

If you didn't know it was there you might've missed the tiny door between shops. At the Tottenham Court Road end of Oxford Street, this led to the upstairs offices of C Ramon, Moneylenders. I don't know about other moneylenders of the time, but although this one did offer short term loans, it wasn't like today's sharks.

As well as giving mortgages so people could buy their own homes, the company rented out houses and flats. I had to keep track of what was borrowed and what was paid, writing it all by hand in a ledger system with the weird name of Kalamazoo. It was great to be trusted to take cash and cheques from clients and get it ready to take to the bank. But if there wasn't anyone to go with me, which often happened, my heart pounded a bit harder and my palms felt a bit more sweaty than usual till I'd left the wads of notes and bags of coins with the bank's cashiers.

The main office here was big too. (OK, not as huge as the one at Burroughs.) But it was the layout of this one which made it different. I have to ask you to again use your imagination because I've never seen anything like it before or since.

Your guess is as good as mine as to the purpose of the room when it was first built, maybe a courtroom or something, because from both sides of the entrance door, raised platforms stretched to the window at the end. Along the front of these were dark brown balustrades, like staircase bannisters, complete with smooth wooden rail on top of carved wooden poles. My desk was on the one on the left, close to the wall beside the door. So to get to it I had to walk down the centre of the room, passing my desk on the way till I reached a gap in the rails (which also led to one of the small rooms off the main office.) Then I'd have to step up through the gap then double back. (I didn't realise what a performance that was till I started writing about it.)

Other desks in the room were either further along the platforms or under the window. The platform facing me was home to a large machine similar to the Sensimatic, but made by National. The only person who knew how to operate it gave me yet another brush with prejudice at work. This senior clerk would turn away so that I could only see the back of her short, dark hair because, as she loudly said, she didn't like Jews. Whilst in the middle of a rush job, a family emergency meant she had to leave the office. She started to panic. Because of my knowledge of similar beasties, I offered to take over. Her words when she got back were "I really don't like Jews, but you're ok." High praise indeed from her. The joke was that in spite of working for, and with, Indians and Pakistanis, she quite openly said she didn't like Asians, but those who worked here were ok.



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Our short, round and very friendly boss C M Shah, ignored all her comments. As did his brother C K Shah who also worked there. (Bosses were usually known by their surnames, but to stop it being confusing and know which Mr Shah we were talking about, and so they'd know which of them we were talking to, everyone called them by their initials.) C K was just as round as his brother but a lot taller and very shy, so none of us juniors really got to know him.



C M often brought in treats for us all. Once it was a box of mangos. I didn't have a clue what they were till my special friend at work, Vidu Patel, told me. They're now top of the list of my favourite fruits.

Tiny Vidu wore her black hair in a single plait which reached half-way down her back. During one of our many break times together I admired her sari and mentioned I'd always wanted one. I'd forgotten about our conversation by the time I left the company, but she'd remembered and her leaving present to me was a gorgeous sari in red/orange shot silk edged with gold thread. Many years later I wore it to another Indian friend's wedding, but that's another job and another story.

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