

THIS RECORD OF E. N. RUSSELL'S BUSINESS

LIFE DEALS WITH HIS SERVICE WITH

ROSSER AND RUSSELL LIMITED

FROM THE YEAR 1916 TO THE YEAR 1948

Although it gives some pre-1916 particulars he did
not serve for the firm before that year.

February 1979

RECOLLECTIONS OF ROSSER AND RUSSELL LIMITED

FROM 1910-1948

BY E. N. RUSSELL IN 1979

PREAMBLE:

A year or so ago I gave the firm some rambling and incomplete notes, parts of which were reproduced in the firm's publication called "Pipeline".

The main object of these present notes is to give a more coherent and complete story in the hope that sometime in the future it will be of interest and will give information on the firm's history in the early 1900's.

A lot of the history has already been given in "The First 200 Years" so that an attempt has been made to avoid repetition, but rather to add to what has already been told.

In 1910 I was only 8 years old so that a small part of these memories deals with a time before I joined the firm, so that recollections of that period are dim. It has been difficult to avoid the words "I" and "me" too often but as it is my story these words have to appear. I wish that I could write more than I have done about the work done by others, but I was not directly involved in some of it so that it would be difficult to give a correct record.

References to some of the staff of early days are made, but many of those who served and contributed to the firm's later success have been omitted. To do so would add considerably to the length of my memories.

Some of the stories are already known to some, but are repeated for the benefit of others.

In general the events are in chronological order, but this does vary for clarification purposes.

MEMORANDUM OF ASSOCIATION:

The following are extracts from the memorandum of December 1890 dealing with an agreement between my grandfather (Joseph Russell) and his partner (George Caulfield) and the capital of the company was £25,000 divided into 5,000 shares of £5 each. The name of the company was Rosser and Russell Limited.

The objects of the company were to carry on the business of:-

1. Heating and Ventilating and General Engineers.
2. Smiths, Millwrights and Iron and Brass Founders.
3. Iron and Wood Steam Boat Buildings^{ERS}, Conservatory and Hot House Builders.
4. Iron and Wood House Builders in all its various branches.

I have always considered my grandfather as being a far-seeing and cute business man, but my memories of him in his business days are few, although I remember him well in his private life.

Fortunately records still exist which give an insight to his work both before and after the company was formed and my cousin Pamela Russell must have spent much time and effort in searching for and producing some of these. I have often wondered if Boat Building was ever done and I have not come across any record of this, but Queens Wharf, by the side of the Thames, would have been ideal. The following story may, however, give a clue.

The Wharf had been purchased in 1878 and Joseph's family were brought up at Digby House which was close by. In his family there were two daughters named Louise and Daisy, later Mrs. Naylor and Mrs. Wallace (true christian name Rebecca).

He owned two barges which he named "Louise" and "Daisy" and although I cannot put a date on these it is likely to have been pre-1900.

One day somebody tethered the barges at low tide to rings let into the sides of the Wharf, but forgot to leave sufficient leeway on the chains to allow for the rise in the tide, with the result that both sank.

My father's description to me, a long time after the catastrophe, was on the following lines:-

1. He and his brothers laughed and laughed (beyond the hearing of Joseph) because he had lost his "two daughters" by drowning.
2. The brothers teased their sisters because their father had let them be drowned.

It is quite possible, therefore, that Joseph made these barges in which case he was a Boat Builder.

At that time barges on the Thames were a major method of transport so that they would have been useful, not only for delivering goods to

the Wharf, but also in taking them from the^Rse to sites on the river where Joseph carried out work at Lots Road, Hampton Court etc.

Prior to the 1890 Memorandum and Agreement the foundations of the firm had been laid years before and this is explained in "The First Two Hundred Years".

THE INSTITUTION OF HEATING AND VENTILATING ENGINEERS:

This is just to record that my father, Joseph Nelson Russell (Joseph's eldest son) was one of the founders and was President in 1902.

After he died in 1948 I gave his gold medal to the Institute for safe keeping and inspection when wanted. The old Institution has recently been renamed "The Chartered Institution of Building Services". Nelson was also a very early member of the then American Society of Heating and Ventilating Engineers.

QUEENS WHARF:

As "The Wharf" has always played an important role in the firm I feel that a description should be given of it and the attached plan will help to describe it as it was in about 1920.

In those days Queen Caroline Street was called Queen Street and the walk from St. Paul's Church down to the Wharf passed property which was mainly semi-derelect.

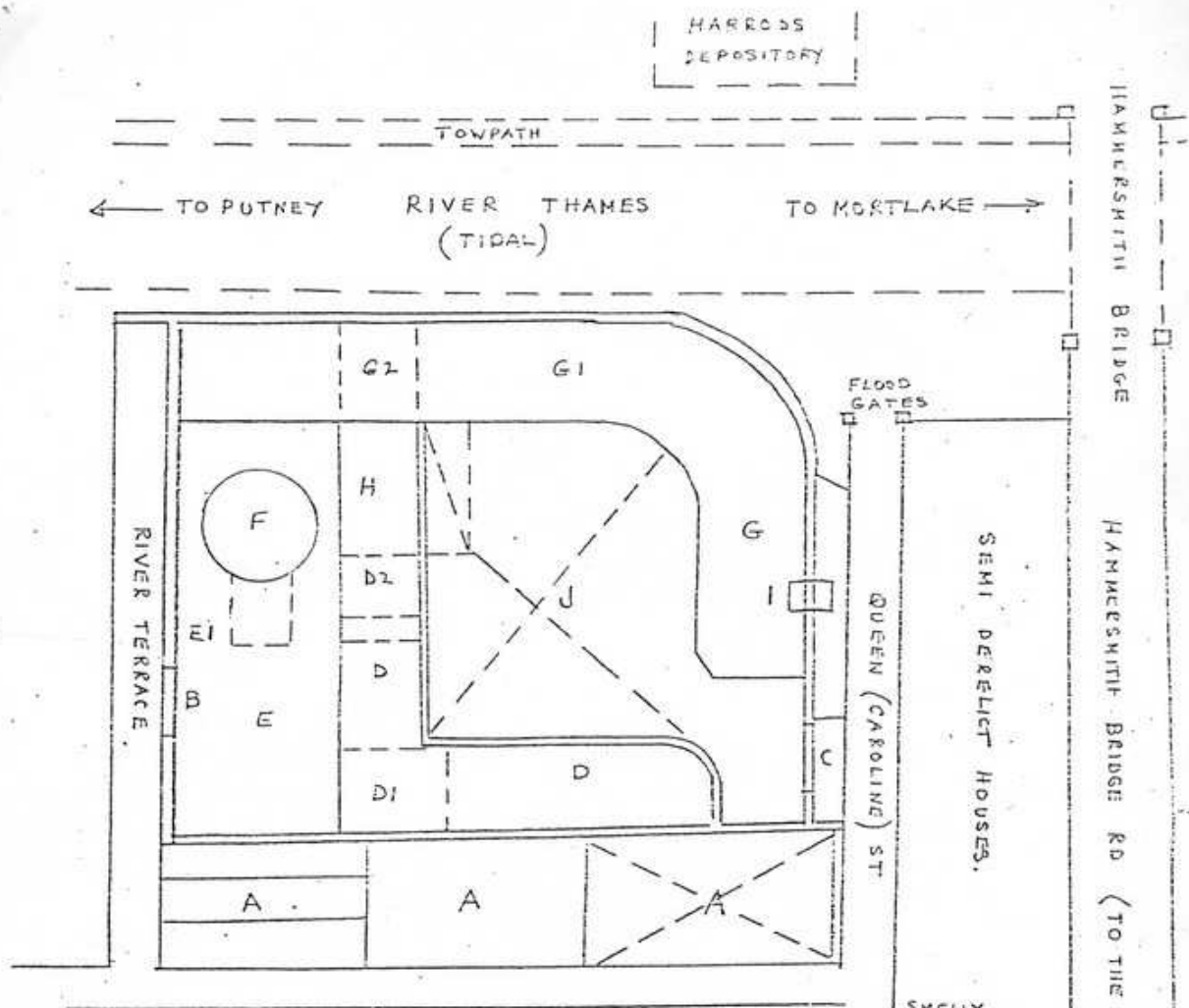
The end of the street terminated in flood gates which gave direct access to the river.

Even in 1920 the Wharf buildings would not have been described as sound looking ones but they lasted for many years after 1920, so that the basic structure must have been good. In about 1924 severe flood damage was done to the river wall of G1 and this had to be re-built. The new roof was a flat one and was able to carry many visitors who came to see the Boat Race between Oxford and Cambridge Universities. I can only guess at the site area which may have been something over half an acre.

Also my guess is that the occupants would have numbered under 100, and probably nearer to 50.

During this period the heating and ventilating side of the business was dealt with from Duke Street, but the Wharf dealt with accounts, storage of pipes and fittings etc. In addition, it dealt with the purely mechanical side (fabrication of plant by means of lathes etc.) for clients such as Messrs. Lyons of Cadby Hall, Messrs. Manb^{RS}ie and Garton, Messrs. Carlo Gatti, Messrs. G.E.^S. (Gram) etc. Area G, which contained most of the larger engineering equipment (lathes etc.) was served by means of overhead shafting with pulleys and belts down to the machines. The shafting was fed by the Gas Engine 1 of about 60 B.H.P. (I think).

Smaller machinery in G1 was electrically motivated.



- A. SHOP, GARDENS & HOUSES, ONE OF WHICH BELONGED TO R.R.
- B & C. BACK & FRONT GATES
- D. GROUND & FIRST FLOOR OFFICES. D1. STRONG ROOM. D2. HUSSEYS STORE
- E. LOFTY SINGLE STOREY PIPE STORE EI FORGE
- F. ROUND HOUSE
- G. LATHES, DRILLING & MILLING MACHINES. G1. WORKSHOPS. G2. FLAT ROOF FOR BOAT RACE
- H. ABLUTIONS. I. GAS ENGINE & COOLING TANK.
- J. LOFTY SINGLE STOREY ASSEMBLY SHOP

NOTE. THE BOARD ROOM WAS SITUATED ON THE FIRST FLOOR OVER GATEWAY C & THE FIRST FLOOR OVER G WAS HINTONS PATTERN MAKING SHOP

MEMORY SKETCH PLAN OF QUEEN'S WHARF IN EARLY 1920

CERTAINLY NOT TO SCALE.

Area G2 indicates the then limited position from which the Boat Race could be seen on a flat roof.

Area D was offices, those close to C being for the Secretary and his staff and those close to D2 being for mechanical engineering staff.

Area D1 shows the position of the strong room in which, later, Jim Russell was accidentally shut in.

Area D2 was the store in which pipe fittings, valves etc., under the charge of Hussey, were kept. A real jumble!

Area E is where pipe lengths of over 20 feet long were stored vertically under the able charge of Hussey.

F represents the Round House and its rectangular attachment.

I cannot really remember the attachment except for a very dim recollection of seeing it sometime. I think but am not sure that this attachment was demolished in 1924 when the flood occurred, but this flood would not have caused the demolition.

The firm will have records and photographs of this strange Round House building which was probably about 25 feet in diameter. Its use was for storage only and I remember seeing old shafting etc., on the ground floor and old files, papers and records on the upper floors. When I was a very young boy I remember that my father told me that a witch used to live there.

The towpath across the river was, and still is, a relic of the old days when horses were used to pull barges up and down the river. I have often wondered how they got on at low tide, when the river diminished to a stream with mud at the sides. Tingeys radio shop always attracted me and must have been one of a few to sell wireless parts in those days. Several photographs of the old wharf still exist but I do not remember seeing any illustrations showing the general inside layout, and hope therefore that my sketch plan and description will be of interest.

EARLY DAYS:

I do not remember any London office prior to the one at 22 Charing Cross.

My first recollection of 22 Charing Cross is when I went there to see the funeral procession of King Edward VII in 1910. This was viewed from specially erected wooden benches in front of the first floor windows and what impressed me most was the view looking down onto the bayonets of the soldiers lining the route up to Trafalgar Square and down Whitehall.

Another recollection is of a barber's coloured pole which projected over the pathway from one of the upper windows. Some of the Russell, Wallace and Naylor families were there and there are some still living who may remember the occasion. A clearer recollection is of my mother becoming tired of having me at home during school holidays, possibly in about 1916 and when my father took me to 22 Charing Cross to help with office boy duties.

I worked in a dingy and dirty basement room, the only natural light being from pavement lights so that artificial lights had to be used continuously. This was poor probably because carbon filament electric bulbs were still in use. There was a telephone switchboard which nonplussed me and a letter copier which obtained a very faint blurred copy of letters sent out. It was not electric or photographic and the copy was obtained by damping the flimsy paper and pressing it onto the original. The result was a "looking-glassed" copy which had to be looked at through the back to read it. Carbon paper was only just starting to arrive on the market.

General correspondence was in long hand, except for letters to clients which were typewritten.

Those working there were:

F. R. Edwards:	(then the male typist) who helped me with the telephone.
C. Leggett:	(draughtsman)
F. W. Tibbles:	(draughtsman)
Glastonbury:	(office boy) who was a real cockney and Alfred Naylor took exception to his language and he was soon sacked.

Those working upstairs were:

J. N. Russell:	(my father) "NELSON"
F. S. Russell:	(uncle) "FRANK"
A. Naylor:	(uncle) "ALF"
A. Russell:	(uncle) who attended to the Birmingham office "ALFRED"
Saxton:	(designer)

The total staff in those days was, therefore, about nine and they dealt with the heating and ventilating side of the business. My father and uncles also kept an eye on the mechanical work done at the wharf.

Joseph used to call regularly at Charing Cross and the wharf to make sure that the "boys" were doing their jobs properly, and he thought highly of them. To me his beard indicated authority.

The offices upstairs were much better than those down below and I remember that the front had a shop window in which photographs of buildings dealt with were displayed.

Another very old recollection is of the Oxford and Cambridge Boat Race viewed from the wharf but I deal with this later in these notes.

At about this time my father dealt with some work on a remote island off the Scottish coast. He asked the fitter how he spent his evenings after work and the reply was "Sir, come with me this evening and see". He was taken to a secret whisky still and spent the evening there.

I was told about a large job done previously by Alfred Naylor at Hutton Schools, Essex. This was a large job for those days and heat to serve dispersed buildings was obtained from exhaust steam from steam engines which drove dynamos in a central boiler house. The site foreman was Turner. I wonder if this was one of the forerunners of district heating. World War I (1914-1918) was being waged during my school holiday service but my memory of work done is now dim. The following may, however, be of interest:

1. Mechanical:

The wharf was fully engaged on war work which I think was chiefly sub-contract work for larger firms. A lot of work was done for a Mr. Constantinesco including that of firing a machine gun between the blades of a rotating aircraft propeller without damaging them. The engine and propeller were, at that time, immediately in the front of the cockpit of fighter aircraft so that this was an innovation allowing the gun to be fired at the enemy from the front.

Towards the end of the war, or maybe afterwards, work was done for Constantinesco on a variable gear, for driving motor cars and other apparatus, in order to avoid gear changing. I think that razor blades, or something similar, were incorporated in his idea.

I have a very clear memory that, after I had joined the firm, I attended, with others, a lecture which he gave on this gear, when he thought that he had achieved success. He showed a cinematograph picture of a car, without anybody in the driving seat, and going up a hill. A cord was attached to the accelerator, which, when operated from a distance, allowed the car to gain speed without stalling, and to lose speed when the cord was slackened. There were difficulties, however, due to quick wear in the parts, and his idea was not developed further.

2. Heating and Ventilating:

The only war jobs I remember were as follows:

a) Ellesmere Port, Cheshire:

This was done by Nelson and was a large shell filling factory, but I never went there.

b) The Beldam Factory, Brentford:

This was done by Nelson and was used for the manufacture of rubber vehicle tyres. Although I went there on one occasion I cannot now remember details.

c) The Royal Flying Corp. Stores at Ruislip:

This was done by Frank and is still in use by the Royal Air Force. It had two boiler houses each with a "Lancashire" coal fired boiler. The output would, therefore, have been about 10,000 - 20,000 lbs. of steam per hour. The system in the buildings was by steam batteries and ducting which delivered warmed air. I have a faint recollection of visiting this site on one occasion. It was a large system for that period.