

Albert Turville

Albert Turville lived at Hillview, Guilsborough Hill, Hollowell for many years.

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An optician in Northampton was down to his last penny when he first started business.

Now, more than 70 years later, the Abington Street practice he founded is about to become the biggest in Europe.

J Sheinman and Associates are extending into a building next door, almost doubling floorspace and, at 4500 square feet, setting a new European record.

And in the extension, opening in November, there will be a tribute to the founder, Albert Turville - a small museum where his painting will hang next to examples of old spectacles.

Mr John Sheinman said the extension will link the former Rainbow Carpets showroom at 110 Abington Street with the four Storey, 2500 square foot practice next door.

He said "We shall have a much better and larger reception area at pavement level, with no steps. We will also have facilities for testing people on the ground floor, to help disabled customers."

Through a glass wall visitors will be able to see their glasses being made in the laboratory, which is moving up from the basement.

There will also be more space for consulting rooms and contact lens fitting, plus a dispensing room the whole length of the building where customers can choose frames.

What people will not see is the behind-the-scenes work at the practice where Mr Sheinman and colleagues continue Albert Turville's tradition for research, helping children who have learning problems because of lack of co-ordination between their eyes.

Mr Turville, who lived from 1890 to 1965, was a Northampton watchmaker who trained as an optician and was almost down to his last penny when his exam results came through.

He went on to pioneer many eye testing methods used today and invented equipment like the first electric ophthalmoscope, which opticians use to look into patients' eyes.

But there was another side to the optician's researching in his laboratory at Northampton or in Birmingham University. He was also a spy.

His hobby as one of the first amateur radio hams let the Government to use his experience when setting up the Foreign Office communications centre at Hanslope Park, near Milton Keynes.

Mr Turville's trips to Germany just before the Second World War to attend conferences on the science of eyes provided the perfect cover for his work, meeting the Nazis' underground opponents and laying the channels of espionage between Britain and Germany.

When the Abington Street extension is complete the whole building will bear the name Turville House.