

Last Sawmaker my Grandfather

Sydney Reuben Tyzack was a puckish fellow, always ready for a prank. Life was for fun when he was a young man and that was the way he ran his business.

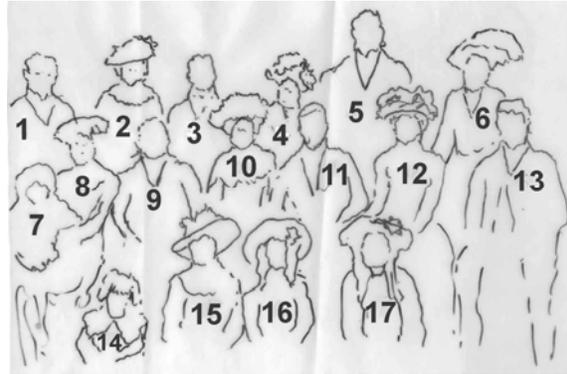
The shop he inherited, on the busy Ball's Pond Road, was at No. 10, Kingsland Green, near Dalston. The map shows it marked as one.

Around the year of 1905, Edgar, who ran Samuel's shop, only half a mile away, at the other end of Kingsland Road, changed the name of his business at No. 345 Old Street. The sign over the front now boasted 'Samuel & Sons Ltd'. Sidney always kept an eye on what his relations were up to. He thought that there must be advantage in a name change, so he took it into his head to change the name of his shop. Sidney's shop was called "Henry Tyzack Sawmaker". Ever since he had taken over from his father, Henry, when his father had died eight years before, that was the name on the shop. From now on the sign would say freshly, 'Sidney Tyzack Sawmaker' and all would know who was running the outfit.

Once having started to think about strategy it was not long before expansion was in mind. By 1913 the trade directory showed that Sidney had plucked up his courage and was again using the next door premises. He added number nine to his number ten.

Sidney was lucky, a mere lad aged 18 years old, and he inherited the business. The older brothers, William Ebenezer aged 32 years, A. Samuel aged 22 years and A. Henry aged 24 years were all left out in the cold. Henry, his father, knew what it was like to be the youngest. He did not intend his youngest son to feel left out as he had felt. Hearsay has it that the business was left to Sidney because he was the youngest. He was the only one without either a current job or a trade. So if you want to get ahead, do not be too quick to learn.

The bequest caused a fair amount of family resentment. Sidney took sometime to treat the business seriously when he first took over. When he began to trade he had nowhere to live so he stayed with his sister Adelaide, known as Joe. He says he had a place in front of the fire where he slept on the rug. Joe charged him five shillings per week, a princely sum in those days. He used the carpet in front of the fire, until he married. Sidney married Lillian Dimmer in 1902 but few of his family came to the wedding.



Wedding Group August 1901

- 10&11 Lilian & Sydney
- 9 Alf Dimmer Great Grandfather
- 1 Lilian's Father Alf Dimmer
- 2 Not Sure
- 3 Lilian's Brother Will Dimmer
- 4 Sydney's Sister Minnie Tyzack
- 5 Husband Lilian's Sister Kate Alf Hendy
- 6 Lilian's Sister Kate
- 7 Edie, Alf Dimmer's 1st Daughter
- 8 Lilian's Sister-in-Law
- 12 Ade Sydney's Sister
- 13 Husband of Ade, Thomas
- 14 Harold a bit touched
- 15 Katie, daughter of Kate
- 16 Babs, daughter of Kate
- 17 Not sure

Probably the bequest still rankled. They had three children, Sydney John, and Leslie Ernest, who were born at Woodside Gardens, Tottenham and Doris Irene who was born in Yarmouth, by the seaside. By this time smaller families were becoming more normal.

The shop was a large one with saws and other tools hanging up in the ceiling. Outside a large York sandstone grinding wheel rested against the front wall. Years before the grindstone had been operational in the workshop but now it had gone beyond its normal operating life by becoming too small and misshapen. It was finishing its days as an advertisement. Although a prime activity of the business was knife and tool sharpening, passers-by could come along and sharpen their own knives on the stone free. He lent new saws to friends and that way they avoided purchasing.

Inside the shop, on a small raised platform near the counter was a fairly tame baboon. At this date it was common for ordinary people to keep exotic pets for their own amusement.

Sailors coming home would bring in such animals to the docks and make a little money by selling them as they returned from their trips abroad. Sidney owned the baboon for some time but it caused a rumpus when it spied some wax fruit on a lady customer's hat. The ape snatched off the fruit it couldn't resist, complete with the bonnet. Exit one screaming lady to return shortly with the local constable! The law did not lock him up. It didn't even lock up the baboon. "You'll 'ave to do something with that damned animal Sid" was fortunately the way the law exercised its power in those days.

In the years immediately before 1913, the business began to lose its customers. Nobody was buying saws, at least not from Sidney Tyzack. Sidney suspected his brothers. He had caught one of them once reading his order books and forever after that he thought they tried to steal away his customers. Who knows whether it was true?

So in 1913, just as markets to this day have their periods of ups and downs so a mini depression in the business climate hit the saw making business. Soon after the local trade directory showed the additional shop next door the financial position became serious. The day came when the business at No. 10 Kingsland Green, was insolvent and it had to be let go to discharge the liabilities. Even after selling all the assets there was still money owed.

They called it a moonlight flit, in those days; the family moved out suddenly to Yarmouth! At the time, Yarmouth still had jettied houses built in rows so that neighbours could shake hands if they had a mind so to do, from the upstairs windows.

Sidney took his family to a house in Row 60. Even now mystery surrounds the reason for this sudden move. A second mystery is that Doris Dimmer was the name given to the youngest daughter.

She was born in Yarmouth after about a year of living there. Dimmer was her mother's surname and although there could be other reasons, the most likely is that Sidney was trying to fade away to escape his creditors. It all adds up to a disappearing act. Even after a year of being away he still did not want his name on the parish register. At the time of course the war had been declared and able bodied men were expected to join the army and die for their country. This is what happened to my maternal grandmother's brothers, surnamed Moore, and to the fiancée of my subsequently maiden aunt Florie. Unlike my mother's family there was no history of Army service in this part of the Tyzack family. So could it be that Sidney was keeping his head down for army service or was it just debt?

He returned occasionally to London while in Yarmouth. Perhaps he went to sell some saws and make some money. Certainly the family was very hard up during the period there. It is not apparent how they made a living in Yarmouth.

About 1915 they returned to London, but without 10 Kingsland Green any more! They did not return to where they had lived before, at Woodside Gardens, Tottenham, but to Wood Green. During this period and for several years later most of the family were

engaged in helping to make saws, but now in a back room in the home. The only saws made under these conditions were small frets some tenon saws, keyhole saws and one particularly large order for small handsaws, with round handles, from Woolworths of Canada.

The family went to a rented terraced house at No. 111, Sirdar Road, Wood Green. Nearly next door at No. 115 lived Maud Duke, my mother, who later married Sidney's eldest son Sydney John, my father.

Sirdar Road houses were typically Edwardian. A pattern in stained glass embellished the downstairs front door. When the door opened it revealed the entrance to the upstairs flat in which they lived. This was a dark oak stained staircase with fashionably paisley patterned lino on the stairs held in place with much polished brass rods. At the top of the stairs was a heavy red velvet fringed curtain. The fringe was necessary to keep out the draughts. A front room, only used on Sundays, had as its centre-piece the upright piano, the centre of many riotous parties and the main family entertainment. It had brass candlesticks, with candles, hinged out from two oval recesses in the front, between which was the music stand. Why they had a music stand I don't really know. Probably it was to hold the music which of course contained the words, which all the surrounding group would sing. Certainly it wasn't for the music notation. My mother, who did most of the playing, played only by ear so far as I know. On top was the mandatory bowl of wax fruit. Pictures of uncles, who had died in the war, stood each side and on the wall was a large faded sepia of an antlered stag, *The Monarch of the Glen* by Sir Edwin Landseer! Brown salt glazed tiles decorated the fireplace. All parts of the grate in black iron were lovingly black-leaded. Around the fender were more brass rods for polishing. Above the fireplace was a mantelpiece, dressed with red velvet and having a tasselled edging. Upholstered chairs had antimacassars, protection from macasser hair oil¹, which was advertised in such glowing terms that everyone used it!

The furniture was simple. The centre piece was a chaise-longue again in red velvet. Heavy curtains helped the small fireplace warm up the room on Sunday, but burning knees and cold backs were normal. The door of the room had a curtain to pull across to keep out draughts.

Our family stayed in the living room for most of the time. This living room at the back of the house, was really the kitchen. There in one wall, stood a large black-leaded double oven, coal fired. Today the nearest thing in appearance is an Aga cooker. In Sirdar Road the oven had a covered hole at the top at one end for putting in the fuel. A door at the front with a brass knob, which needed a glove to open, was at the other end. It gave access to the oven. Incredibly the oven did not cook the cat that used often to sleep in it. The kitchen table was wooden and scrubbed and so was each chair. Out the back was a water closet with a large beechwood board on top. The board was the seat. It had a nine

¹ Rowland's Macasser Oil : It prevents Hair from falling off or turning grey, strengthens weak HAIR, cleanses it from Scurf and Dandruff, and makes it all beautifully SOFT, PLIABLE, and GLOSSY.

inch hole in it with a rounded edge. Very little was labour saving so someone scrubbed the seat each day.

„The portrait of my grandfather is from a painting in oils by his son Sydney John Tyzack, my father, who was an accomplished artist.

In later years when Sidney the elder, lived at No. 10 Norfolk Close, Palmer's Green, Sidney had a workshop separate from the house. It was at Whitehart Lane, a short walk across the park, and next door to the flower pot pottery.

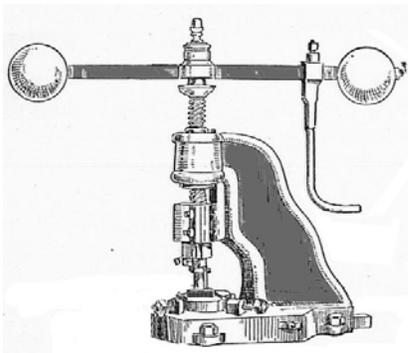


The sunlight came in through a small window, high up in the wall at one end. All benches were black with the residues from myriad pieces of steel and from oil used to stave off rust. The concrete floor was flat in places but pitted and rough in others. Scraps of straw were in the corners, discarded from the packing.

The tools would be collectors' pieces today. The front of the bench supported a leg vice. It stood about three feet tall. It had a hinge at the bottom and a large wing nut at the front to close the vice. As a child it needed both my

hands to tighten it.. On the bench was a screwdriver with the most shiny ball handle about the size of a flattish tennis ball. It had a blade about eighteen inches long and used for what I cannot say. On the wall above the bench many types of hammers for all kinds of special purposes hung between pairs of rusty nails. Boxes of tool bits were there to be fixed to the fly-press to fashion a variety of saw-tooth sizes.

Saws were made by unrolling a piece of steel from the coil it arrived in and first flattening it. Then it was cut to size and offered to the jaws of the fly-press. This held a saw tooth shaped piece of tool steel in its bed and another such piece exactly matching it but in female relationship to that in the bed below. This upper tool was fixed to the ram which was lifted and brought down quickly by means of a helical screw thread which was turned by a horizontal handle counterbalanced by an enormous steel ball.



Such a workshop was a small boy's Aladdin's cave of wonderful but inexplicable objects collected over the years and kept safely but not to be touched. They were not there for some specialised engineering reason but in case at some time in the future they might come in handy!

Above all the smell of engineering pervaded the clothing of all who worked in there for more than a few hours. The few tools needed for making small saws lay all around. The

fly-press stood to one side for punching the teeth. There were various iron stakes used as small anvils on which to hold the saws while they were set.

The setting process consisted of hitting every other tooth with a special narrow headed



hammer and then turning the blade over and hitting the alternate teeth. Years of practice gave enough skill to set the teeth rapidly at a low cost.

The original material was EN42 sheet steel bought in rolls and already ground flat. Unwinding the spiral roll yielded a long strip from which blanks, surprisingly, flat enough to use, could be cut. The final stage of many saws was bluing, which was supposed to indicate the degree of tempering that the blade had undergone in its heat treatment. It must have been a very hit and miss process. When the blades were all wired in a bundle they were heated either on a hob by the fire or on a gas burner until they turned blue. This showed the correct degree of hardness, or at least thts what it was supposed to do..