

# Cotters marks century of change

It was 1919, the Great War was over, the first washing machines and refrigerators were becoming available and electrician Chris Cotter had a plan for the future.

Moving shop from Lower High St – now Ferry Rd – to the heart of Christchurch, he opened CF Cotter & Co, and in doing so launched a visionary electrical business still going strong 100 years later.

The company is today known as Cotters Electrical, an expert vacuum cleaner supply and appliance repair business whose ups and downs trace a century of rapid technological change.

Chris's grandson Allister Cotter has been in charge since 1993, when he took over from his father, Jim Cotter, who had in turn picked up the mantle from Chris in 1952.

In 100 years, just three managers have run the business. The products and services they offer have changed but the traditional family values and entrepreneurial spirit endure.

## Beginnings

Chris Cotter was born in 1891 in Cork, Ireland, the youngest of 10 children. Raised by his eldest sister following his parents' deaths, he earned his passage to New Zealand in 1910 as an engineer aboard the steamer Ionic.

Here he began his electrical apprenticeship with Christchurch firm Turnbull and Jones, including a stint working on the Southern Hemisphere's first public lighting system in Reefton. Having seen the massive potential electricity would bring to homes, Chris set out on his own, turning "Cotters" into an institution at 158 High St. The business remained there until 2004, rebranding as CF Cotter Ltd in 1940 and then Cotters Electrical in 1976.

One of Chris's last actions as manager was to hire a man named Bob Hastie. Bob went on to spend 57 years with the company, a record even in a place where many staff stayed 40 years or more.

The lure was strong for Jim,



**Cotters Electrical has kept a strong family focus after 100 years in business. From left is showroom manager Simon Swarts, sales assistant Lana McDonald and owner Allister Cotter.**

too, who was already on his way to becoming an electrician when World War II interrupted.

Serving in the Navy in the Atlantic and in Europe, he made it home to complete his qualification under his father's watch.

He took the reins a few years later after Chris died in 1952 following a short illness.

## Diversifying

Jim oversaw the business's greatest period of diversification, establishing a team of electrical contractors who would crisscross the city visiting homes and businesses while the store back on High St heaved with a new wave of electrical appliances – and more.

"Cotters was the place to go in the 50s and 60s to buy your LPs," Allister says. "It was filled with toasters, irons, sound systems. They were even selling cosmetics in World War II because there was nothing else available to sell."

"There are a lot fewer shops like us than there used to be," he adds.

Contracting work was wound back in the 1960s, and with imported goods starting to arrive in a multitude of variations, Cotters Electrical increasingly found itself a player in niche markets where quality was the distinguishing feature.

Their relationship with Nilfisk – formerly Tellus – is a case in point. They have been selling, servicing and repairing the acclaimed Danish vacuum cleaners since 1963. Coffee machines have emerged more recently as a similar specialty.

"What we repair has changed a lot," Allister says, noting that many imported appliances no longer have spare parts available, forcing people to buy new.

"We do a lot of whiteware servicing, and work for Electrolux, De Longhi and AEG. The pace of change in the market has increased in the last few years so you've got to be able to adapt."

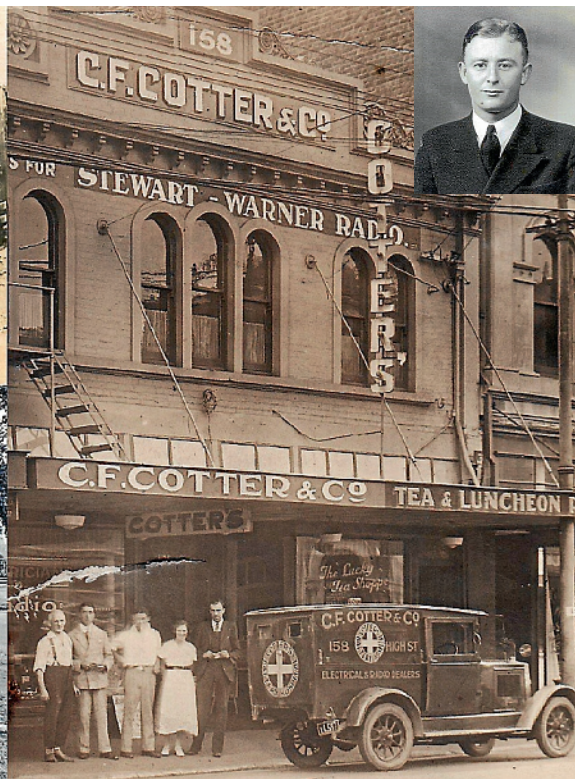
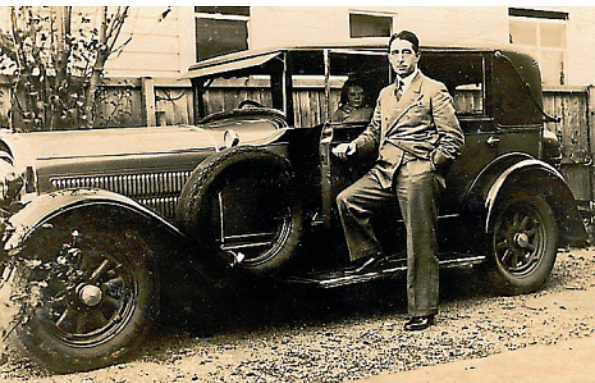
Cotters Electrical shifted to Fitzgerald Ave in 2004, before finding its current home on Tuam St in 2010.

The showroom features high-end vacuum cleaners, spare bags, coffee machine cleaners and a select range of shavers. Also onsite is a busy workshop with three electrical service technicians.

Helping out in the showroom is the business's fourth generation, Lana McDonald, the niece of Allister and great-granddaughter of founder Chris.

What the future holds is anyone's guess, although for quality you can trust and a team that is as Christchurch as it gets, there's no going past Cotters Electrical. A century of happy customers prove it.

■ Cotters Electrical is located at 287 Tuam St, central Christchurch. See them for new vacuum cleaners, spare parts and home appliance repairs. Phone 03 366 9019 or shop online at [cotters.co.nz](http://cotters.co.nz).



**Cotters Electrical has been a constant through a century of change. Pictured clockwise from top left is founder Chris Cotter, the original store at 158 High St, Jim Cotter (inset), and a vehicle from the firm's contracting days in the 1960s.**



**287 Tuam Street, Christchurch**

**03 366 9019**

**<https://www.cotters.co.nz/>**