

## Hendon Paper Works Co Limited - by Denis Linfoot

My father, Arthur L. Linfoot (1890-1977), worked at the Hendon Paper Works (HPW) for nearly 50 years: from 1907 or 1908 until his retirement in 1956. He was however on War service from July 1915, when he volunteered for the RAMC (see his daily Diary blog for the years 1914-18, [www.arthurlinfoot.org.uk](http://www.arthurlinfoot.org.uk).) until May or June 1919; see the letter (below) dated 16.01.1919 from Mr Sandelands of HPW, regarding his post-War re-employment. My father went to HPW as a clerk, doing shorthand, typing, book-keeping and general duties, as recorded in his Diary; he became Company Secretary in 1931 or thereabouts, and was a Director from 1953 until shortly after the take-over by DomTar.

HPW was as Ms Larmour says founded in 1872; I remember the date and initials HPW in a roundel on the porch floor in the office building, which I believe had originally been the Manager's house, near the Works entrance in Ocean Road. The factory area extended north from there, perhaps as far as Sea Beach Road, and from Commercial Road on the west towards the low cliffs (where there were piggeries.) The image on the 1907 card was apparently taken from this direction. At their north-east corner, HPW had a heavily-used rail connection from the docks, running through or east of the gas works; there was then very little road freight, either of raw materials or finished products. The two chimneys were indeed a landmark, as Ms Gomersall says; both were originally about 200ft. high, but one was shortened by some 20ft. early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Up to WW2, HPW produced mainly medium-quality (ie not hand-made) writing-paper, from esparto grass as Ms Larmour says; this came from North Africa, sometimes on vessels chartered by the Company. During and immediately after WW2, however, much of the paper was made from waste paper and straw, which required much more boiling than esparto, and made poor-quality paper. After WW2, HPW became a big producer of duplicating paper (which had become a world-wide peace-time requisite), and used a lot of wood pulp from Scandinavia; HPW also tried producing coated wrapping papers for confectionery etc. – another new need - but this required expensive specialised machinery. Although the illustration on the Sunderland Site is captioned as a 'printing machine', it is actually a paper-making machine and I never heard of HPW doing any commercial printing. The work-force is quoted in the cutting about DomTar's closure as about 400. My recollection, from the 1940s and '50s, puts it nearer 200-250, but perhaps it varied.

Paper-mills need a great deal of clean water (the fluid at the 'wet end' of a Foudrinière machine was about 2% cellulose fibre and 98% water, and the basic process of paper-making is to get rid of the water and leave a sheet of dried-out fibre of even thickness.) This why the small, older paper-mills, such as Ford and Fourstones, were often sited at river-sides. HPW was near the sea, but sea-water won't do (desalination was not a practical proposition), so they got their fresh water from a pumping-station adjoining Leechmere Road.

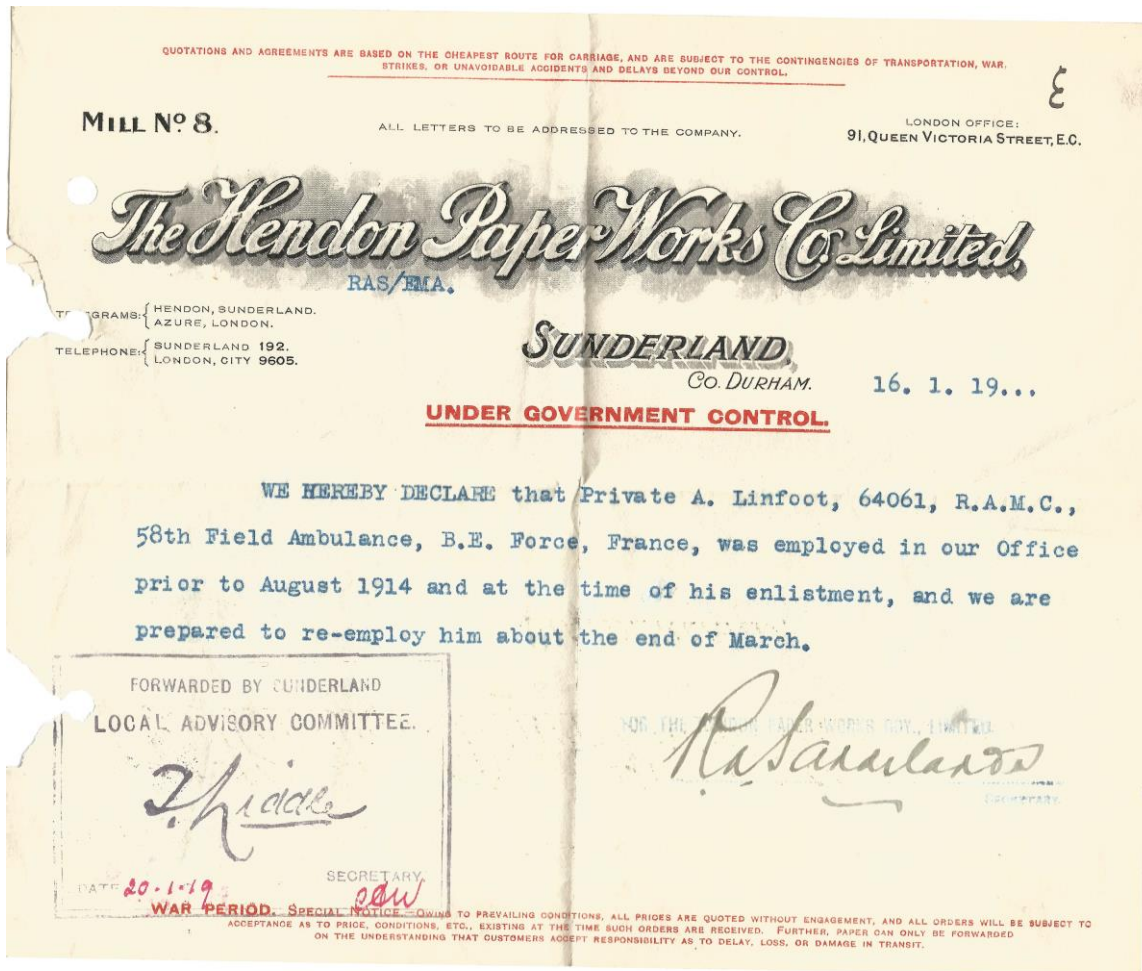
The Company was not totally owned by the Davidson family, though no doubt they had large shareholdings; my father mentioned sending dividends to shareholders on the South Coast and elsewhere, the Directors undoubtedly had shareholdings, and I believe he had a few shares himself. But it was a private company, not quoted on the Stock Exchange, and the Articles did not permit share transactions without the consent of the Board. This probably helped the Company to operate in a financially conservative way, with fixed assets written off comparatively quickly, and without constant pressure to maximise returns on capital. This in turn may have helped in the decision not to close during the Depression in the early 1930s (the Ford Paper Mill, mentioned on the web-page, did of course have to close). My father used to say after WW2 that if the financial institutions had had access to the Company's balance sheet and other data, there would have been a great scramble from the asset-strippers. The

takeover by Dominion Tar, which Mr Cyril Smith mentions, was perhaps encouraged by HPW's financial strength, but DomTar's main motivation was actually to get access to the European Common Market; the delays in the UK's accession, due originally to de Gaulle's opposition, may have influenced DomTar's eventual withdrawal, though the competition of much larger paper-mills in the UK, and of trees-to-paper mills in Scandinavia, would probably have been decisive anyway.

Regarding the Davidson family: Percy W. Davidson, who was a few months older than my father, came to HPW some time after WW1, from a Tyneside company which then or later merged into ICI. He came as Managing Director; I do not know whether he was also Chairman of the Board initially, but he was certainly Chairman & Managing Director when I knew the firm. The Davidsons lived in a big house (which may have been company-owned) in Grangetown, named 'Sea View'. Percy's son Ian was in his early 20s at the outbreak of WW2, and remained in post, effectively as his father's deputy (I don't know his exact title) at HPW as part of the war effort. Percy Davidson in the late 1940s wanted me to take over from my father and carry on the firm with his son after our respective fathers' retirement. This partly explains my knowledge of the Works, but while I took an interest in my father's work, I did not take up the suggestion.

Denis Linfoot

08.01.2014



Rights to the material in this Note reserved by Arthur Denis Linfoot, 2014.