

Atkins, P.J. (1985) Joseph Herbert Maggs (1890-1964) dairy company chairman, pp 79-80 in Jeremy, D.J. (Ed.) *Dictionary of Business Biography* vol. 4 London: Butterworths

Joseph Herbert Maggs was born at Melksham, Wiltshire, on 22 July 1875, one of the eleven children of Charles Maggs, a rope and twine manufacturer, and his wife Charlotte Elizabeth née Stratton. In 1889 Charles Maggs started a butter factory and Joseph with his brother Leonard (qv) followed his father into the dairy trade.

After education at Wycliffe College, Stonehouse in Gloucestershire, Joseph started work in his father's factory in 1889 at the age of fourteen, and learned about the trade through the eyes of the rural producer and manufacturer. In 1896 his father became the first chairman and a principal shareholder in the newly-formed wholesale firm, Wilts United Dairies. He died in 1898, however, (leaving £31,103) and responsibility for the family's shares fell to Joseph Maggs. In 1901 a small wholesale business was acquired at the Great Western Railway's Paddington terminus in London, and Joseph was asked by the Wilts United Dairies managing director, Reginald Butler (qv), to become the company's representative in the London milk trade. Experience had shown that butter factories, creameries and condenseries could profit from the high prices paid by retailers in London for 'accommodation milk' in times of shortage of supply or increased consumer demand.

Joseph was an outstanding success and in time the London wholesale operation was expanded with the acquisition of Freeth & Pocock Ltd. Circumstances were favourable, with 40 per cent growth in the quantity of railway milk imported into London in the period 1901-11, but a poorly organised and inefficient trade structure. Wilts United Dairies were able to increase their share of the market, and after the outbreak of the First World War became the core of a large new dairy combine formed in 1915 as United Dairies Ltd. United Dairies started with an authorised capital of £1 million; initially concerned exclusively with the wholesale trade, by 1917 it had acquired some of the largest retail organisations in the country, mostly based in London. In that year the capital was increased to £4 million. In 1920, by acquisitions and share exchanges, United Dairies had a controlling interest in 13 companies. Joseph Maggs became chairman in 1922. The next ten years were a period of dramatic growth for the group. In 1930 United Dairies (Wholesale) Ltd controlled 32 subsidiary companies and through them operated over 700 shops and over 50 condenseries and creameries in England and Wales and two in Normandy. By 1939 two more companies had been acquired but rationalisation was taking place and only 40 creameries were now operated. Joseph Maggs retired from the chair in 1942, when he was succeeded by his brother Leonard, but remained on the board until 1956.

Despite his naturally retiring disposition, Joseph Maggs became a dominant personality. His standards were strict and his unrivalled knowledge of the intricacies of the dairy industry was based upon personal experience of the production, manufacturing, wholesale and retail sectors of the milk trade. He farmed on a large scale in Wiltshire and was involved in trade organisations as president of the National Dairymen's Benevolent Institution, 1912-13 the first chairman of the Central Milk Distributive Committee, and a member of the National Milk Publicity Council, 1938-39.

Joseph Maggs married in 1902 Ada Fry (d 1963); they had no children. Maggs's main recreation was fishing. He died on 1 February 1964, leaving an estate proved at £93,553.

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