher Hayden



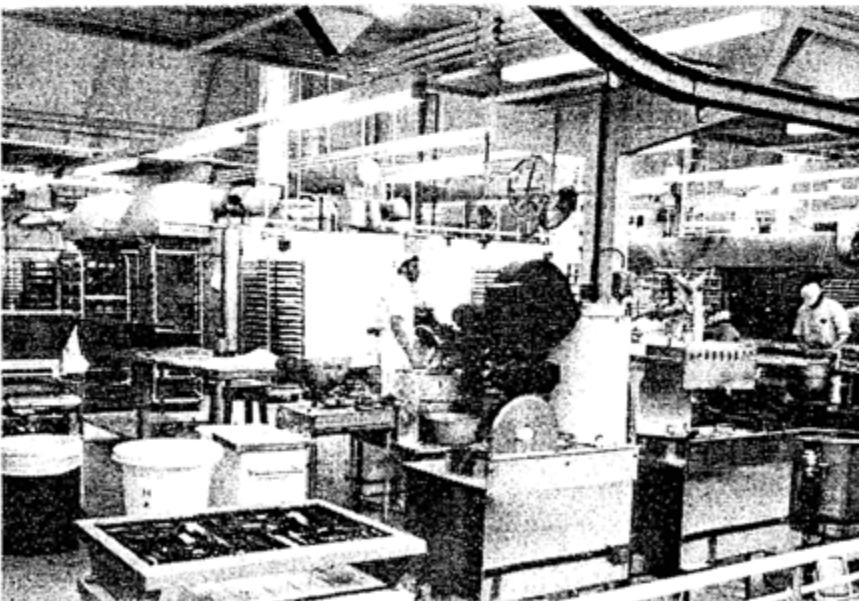
From his office the managing director, Peter Chesterfield, has a clear view of the bakery through a big plate-glass window



A section of the new bakery showing the preparation of fruit flans in the foreground



The rail of the overhead conveyor system is clearly shown in this picture. Two of the racks, each of which carries four galvanised trays, can be seen to the left and right



The ovens are concentrated in a central area of the bakery



Housekeeper Mrs. June Osborne makes sure that one of the cleaning bays is fully equipped

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until it became one of the best-known confectionery bakeries in Britain. This was partly due to a substantial postal trade. Elisabeth's cake were, and still are, sent all over Britain and to many overseas countries.

At Easter and Christmas peak periods several thousand parcels of cakes are posted a day.

Only a year after Mrs. Chesterfield started her business the shop had to be expanded to its present size. In time branch shops were opened until today there are eight, with a ninth due to be opened in Hertford Street, Coventry, next month. This shop, like four of the others, will have a coffee room attached.

Mona and John Chesterfield were eventually joined in the business by their second son, Peter. He studied confectionery-making in Switzerland and joined his parents in visits to other countries to look over the bakery establishments. Some of these visits were in tours organised by the BAKERS' REVIEW.

#### New Managing Director

Gradually Peter Chesterfield assumed more and more responsibility for running the business. His father died in 1967 and he is now managing director.

Mrs. Mona Chesterfield still takes an active interest in all aspects of the company of which she is chairman and secretary. She deals with advertising and one of her main interests is designing the décor and lighting of the shops and coffee rooms. For in addition to being an outstanding confectioner and cook she is a talented artist, although it was not until she was 50 that she took up art seriously.

A few years ago it was realised that increasing sales were beginning to over-tax the facilities of the bakery

at The Parade, Leamington. Plans were drawn up for a new bakery on an industrial estate on the outskirts of the town.

Many hours were spent by the directors studying ideas for incorporating in the new bakery. It was decided from the outset that in addition to the best possible production area there should be first-class facilities for employees and a well-planned administrative section.

Mr. Peter Chesterfield is insistent upon the most meticulous attention to detail. For instance he demanded that the glazed tiles for the walls in the men's and women's changing rooms should be 3 by 6in. instead of the standard 6 by 6. He contended that the smaller tiles produced a more pleasing effect and he was prepared to wait 18 weeks to get the tiles he wanted.

In fact the care taken over the design and fitting of the changing rooms is typical of the approach by Mr. Chesterfield and his co-directors to the whole new bakery project.

#### Maximum Comfort Ensured

The partitioning to the toilets is clad with an attractively-patterned plastic laminate. Great care was taken in selecting the toilet seats to ensure maximum comfort and ease of cleaning. "I am a strong believer in the importance of good loos," Mr. Chesterfield told me.

The result is that the two changing rooms are equal to and in some respects superior to the men's rooms and ladies' powder rooms in many modern hotels.

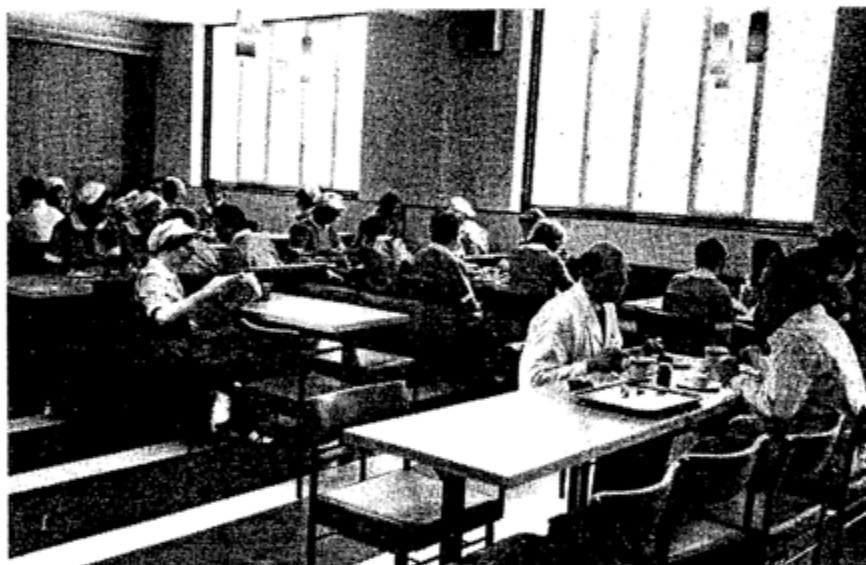
In addition to the usual toilets and wash-basins the changing rooms also have showers, a bidet in the women's room, and lockers for outdoor clothes.

Equal care was taken with the layout and design of the main entrance and reception area. Here, as in other parts of the new building, the artistic talents of Mrs. Mona Chesterfield were employed in advising on colours and wall coverings and on producing a large mural for one wall.

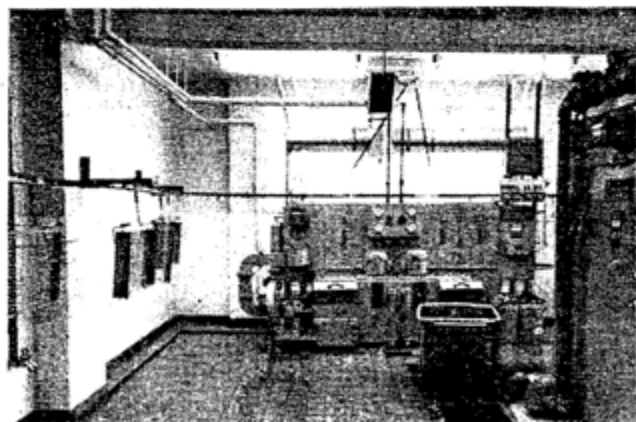
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Mrs. Jennifer Chesterfield with German-born confectioner Walter Hecker and a selection of torten produced in the bakery



The Club where members of the staff take morning and afternoon tea-breaks and can obtain midday meals at low prices



Galvanised trays from the vans pass through this cleaning bay before going back into use in the bakery



On the first floor of the office section are a white table and chairs for the use of members of the staff wishing to discuss wages and other problems



In the flat over this shop at 23 The Parade, Leamington Spa, Mrs. Mona Chesterfield first made her home-made cakes in 1928



One of the newest Elisabeth the Chef shops at Victoria Terrace, Leamington Spa



Seven of the 13 delivery vehicles ready to take supplies from the bakery to the eight branch shops

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All members of the staff, production and administrative, use the main entrance—there is no separate works entrance. And the impression as they enter the building is of going into the foyer of a small-scale Hilton Hotel.

To the left is the managing director's office with huge lace-curtained windows back and front giving clear views of the entrance hall and the bakery.

Staff facilities include The Club, a well-appointed canteen. Here morning and afternoon tea breaks are taken in shifts, and light lunches are served at attractively-low prices.

There is a small shop where members of the staff can buy bakery goods at a discount and a coin-operated telephone box for personal calls.

The women workers wear green nylon overalls designed by Mrs. Jennifer Chesterfield, wife of Peter, who also plays an active part in the business.

Soiled overalls and aprons are laundered on the premises in a Bendix washing machine. This is also used for washing savoy bags.

This laundry room is presided over by the housekeeper, Mrs. June Osborne. She is also responsible for ensuring that the small cleaning bays situated at intervals in the perimeter wall of the bakery are kept supplied with cleaning materials and equipment.

#### Special Interview Area

Staff having pay queries can see the wages clerk by appointment at a special interview area on the upper floor of the administrative section. In this way there is no distraction which might be caused by an employee going into the wages office or the clerk seeing the employee in the bakery.

Overall floor area of the new bakery, which came into use in January, is 45,000 square feet. Production is carried on in a large rectangular open-plan baking area.

Roughly in the centre the ovens are concentrated. These include six Cox double-deck peel ovens, two Artofex reel ovens, two Cox reel ovens, and two Cox-Denholm rack ovens.

There are fewer machines than might be expected in a bakery of this size. This is because the directors insist on maintaining the Elisabeth the Chef tradition of producing high quality, home-made type goods.

Large-scale rather than mass-production is the keynote of the new bakery. To aid this there is an overhead conveyor rail carrying racks containing four galvanised trays. This system is used mainly to carry the finished goods to the despatch bay for loading into the firm's 13 vans.

Empty trays from the vans are returned to the bakery by way of a

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# 'High quality is a moral ingredient'

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special cleansing bay equipped with Dawson cleansing plant.

Two other concessions to the needs of large-scale production are silos for the bulk of flour and sugar.

All production work is planned and arranged through the supervisory control of highly-experienced chefs in conjunction with the production manager, Mr. Christopher Hayden.

Each chef, a specialist, has his own team of eight to 10 women and girls. Among the chefs is German-born Walter Hecker, a specialist in torten and gateaux. He came to Elisabeth for a short stay and was so happy he became a member of the permanent staff.

A certain amount of retarding of unbaked goods is employed but there is no deep-freezing of finished lines. This again is because of the firm's belief in oven-freshness.

A wide variety of confectionery and savoury lines is produced by the 60 men and 90 women employed in the bakery. The confectionery ranges from small pastries to large torten and rich Dundee and fruit cakes. The

two latter are among the most popular items in the direct postal service.

This service is publicised through brochures issued twice a year and advertisements in national newspapers.

Long before the Food, Drink and Tobacco Industry Training Board appeared on the scene the management of Elisabeth the Chef believed that training was necessary to maintain and improve the efficient running of the business.

## Training At All Levels

Training at all levels is now carried out under the direction of the training officer, Mrs. Alice Clarke. The programme includes induction training for all new entrants and those transferred to new departments.

I was present recently at one of the induction periods in the bakery's own lecture and demonstration room. About 12 members of the staff attended. The session was opened by Mr. Peter Chesterfield. He explained something of the history and traditions of the firm and spoke of "who's who and what's what at Elisabeth's."

The session ended with a practical demonstration by confectioner Jerry Lewitt on one of the firm's most popular lines, the Orange Victoria Sandwich.

Samples of the ingredients were shown and the baking process described. Mr. Lewitt showed how the sandwiches were filled, using an ice-cream scoop to ensure an equal amount of filling in each, and finished off with crystallised orange, and greaseproof and fancy paper bands.

It was obvious that the young people at that induction session went back to their benches with an even greater interest in Elisabeth the Chef than they had before.

This was, of course, in keeping with the spirit and tradition of the firm, expressed in the wording on the grey slate plaque on the wall above the staircase in the entrance hall:

"John and Mona Chesterfield founded Elisabeth the Chef in their own home on December 1, 1928, for the purpose of making home-made cakes. Their belief that 'high quality is a moral ingredient' will continue to be the guiding principle of all who work here."



Customers watch the skilful hands of these chefs at work in the bakery of 'Elisabeth the Chef' in Leamington. A chance to look behind the scenes was given to customers from Leamington, Rugby, Coventry, and Leicester on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday. Several thousand passed through the doors and were invited to coffee and hot mince pies during their tour.

Learn more at

[www.elisabeth-the-chef.co.uk](http://www.elisabeth-the-chef.co.uk)

