

Atkins, P.J. (1986) Edmund Charles Tisdall (1824-1892) milk retailer and wholesaler, pp 534-36 in Jeremy, D.J. (Ed.) *Dictionary of Business Biography* vol. 5 London: Butterworths

Edmund Charles Tisdall was born in 1824, the eldest son in a family well-known in temperance and Nonconformist circles. His father was a founder member of the London Temperance League, and Edmund himself before the age of twenty was president of the Kensington and Hammersmith Youths' Temperance Society. In later life he brought his strong moral and temperance principles to bear upon London's milk trade, in which he was to figure prominently.

In 1847 he married Emma, the daughter of George Tunks, a Kensington dairy farmer whose business had been founded in 1777 on the present site of the Albert Hall. By 1854 Tisdall had gone into partnership with Emma's sister Elizabeth, and as Tunks & Tisdall they took a twenty-one year lease on 63 acres of pasture in Holland Park, at £250 per annum. The quality of milk from this enterprise was high from the outset. Tisdall stocked the farm with 50 Jersey and Alderney cows, and scorned the prevailing practice of adulterating milk with added water. He also maintained standards of hygiene in the dairy which were ahead of the times.

The expansion of London's built-up area meant that Holland Park Farm became a green oasis in a desert of brick and mortar. In 1869 Tunks & Tisdall took the 200-acre Horton Manor Farm at Epsom, some 12 miles distant from London, to enable the expansion of their herd and provide much needed fodder for their cows in Kensington. They experienced the strained logistics of maintaining a herd in the heart of London but were able to survive both the added costs that this imposed and the competition of the cheap country milk imported in ever increasing quantities by rail, by building up a reputation for high quality and honesty, virtues which were appreciated in the middle class residential neighbourhood of Kensington. At their peak Tunks & Tisdall were supplying milk to 1,200 families and hotels in this district.

The Holland Park Estate was sold in 1874, and the pastures were gradually eroded by building land. In evidence to a parliamentary committee in 1888 Tisdall remarked that only 40 acres of his land were left in Kensington, and that he had recently given up three farms in Epsom, Surrey (Horton Manor, Green Man, and West Farms) when their leases fell in. His former herd of 150 pedigree shorthorn cattle had been dispersed to all parts of the country and in effect Tunks & Tisdall had become like most dairymen in London, merely agents for the receipt and distribution of country milk. In 1888 they handled the milk of 1,000 cows daily.

On her retirement in 1878 Elizabeth Tunks was granted an annuity of £170 secured on the leasehold dairy and premises in Kensington High Street, and in 1879 Tisdall formally went into partnership with his son Alfred. Their estimated net capital then was £10,000 including £1,650 in plant such as delivery carts, and house cans.

As a pioneer in dairy science Tisdall was responsible for two notable experiments. He was convinced that a cow's milk output could be improved substantially in quantity and quality by constant monitoring of the daily yield. This he did for every beast in his own herds, with satisfactory results in the upgrading of the cattle he bred, and he attempted to convince other farmers by organising milking competitions at dairy shows, the results of which were published in the *Journal of the British Dairy Farmers Association*. The second experiment was less successful. Tisdall was the first dairyman to offer a supply of sterile milk to the Navy. Unfortunately the biochemistry of souring was imperfectly understood at the time and the sample bottle he handed round to the board of enquiry exploded in their faces.

Tisdall's material success in the dairy trade was only a part of his own renown. He devoted much of his time to trade organisations, being a founder member of the Metropolitan Dairymen's Society (1873), the Metropolitan Dairymen's Benevolent Institution (1874) (of which he was in turn president and treasurer), and the British Dairy Farmers' Association (1877), and gave evidence on behalf of the trade to several parliamentary committees. His devotion to the ideal of pure milk supplied at a reasonable price did not always make him popular in the trade, but the improvements enforced by legislation and inspection in the last two decades of the nineteenth century were partly the result of his influence and energy.

Tisdall was also father of the Kensington vestry. He was first elected in 1857 and served continuously, apart from one period of brief retirement, as a member of the Works and Sanitary Committee and as chairman of the Special Purposes Committee. He was for many years on the Commission of Baths and Workhouses and was a manager of the London Temperance Hospital from its foundation. In the temperance world he was an ardent advocate of abstinence and patron of many projects. He was, for instance, a founder member (1853), a director (1854-78), chairman (1874-78), vice-president (1878-90) and president (1890-92) of the Temperance Permanent Building Society.

He was judged by his contemporaries to be 'a staunch friend, a man of keen intellect and kindly heart' {*Journal of the British Dairy Farmers' Association* 7 (1892) 99}, who was 'bold and reliable in attacking and denouncing illegality of any description' {*Cowkeeper and Dairyman's Journal* 13 (1892) 590}. Edmund Tisdall died on 14 July 1892 leaving £16,171 gross.

Writings:

PP, HC 1874 (26) VI SC on the Adulteration of Food Act 1872.

PP, HC 1877 (362) IX SC on the Causes of the Recent Outbreak of Cattle Plague.

'The Improvement of Dairy Cattle' *Journal of the British Dairy Farmers' Association* 1 pt 2 (1878).

PP, HC Departmental Committee on Pleuro-pneumonia and Tuberculosis in the United Kingdom (1888) C 5461.

Sources:

Unpublished

Greater London RO, papers of Holland Park Estate.

MCE.

PrC.

Peter J Atkins, 'The Milk Trade of London, c 1790-1914' (Cambridge PhD, 1977).

Published

Cowkeeper and Dairyman's Journal 13 (1892).

Dairy 4 (1892).

Dairyman 17 (1892).

Journal of the British Dairy Farmers' Association 7 (1892).

Seymour J Price, *From Queen to Queen: the Centenary Story of the Temperance Permanent Building Society, 1854-1954* (Franey & Co, 1954).

F H W Sheppard (ed), *Survey of London, vol 37: Northern Kensington* (Athlone Press, 1973).