


# JOHN PYOTT



1862 - 1947

JS BENNIE

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*Jenny Bennie*

*Port Elizabeth. June, 1977.*

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# JOHN PYOTT – 1862 – 1947

## CHAPTER I

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### **EARLY LIFE, MARRIAGE, ESTABLISHMENT IN BUSINESS**

John Pyott was born on the 9<sup>th</sup> May, 1862 in Dundee, Scotland. He was the firstborn son of Margaret (nee Jeffrey) and George Pyott. Their other children were, in order, Annie Smith, Maggie, William, George and James. George Pyott Senior was the farm Manager at the Estate of Balbeuchly, about eight miles west of Dundee, near the Sidlow Hills. At the tender age of ten, John was sent to Dundee to serve his apprenticeship as a baker. He joined the firm of Lindsay and Low and it was here that he learnt the confectionary business. He spent the whole of the week in town and returned home to his parents for the weekends. Mostly he would walk both ways. On occasions John Grant (of Grants Oatmeal fame) driving to Dundee in a dogcart would give him a lift providing that John was at an appointed spot on time. Grant always maintained that if he was not there, he would not wait for him. Pyott admitted that it was this that taught him punctuality and he retained this trait to the end of his days.

Even at this early age John Pyott displayed signs of ambition. He was determined to reach the peak of his chosen trade. Just prior to turning 18 years, he was appointed manager of one of Lindsay and Low's branches. However, his health was not of the best and on the advice of Mr Grant he decided to emigrate to South Africa. After a lengthy sea voyage he landed in Cape Town and one day while wandering in the Gardens saw there was great building activity at the Houses of Parliament. He offered them his services which were rather sceptically received as he looked so slim and frail. After a short time he decided to move on to Port Elizabeth and in 1880 he landed there with £10 in his pocket and two mill stones which he brought from Scotland. He immediately set up business in a tiny shed measuring 8ft by 12ft and commenced making sweets. It was not long before he took over the bakery next door and added bread, cake, biscuits and jam to his output. The Port Elizabeth Directory of 1883 lists 'Pyott, John – Grocer and General Dealer, 6 and 8 Princes Street.' His business career had begun!

As he often employed friends and acquaintances from his native Scotland, he spent time down at the Jetty (the harbour was in its infancy) meeting the new arrivals. It was on one such occasion, the story is told, that he caught sight of Annie Mahaffy, who with her Aunt and Uncle alighted from the tug which had brought them to the shore from their ship. He

immediately decided to marry her and luck was on his side for a few days later he was able to meet her when she came to the bakery to shop. Annie came from Belfast, Ireland where her family were in the linen trade. As her Aunt was delicate, she had accompanied her to South Africa to help see to her needs. On the 20<sup>th</sup> June, 1885 Annie and John Pyott were married at his house in Queen Street by the Reverend Robert Johnston. They signed the marriage register at the Hill Presbyterian Church on Monday, 22<sup>nd</sup> June in the presence of the Minister and A.B. Galloway and Annie Morrison (Harrison?), and spent their honeymoon in Hankey after riding there on horseback from Port Elizabeth. Between 1886 and 1899 eight children were born to the Pyotts. They were Maggie, Robert (Bob), Annie Catherine (Nance), Elsie Jane, George Ernest, Ian Vernon Jeffrey, Olive Gladys and Frank Percival. All except Robert (Belfast) and Ian (Dundee) were born in South Africa.

Their first home was in Elizabeth Street, above the factory, opposite Mr. D.M. Brown, a Chartered Accountant who was later involved with Pyott in the Strathsomers Estate. Adjacent was the Chinaman's Gardens which provided unlimited scope for small boys (Bob especially) to get up to mischief. The double storey house overlooked a beautiful green paddock in which Pyott's horses grazed. In 1896 they moved to Balbeuchly House, Middle Avenue, but must have returned to Elizabeth Street in 1899 as their address in the Directory of that year is given as such.

Soon after their marriage South Africa was gripped by Gold Fever, Pyott not the least. He decided to go to the Witwatersrand to see whether there was any future for him there. First he travelled to Durban by sea and then bought a horse which he intended riding to the Gold Fields. Shortly after he had set out he came across a Cape Cart with one very lame horse. As always, quick to seize his chance, Pyott offered the Dutch gentleman the use of his horse in return for a ride in the cart. With alacrity this was accepted and John Pyott's companion turned out to be none other than Paul Kruger! On reaching their destination Pyott went north to Barberton but found that the diggers were already moving to Johannesburg. He rode with them and was in fact offered land which is today the centre of the city. However, when he realised how rough the life was, he decided that it was no place for a woman and small baby and returned to Port Elizabeth.

In 1885 the South African Exhibition was held in the Feather Market Hall. It sought to stimulate the manufacture of confectionery in the Colonies as there was a steady demand

for the articles. The principle exhibitors in this class were: John Pyott, of the Port Elizabeth Steam Confectionery Works; J.J. Hill and Co., Cape Town; W.C. Jones and Co., King Williams Town and the Natal Court. The exhibits formed the best variety ever shown in South Africa so it was with justifiable pride that John Pyott could claim a first prize" his exhibits comprising the largest variety of confectionery and in quality the best!' In the biscuit section they exhibited 22 kinds and won the prize for the best exhibit, 'but nothing worthy of special commendation!' The judges of the meal, flour etc. were W.M. Burls, John Pyott and John Whyte. Pyott's early competition consisted of W.B. Anderson of the P.E. Steam Confectionery, Preserve and Chicory Works, Rufane Vale; A.P. Alexander, Town Hall Confectionery Works, 72 Queen Street; John Whyte and Co., Steam Bread and Cake Bakery, 27 and 29 Princes Street.

In 1892 the following advertisement appeared:

***JOHN PYOTT'S***

***PIONEER STEAM WORKS,***

***MANUFACTURING***

***BISCUITS, CONFECTIONERY and JAMS***

Price lists on application.

In August, 1898 Cecil John Rhodes came to Port Elizabeth to address a public meeting in support of Jame Wynne and Mr. Walton who were standing for the Legislative Council. While in the town he heard of Pyott's success and expressed the wish to see the factory. One of Pyott's sons happened to be in the office when Rhodes arrived and he asked the youngster who he was, to which the little chap replied, "I am Pyott's boy". Rhodes picked him up and set him on his shoulders and then proceeded to walk around the factory.

Matters continued to flourish in the business field and for the year ending 30<sup>th</sup> November, 1898 the net profit was £12 840 and the turnover was £139 422. Office salaries were £73 per month. The following year saw a net profit of £13 322 after interest on John Pyott's capital. Mudie, Colquhoun, Sim and Macdonald received a small (2%) equal share in the profits while by the end of the next year Kinnear, MacLagan and Drummond were added to this list. In the Eastern Province Herald of 24<sup>th</sup> January 1901 the following appeared:

**NOTICE**

I beg to intimate that the business hitherto carried on by me as Flour and Meal Miller and Manufacturer of Biscuits, Cakes, Confectionery, Jams, Jellies and Preserves etc. was, on 1<sup>st</sup> December, 1900, converted into a Limited Liability Company, registered in this Colony under the Companies Act of 1892.

The Business of the new Company will be carried on under the designation or style of "PYOTT LIMITED".

All liabilities and existing contracts in my name have been taken over, and all moneys and accounts due to me will be received by Pyott, Limited.

I would take this opportunity of tendering my sincere thanks to all those who have accorded me their kind support in the past, and as I have been entrusted with the management of the new company I respectfully solicit a continuance of their esteemed favours. JOHN PYOTT

The capital was £100 000, of which £90 000 had to be taken up by Mr. Pyott, his friends and employees and the rest was to be offered privately to the firm's constituents. At the first General Meeting of Shareholders held in Port Elizabeth on the 2<sup>nd</sup> April, 1901, Pyott mentioned that applications had been received for treble the number of shares set aside for the public and expressed regret that more than the original number could not be allotted. The Certificate issued to the Company under Section 57 of "The Companies Act, 1892" reads as follows:

I, BEN HERBERT HOLLAND, Registrar of Deeds of the Colony of the Cape of Good Hope do hereby certify that PYOTT LIMITED is incorporated as a Company Under the provisions of "The Companies Act, 1892" with limited liability.

Witness my hand and seal of office, at Cape Town, this 4<sup>th</sup> day of December, 1900.

Signed – B.H. Holland

REGISTRAR OF DEEDS

So it was that the biscuit industry in Port Elizabeth set off on a new course.

In August, 1899 John Pyott was elected to the Port Elizabeth Town Council. His first term of office was only six months as he resigned to go overseas. The children spent most of the

Boer War in Ireland and Scotland. When Pyott was in South Africa he served with the local Town Guard. Much to his amusement his children told their classmates that he was a General!



## CHAPTER II

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### THE STRATHSOMERS ESTATE

Being far sighted Pyott realised that the country had to reach its' maximum potential in the field of agriculture if it was to supply its' own needs. To this end he became vitally interested in finding an area of land which could be used for experimental purposes and could also be irrigated from its' own water supply. In February, 1903 he became involved in the Sundays River Estate. This Pioneer irrigation settlement lay in the Sundays River Valley about 40 miles from Port Elizabeth and 8 miles from Bluecliff railway station.

A Mr O.P. Hoole of Bayville inspected and reported on the property when it was offered for sale on behalf of himself, three Port Elizabeth businessmen (Pyott being one), a medical doctor practising in Bayville and three farmers in the district. One, Mr. John Whyte, had been farming in the valley since 1895. Mr Hoole then offered the owners, The Guardian Assurance and Trust Co., £22 000 for the land. This was accepted and a meeting of the new owners was held at Mr. John Scrimgeour's house at Zwartkops on 26<sup>th</sup> March, 1903. Those present were: John Pyott, John Whyte, Dr Macdonald, John Scrimgeour and D. Brown, acting as Secretary. They resolved that their members were to take up ground within twelve months. The original Directors were all expected to farm their property. In August the Articles of Association were finally read and the name of the Company formally became the "Strathsomers Estate Company" – 'strath' being the Scottish word for a broad mountain valley, and 'Somers' in honour of James Somers Kirkwood, whose original company had made a beginning in the valley but had unfortunately not succeeded. He was declared insolvent in 1887. However, all that James Kirkwood had promised and believed in was capable of being realised and this was obvious in the success of the Strathsomers Company which came after him and translated his dreams into reality. The original Directors and Owners of the Company were:

John Whyte	Bayville	Farmer
John Frederick Taute	Bayville	Farmer
John Pyott	Princes Street, Port Elizabeth	Flour Miller
William Macdonald	Bayville	Medical Practitioner
Olof Runlett Larson	Bayville	Farmer
Daniel Maclaren Brown	Main Street, Port Elizabeth	Chartered Accountant

John Scrimgeour	North End	Timber Merchant
Oliver Percival Porter Hoole	Bayville	Manager

John Pyott owned Lot 46 in the area demarcated "Government Belooning". The Deed of Transfer was signed on 19<sup>th</sup> June, 1906 and the extent of the land was 8 morgan 266.4 square roods. According to a report by Christian Michael Lind, sworn Appraiser and Auctioneer, Oudtshoorn, and also an undated, unsigned valuation, the extent of the Company property was about 27 000 morgan composed of rich alluvial deposit highly suitable for cultivation. Lucerne, fruit, vegetables and trees were considered good growing products while grazing lands were suitable for cattle, goats and other stock. The water supply at this stage (i.e. 1907) was derived from two substantially constructed weirs situated on the Eastern and Western sides of the Sundays River respectively. To quote C.M. Lind "The Shareholders of the Strathsomers Estate are to be congratulated in possessing a property of undoubted merit, with the judicious expenditure of a moderate sum devoted to further developments of the property, the Estate could be converted to one of the finest in the Country".

So modest and publicity shy was the Strathsomers Company, that to this day comparatively few South Africans know that this was the pioneer settlement of the Sundays River Valley. It quietly and efficiently established its' irrigation settlement, nursing its' irrigators over hard times and laying the foundations of a township.

On the back of a printed notice concerning the fire at Pyott's factory, John Pyott wrote an incomplete draft of a speech to be made at a meeting with the Sundays River Irrigators; who proved to be the flies in the ointment in the Company's plans for the Valley. "In appealing to my Board at our last meeting to have a meeting with the Irrigators of the Sundays River Estate I did so with express desire to endeavour to remove an impression that has evidently got abroad, that we, the purchasers of this Estate bought it as land speculators. Now, gentlemen, I can assure you that nothing was further from our idea. If you will follow me in my digression for a little I may prove to you that such was not the case. We, the three P.E. gentlemen here now, invited our friend Dr Macdonald to view with us an estate in Humansdorp district that we had an idea of buying; this of course did not suit us. Dr Macdonald then pressed on us the possibility of buying this estate and which in the eyes of

the irrigators would be a Godsend to get out of the clutches of the Guardian Co. Now gentlemen as you are all aware we came and saw this estate and we were so to speak enamoured of it but at the same time we found out that there was a man here who had practically the option in his pocket. This gentleman practically approached us to join him in the venture and which after some preliminaries we did, on such short notice that we had not time to consider the conditions that had to be complied with, or I question I would have taken it, but it was impressed upon us that there would be no difficulty as far as being taken over by Irrigators. Now Gentlemen, as you all are aware there has been considerable difficulty. Whether the fault was ours by wanting to rush you too fast I do not know, or that you did not know .....

When the Strathsomers Company held its' Second Annual General Meeting in 1905, they stated that their total deficiency was about £100 as against the first year which had been £2 000 'largely due to the amount spent ..... improving the irrigation system. The need for a bridge to be built over the river was recognised and fully discussed, and once again the question of a railway through the valley arose. Thus it was obvious that they had endeavoured to give the Irrigators benefits which previously they had not enjoyed. Their discontent however continued. It is interesting to learn of John Pyott's plans for the Estate in a letter to Mr B.K. Mayo on 20<sup>th</sup> June, 1905. Mr Mayo had arrived at Bayville (the village which was afterwards called Kirkwood) in 1895, and bought a farm which he called 'Cheshunt'. There he planted fruit trees and Lucerne, bred cattle, ostriches and a few sheep. He took his first Lucerne hay to market in 1896 and soon there was an excellent demand for this product. John Pyott wrote:

"I fully intended to write to you long ago ere this and lay before you my own personal plans in regard to the exploiting of the Sundays River but, something has always come in the way of my doing so.

It is our intention (that is, Mr. Wood, Mr Scrimgeour and myself) to come up to Bayville on Friday morning and have an interview with yourself, Mr Frank and the others upon this momentous question, as we feel that it is impossible to get along with the Estate under the present circumstances in the way we desire until some definite arrangement can be arrived at with the Irrigators. Mr. Wood, as you know, is like myself interested in this Estate, and is most anxious that something definite should be done. We are all anxious, therefore, to have an interview with you and the other farmers, and if possible to get this matter thoroughly thrashed out and satisfactorily settled both to the directors and the Company and to the farmers.

As you are aware, when I took up Sundays River my first intention was to take up farming as a hobby when my time with Pyott, Limited, was up, but my election to a seat on the Legislative Council somewhat upset this plan. However, I expect by and by to have more time to go into the working of this Estate; and the more I see of it the more I am convinced that something can be made out of it with energy and enterprise. I should first endeavour to get from the Company the right to run a railway from Bluecliff right down and through the Valley to enable the farmers to get into touch with the markets without the disadvantage of hauling their produce by wagon this tremendous distance to Bluecliff station. I should then tackle a creamery (and probably fruit preserving) on co-operative lines with the assistance of course, of the farmers in the valley. It is not my intention that the Company should be interested in these small subsidiary companies, and I should therefore have to look to the people located in the valley for their support. In discussing Sundays River with our mutual friend, Mr. Macdiarmid, he was very strong upon the point of some permanent water scheme being devised, so that the irrigators could have a permanent supply of water to fall back upon when the river was dry. This of course, is a matter which will require a considerable amount of capital in addition to engineering ingenuity to carry out. However, I am convinced that it is possible. There is also the greater scheme of Korhaan's Drift which will have to be tackled in the near future so that a great deal of land can be brought under cultivation. While in Cape Town Mr. Macdiarmid introduced me to Mr. George Valder, of Australia, and we had a long discussion upon this point. He expects to be in Port Elizabeth at an early date, and has promised to come up to the Valley with me and give me his opinion as to what would be best in the interests of all concerned. As you are probably aware, Mr. Valder was for many years the head of one of the Australian Colleges similar to Elsenburg, and has a wide experience in such matters. He may be able to put us onto a more economical way of working than we have at present. In laying these matters before you I trust you will treat them as confidential, as I may tell you I have not discussed with any of my co-directors the possibility of opening up the valley in the way I have suggested to you, but I merely sketch it for your guidance in order that you may see that I am not half-hearted where the Sundays River Estate is concerned – if we can only come to some reasonable sort of terms with those of the irrigators who are still holding out. I trust you will assist me as far as you possibly can in this endeavour; in fact, it is men such as you from whom I expect to get assistance in the development of this Estate. With kind regards .....

Pyott obviously made a few of his plans for the improvement of the valley known to specific people, some of whom appear to have become over-enthusiastic about an ideology and who had subsequently to be further enlightened. One of these was the Reverend F. Raul of Enon Mission Station to whom Pyott wrote the following on the 12<sup>th</sup> September, 1905:

“I am in receipt of yours of yesterday’s date, contents of which I have duly noted. I would point out that you must not be carried away by that what I have said as I am only one of the Directors of Sundays River Estate and they may not look upon the matter in the same light as I do and besides we still have a great many difficulties to get over before we get the Transfer. I trust you have benefited by those good rains that we are having all over the country and that things begin to look bright and hopeful with you. I note your remarks about old firms going in these bad times and I am just afraid that many more will have to go if matters do not improve.....”

Later John Scrimgeour became the Managing Director of the Company with James Searle the Secretary and R.C. Cresswell the Superintendent. Their Bankers were the National Bank of South Africa Ltd. and their solicitors were Lawson Brown and Brown, Port Elizabeth. The Directors consisted of John Scrimgeour, J.P. Farmer, Kirkwood; D.M. Brown, M.L.A. Chartered Accountant; O.R. Larson, Managing Director of Wigg and Co., Uitenhage; R.C. Macdonald J.P. Farmer, Kirkwood; John Pyott, Managing Director, Pyott Ltd., P.E.; A.B. Shand, J.P. Secretary E.P. Guardian Co., Grahamstown; J.F. Taute, Farmer, Kirkwood; Henry Wood, J.P., Wood Bros. Merchants, Grahamstown.

In 1912 John Pyott sold his land at Bayville. However, his brother William Pyott, had established himself there and continued to farm in the area for many years. In November, 1924 the Irrigation and Finance Commission held their second sitting at Kirkwood and they were endeavouring to clarify the position of the Strathsomers Estate and the situation amongst the irrigators. To aid them in their investigations they had William Pyott called and examined before the Commission. The following ensued:

The Chairman; Are you a farmer? ..... I am.

And where do you reside? ..... I reside in the division of Kerkwood .....here; in the Uitenhage area.

How long have you been farming? ..... I came here in 1904 twenty years ago.

You are an irrigation farmer? ..... Yes, I am.

Do you wish to tell us anything about the construction works here? .....No, not that so much.

Do you want to tell us something about the Strathsomers Estate? ..... They bought this from the Guardian Company in Port Elizabeth in 1901, I think (actually 1903 – ed.) that was before I came here. One of the Directors, John Pyott, of Port Elizabeth is a relative of mine, and when I came here we were in partnership (when Pyott was elected to the Legislative Council he was unable to manage his land and William Pyott did this for him).

Has the Strathsomers Estate been in existence for many years? ..... Yes they have been in existence for a long time. Until 1912 John Pyott and I were in partnership and then I carried on by myself ..... after 1912 I was on my own.”

John Pyott continued to be interested in the Strathsomers Estate for in 1923 he wrote to Mr Nothard saying:

“I beg to confirm our arrangement whereby I shall allow you a retaining fee of £8 per month – which will be credited to your Interest Account monthly – to act as my alternate on the Strathsomers Board of Directors. At the same time I have been discussing with Mr. Lawson Brown a scheme for the betterment of the farmers in the valley”.

He had the idea of purchasing cows for the farmers in order to help them. These cows would remain the property of the committee until they had been paid for. In order to establish a Dairy Industry at Kirkwood, Pyott had built a dairy and his chief engineer, Alexander Shirras had installed the cold storage units. The venture was never a success for although Pyott had envisaged a railway from Bluecliff to the valley and had gone into the sleeper business for that purpose the line was not built and the journey first by wagon to Bluecliff Station and then by train to Port Elizabeth proved too lengthy to allow the milk to reach its' destination in a drinkable condition!

In October, 1993 it is recorded that Pyott loaned the Strathsomers Estate £950. After this date no reference to the Company can be found.

## CHAPTER III

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### THE S.S. NEWTON

On the 7<sup>th</sup> June, 1902, John Pyott acquired a steam screw ship from James Mudie, Secretary of Pyott Limited, for the sum of £2 650. The number of shares sold in this transaction was sixty-four. The ship was built in 1902 in Porsgrund, Norway. Her gross tonnage was 73,54 tons and from mast to bowsprit her length was 80ft. She was 17ft. in breadth, of a steel framework, round stern and schooner rigged. Her official number was 115.057 and she was registered in Port Elizabeth. She had one compound engine. There does not appear to be any record of her cargo although that she was used to convey oak sleepers for a prospective railway from a forest which Pyott owned in Rumania. The 'Newton' was never made to pay her way. On the one hand the coasting trade of the Colony was completely ignored. Small steamers had to pay full customs duties for the coal they required and the provisions they consumed while foreign steamers competing against them were permitted to obtain their coal and other supplies in bonds. In most countries coastal shipping was considered an industry to be protected but in South Africa at that time the reverse was the case.

Maintenance costs too were particularly high. By 1905 the 'Newton' was costing quite a large sum of money and after Mangolds, in Baakens Street had effected a number of repairs Pyott eventually sent it to East London to be looked at by Mackenzie Bros. who were Iron Founders, Blacksmiths, Builders and Contractors. Mr N. Toennissen was the appointed agent. In answer to a request from Mr Toennissen for money for the vessel's repair John Pyott wrote:

"I am in receipt of your letter of the 21<sup>st</sup> instant and note that on examination of the vessel on the slip you find that there is more to do than you anticipated at first. I leave the matter entirely in your hands to have the ship made seaworthy at the least possible expense."

Pyott obviously hoped to make some money from the 'Newton' in a salvage venture off East London. The ship 'Ashmount' was in difficulties and her cargo were to be salvaged.

A Mr Gowan in a vessel called 'Clara' had made an attempt to reach the 'Ashmont' but had been unsuccessful. Pyott was hopeful that Toennissen would find a means of being successful and this would help the 'Newton' to pay her way. He did point out that the vessel was only insured while she lay in the river at East London and that if Toennissen wished to take her outside the harbour other arrangements would have to be made. Captain Olsen was obviously in charge of the ship at this time for Pyott agreed to pay his wages to the end of April after which time Toennissen would have to decide whether he

would be kept on or not. Mr William Gowan, who had charge of the 'Clara' offered to buy the 'Newton' in August 1905. Pyott agreed to sell for £1 750 subject to an inspection. However, this must have come to nothing as the 'Newton' was in Mr Toennissen's hands again in September of that year. He in turn was finding the ship a millstone around his neck and stated 'the further I go the further in debt I get.' There were two offers to hire at this time but neither was prepared to pay the insurance premium.

Later in September, Mascotte Fisheries Ltd., Durban, offered to charter the 'Newton' and John Pyott made enquiries of the Bank of Africa as to the Fisheries financial position. However, the vessel continued to cause problems for obviously the charterers were not satisfied with the conditions of the ship. Mr Toennissen in reply to Mr Robert Trott of Mascotte Fisheries Ltd. wrote as follows:

"..... I was not a little surprised to learn of the leakage through the stern gland. It does seem strange that I should have had the boat for 4 or 5 months without noticing the leakage whatsoever. The gland was packed in East London by Mackenzie Bros., when a new propeller flange was put in, and Mr Atkins, the foreman, was himself present. Any repair to the bush or gland is in my opinion out of the question here. All that might have been necessary would have been to tighten the gland. That some water might have come through the pumps, either salt water or fresh, I shall not dispute on account of your engineer's lack of knowledge of the engine. It has always been the same trouble when a new engineer took charge until he found out the different connections. Had you kept the old engineer on board until you reached Durban as I suggested your man could have known all about it, and all this trouble would have been avoided? You have probably heard from Mackenzie's people I spared no time and expense to be sure and deliver the boat in absolute first class order, which I have no doubt you will find when your engineer first is thoroughly acquainted with it. As regards sharing expense I shall leave that to Mr Pyott, but you will remember I was three quarters of a ton of coal short, besides I had just put on board 1 C/S engine oil, 5 galls. Cylinder Oil and nearly a case of Paraffin Oil which should have been paid for as well as an Ice Box I had bought from Mr Austin, so if we cry quits I think you will be very fairly compensated."

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> October, 1905 Pyott was again in communication with Robert Trott as to the condition of the 'Newton'. Pyott verified that it had been delivered in good condition and said that if they i.e. Mascotte Fisheries, wished to be released from their charter they were to inform him by letter as he was unable to come to Durban personally for a considerable time.

The next reference to the ship is a letter to Messrs' W Storm & Sons of the Point Durban intimating that they should try to dispose of the 'Newton' to their mutual advantage. Pyott



pointed out that he had an offer from Johannesburg to hire her but that he was not prepared to do this. She was for sale and lying in the care of Messrs' Storm & Co. in Durban. Mr Toennissen had asked that the engine be kept well-greased and the decks as far as possible be kept protected from the sun. 'As practical men you will understand what is required.

At length they found someone interested in the ship and she was sold to Charles George Smith and Joseph Ellis Brown merchants of Durban by Bill of Sale on the 30<sup>th</sup> April, 1906. The ship was registered at 10 a.m. on the 15<sup>th</sup> June, 1906 and transferred to the Port of Durban, Natal on the 16<sup>th</sup> June 1906.

In a letter to Messrs' Storm and Sons, John Pyott on the 24<sup>th</sup> February, 1908, replied that he was pleased to note that the 'Newton' was still being employed in the fishing trade and that he trusted 'that the buyer has been able to make some profitable use of her, as I never could'.

So ended his sortie into ship ownership.

## CHAPTER IV

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### **THE FIRE OF 1903**

In 1902 it had been decided at the Annual General meeting of the Shareholders that it would be necessary to build new premises as the old ones were becoming too small. Little did they realise that within ten months they were to be forced to hasten the construction of a new factory as the old one would be totally destroyed by fire.

On Wednesday, 16<sup>th</sup> December 1903 the following report appeared in the Eastern Province Herald as regards the great fire which destroyed Pyott's factory in Princes Street.

'In the early hours of Tuesday morning the North End of the town was visited by a conflagration which completely gutted Messrs' Pyott's confectionary factory, situated on the corner of Princes and Elizabeth Streets. The origin of the fire remains a mystery, but it seems to have broken out in the rear part of the building, where unfortunately, it would remain unnoticed until the flames had obtained such a hold that they had penetrated to the outer air. We understand that some of the employees were at work in the building until about 10 o'clock on Monday night, and when they left all seemed perfectly safe. About two o'clock, Captain Wares and ten men of the P.A.G. Rocket Brigade were returning home from the beach where they had been on duty owing to the heavy south-east wind which was blowing and the heavy seas which were consequently running, in case there should by any call for assistance from the shipping. As they approached Princes Street, coming up South Street, they noticed flame and smoke spewing from the back of Messrs' Pyott's factory. Quickening their pace they hurried on and gave the alarm to a constable who was on duty there. So far as we have been able to ascertain, this was the very earliest indication that anything was amiss, and in support of this, one member of our staff passed the premises a couple of minutes before two o'clock at which there was absolutely no indication of a fire from outside. On the alarm being given the policeman immediately blew his whistle, and in a short time several more of the police were on the scene. They were assisted by the Rocket Brigade, got the hose-reel out from the substation in South Street, and soon had attached it to a fire plug in Elizabeth Street which seemed to be the most likely place from which to fight the flames. In the meantime one of the Rocket Brigade had awakened the inmates of the chemist shop opposite and got them to telephone the Police Station; while the police and others of the Rocket Brigade procured another hose from the Gaol, which also turned a jet of water on the burning building. The Fire Brigade under Superintendent

A.G. Butterworth, Town Engineer, and Lieutenant Anderson, appeared on the scene some forty minutes after the alarm was given, but the fire had then obtained SUCH A HOLD of the building that it was practically impossible to save it. Shortly after the arrival of the Fire Brigade a regrettable misunderstanding occurred between them and some members of the Rocket Brigade, Lieutenant Anderson being of the opinion that the latter were doing wrong in breaking a certain window, which, apparently, was being done with the object of throwing into the blazing interior another jet of water, and the Rocket Brigade withdrew.

Both Inspector Hingle and Sub-Inspector Mason were on the scene. By the time the Fire Brigade arrived the roof had fallen in, and the whole place was one burning furnace. As the roof crashed in a dense cloud of sparks shot heavenward like a brilliant display of fireworks and as the heat increased it exploded innumerable tins of jam which were stored there, the contents of which added to the fierceness of the fire. The colour of the flames as they consumed THESE SUGARY SUBSTANCES was of a pretty pale pink, and one could not help admiring the blending of the different colours as the flames roared and crackled. The flames accomplished their work only too well, and when the work people arrived in the morning, they found nothing but the bare blackened outer walls, and inside the once busy hive of industry a black heap of smouldering ruins. The cottages on the opposite side of Elizabeth Street, belonging to the Reed Bros. combination, had a severe scorching, and the inmates, as may be imagined, got a bad scare. At one time this row of houses was in great jeopardy, but there was very little wind blowing, and the Brigade was able to stay the progress of the devouring fiend.

After the fire was subdued the wind sprang up somewhat, and after eleven o'clock several times fanned the smouldering ashes into renewed activity, but the Brigade were easily able to cope with this.

In the meantime the Fire Brigade were busy knocking down the outer walls which were on the quiver and were a danger, and at 12 o'clock Inspector Hingle, after consultation with Mr Butterworth, closed that part of Princes Street to traffic owing to the danger of the wall falling into the roadway. After that the trams, both from North and South only ran to the Chinamen's Garden on the one side and St Paul's on the other, and the passengers being allowed to cross, while the vehicular traffic was diverted down the side streets. We believe that the lozenge room is the only part of the factory now standing. The safe containing the firm's books and other valuable papers still stands under a mountain of debris, which until a late hour yesterday continued to smoulder, at times breaking out into flames. The fire

points to a better system of alarm, and also the very great necessity of a more speedy way of transporting the hose reel than human labour.

Obviously the fire fighting did not go as smoothly as would have been wished, as a result both the Engineer and the Rocket Brigade want to put their case. The Town Engineer reported as follows:

An alarm of fire at Pyott's Biscuit Factory, Queen Street. was received at the Fire Brigade Station, by messenger from the Police Station, at 2.27 a.m. yesterday. The hose reel was at the scene at 2.40, at which time the fire had obtained a complete hold of the whole premises, and the main roof had already fallen. The Police had got a single hose to work in Elizabeth Street from South Street sub fire station. There was a very full supply of water, principally from the Queen Street 9 inch main, and six jets were thrown on the flames, but it proved impossible to save the greater part of the premises, which were almost entirely gutted. Some of the stock and adjoining premises were saved. It is extremely unfortunate that the Fire Brigade were not communicated with earlier, as the fire originated prior to 1.30 a.m. an hour before we received the alarm. This is in my opinion not giving the Brigade a fair chance. The police rendered valuable assistance, working well under the order of the officers of the Brigade, and no additional assistance was required.

The P.A.G. Rocket Brigade who were on duty on the beach were also in attendance, but did not report themselves to the officers of the Fire Brigade on their arrival, and shortly afterwards withdrew. I again regret to have to call attention to the fact that persons entirely unauthorised broke in windows and doors on the ground floor before the arrival of the brigade, thus increasing the draught and rendering the fire more hopelessly beyond control. A hydrant was also broken by the attempts of some unskilled persons. This is the largest fire that has occurred in Port Elizabeth since that of Cleghorn, Harris and Wards premises."

To give the other side of the picture we have the report from Captain Wares of the Rocket Brigade. He communicated as follows:

He and ten men of the Rocket Brigade were returning home from watch on the beach, at about 2 o'clock, up South Street, and when opposite Pyott's factory saw smoke spewing

from the roof in the rear part of the premises. They went over to see what it was, and a policeman who was on duty there sounded his whistle as an alarm. The policeman asked the men of the Rocket Brigade to go down to South Street substation and get the fire-hose, which they did, and then assisted the police to attach the hydrant to the fire plug, and to pour a jet of water onto the fire. They had some difficulty finding the fire-plug, as it was covered up, and also in opening it. Some of the men then assisted the police to use the hose on the Elizabeth Street side of the building where the fire seemed strongest. After using the hose there for some time, they cleared and opened another fire plug a little higher up the street, with the object of saving time when the Fire Brigade arrived. The fire continuing to spread, Captain Wares sent several of his men to the North End Gaol, where they found a number of policemen getting the reel out of the shed there. The Rocket Brigade men assisted to get the reel out, and up to the fire, and after attaching the hose assisted the police in directing the water onto the fire. All this was done before any of the Fire Brigade had arrived. When the Fire Brigade arrived Lieutenant Anderson pulled one of the Rocket Brigade men who was assisting the police with the hose away from the hose, and told him to clear out. Another Rocket Brigade man was attempting to break in a window on the front of the premises, with the object of putting a hose through there, as he had done on the Elizabeth Street side under the direction of the police sergeant – so as to try and keep the fire from spreading to the northern side of the factory, when Lieut. Anderson laid hold of him, and handed him over to a native constable, and the men were told very abruptly that their services were not required. Captain Wares spoke to Mr Butterworth about his man being handed over to the police saying he thought after what the Rocket Brigade had done it was rather harsh treatment, especially as it was done with the object of assisting the Fire Brigade, and the man was released. Captain Wares estimates that it was quite 40 minutes from the time the alarm was given until the Fire Brigade arrived on the scene, and has expressed himself as very indignant at the way his men were treated after doing their utmost to keep the fire under control. Two of the Rocket Brigade went down to St. Patrick's Hall at the request of Lieut. Anderson to assist the Fire Brigade haul up their reel and when the fire was first seen one went over to Messrs' Monkman and Goddings Chemist shop, roused up the inmates and got them to telephone the alarm to the Police Station. The particular window that the Rocket Brigade was endeavouring to break in when Lieut. Anderson interfered, Captain Wares states was broken in about ten minutes later by the Fire Brigade themselves with the same object.

The premises of Pyott's including stock, machinery etc. were insured as under:

New Zealand	-	£2 500	Phoenix	-	£3 000
Imperial	-	£3 000	North British	-	£2 000
Union.	-	£3 000	Equitable.	-	£ 500

Sum Total – £14 000

The tale is told how natives in the vicinity rushed to the factory with tin cups and buckets to catch the jam as it flowed down the hill.

Where previously only the Four Mills had been situated in Broad Street now a new works factory was built in the same road. The 1907 Directory gives the address of the Works and Four Mills as Broad Street but by this time the offices had moved to the Cuthbert's Building. Pyott took great pride and delight in the new building and was up at 5 a.m. each morning to go down to work. He loved his family to show an interest in it.

It seems amazing that within three months of the fire the new building was almost complete. The old site remained vacant for many years until Pyott had a bioscope built and let the premises for £20 per month in 1913.

Out of the ashes a new and more vigorous business was to emerge.

## CHAPTER V

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### **THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL**

In 1834 the first attempt at a truly representative government was made when Sir Benjamin D'Urban arrived in the Colony as Governor and proceeded to introduce a new constitution which was known as a Crown Colony type government. It was to consist of an Executive Council and a Legislative Council. This latter body was originally made up of the Governor and four senior officials namely, the General Officer Commanding, the Secretary to the Government, Treasurer and Auditor General and also the Attorney General and from five to seven colonists nominated by the Governor and holding office during his pleasure and their residence in the Colony. The first nominees were all resident in the Western Province. Intense rivalry existed between the Dutch speaking Western Cape and the English speaking Eastern Cape, the latter feeling that they were at a distinct disadvantage when it came to representation. The Governor summoned all meetings of the Legislative Council, in which he had a deliberative as well as a casting vote. The establishment of the Council was a real advance along the road to self government, for its' consent was necessary for any legislation to be passed and it had both the freedom of debate and the power of the initiating legislation except in regard to certain reserved subjects. The meetings of the Legislative Council were open to the public and the Press. Members had to be at least 30 years of age and had to possess £4 000 worth of general property or immovable property to the value of £2 000.

In 1874 the Legislative Council was altered to consist of 21 members elected for seven years, three from each of the seven circles into which the quarrelsome Eastern and Western Provinces were divided. In 1904 John Pyott was elected to represent the South Eastern Circle on the Legislative Council. He had some political experience at local level but his interest in the economics of the country clearly coloured his political outlook. When Pyott knew that he was to sit on the Legislative Council for an indefinite period, James Mudie was appointed joint Managing Director with him, of Pyott Limited.

An insight into the workings of the Council as well as into Pyott's ideologies and political leanings is best illustrated in a speech which he delivered to the Mayor, and Councillors of Port Elizabeth after a Parliamentary session.

"In appearing before you tonight as one of your representatives in the Legislative Council, I feel that I am taking up valuable time which might be better employed by those who are to follow; who have not had the opportunity of laying their ideas before you at such a recent date as I have. Their positions in the Ministry and as your representatives in the Assembly,

may enable them to lay before you more valuable information anent matters of vital importance, not only to this community, but also to the Colony of which we form a part. Bearing this in mind I shall be brief and to the point as far as possible.

Since appearing before you some four months ago another session has come and gone; to my mind one of the least productive through no fault of this present Ministry, but the fault of the Opposition in their desire to hamper and oppose useful measures which might have been introduced during the past session

I am not opposed to fair criticism on any measure, and I think it is only right that all sides of any question be fully discussed, but the Opposition have gone out of their way to hinder and retard the work of this Session, especially in the Estimates and the Irrigation Bill. The latter if only set ageing on proper lines should prove the salvation of this country in so far that it would tend to assist us in feeding ourselves with many articles we now import.”

Pyott went on to deal with a number of different political and commercial problems.

**“LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL”** - Mr Mayor, your representatives in the Legislative Council have had to make strong representations to the Government many times throughout the session regarding the way in which the business has been rushed in to the Legislative Council during the last few days of the Session. This made it impossible to give measures the consideration they deserved, and there might as well be no Upper House of Review at all.

Until there is some alteration in the Constitution, or some other method of payment of members things will never be any better, and I for one feel that we might as well be at home attending to business instead of wasting our time waiting for measures that may not reach us for weeks. A matter of importance that has taken up the time of both houses and is of paramount interest to this Colony is the New Customs Convention, and although not all that one could desire, to me it is a movement in the right direction and a step forward towards the federation of the British states in South Africa.

In touching upon this Protection Policy I know that I am bringing forward a point upon which some of my friends do not quite agree with me, but in view of the present depressed state



of South Africa as a whole, I feel that every item that can be conserved to South Africa is of the greatest importance to us, especially the conservation of what capital we may have left, and in giving employment to our own people; employment which is so badly wanted today in most of the large towns throughout the country. Much has been said about Protection increasing the cost of living, but I for one have not found it so, and my idea of reducing the cost of living is to produce our own requirements and until we do so there is little possibility of any great reduction in the cost standard today.

**MEAT DUTIES** - I do not think you have found any increase in your butchers bills as a result of the imposition of the duty of 1¼ pence per pound within the past few months. At least I am told on the best authority that meat is cheaper today than when it was allowed into this country free.

**EDUCATION** – There are one or two other matters of importance to this community that occurred last session, and one was the Amendment to the Education Bills of 1905, which now clearly defines the position of who shall elect the Board to manage educational affairs in our midst.

**SHOPKEEPERS BILL** - The Shopkeepers Bill passed last session goes a long way to protect the interests of wholesale merchants from the nefarious methods of certain unscrupulous traders, and which will be a great benefit to them in their dealings with up country and out of the way store keepers. It will tend to keep the trade of the shopkeepers in the best and most legitimate channels, and to a certain extent free the honest trader from unscrupulous dealings of many aliens who have absolutely no stake in this country.

**RAILWAY AFFAIRS** - Now, Mr Mayor, there is just one other point and that is one which is in the minds of every citizen today – the difficulties of the Railway position in South Africa. Your members have continued to peg away at this question both in and out of Parliament, but without any practical result, and now feel that the position we have to face today is one that cannot be settled by our Ministers but is a matter for the Imperial Authorities upon whom we must bring our strongest influence to bear. We must endeavour to lift the bar which stands across our legitimate way to the northern territories and trade. However, this

is a matter which will be dealt with more fully by those to follow me, and they are much better versed in these matters than I am.

**HOSTILITY TO THE MINISTRY** – Referring now to the attitude by a certain section of this community against the present Ministry, as one who has not always seen eye to eye with them on every point and who has studied their position very closely, I say that the attitude taken up by those people is a most unreasonable one.

In the present state of this Colony no Government which had the country's best interests at heart could possibly have taken up any other.

Gentlemen, you elected me to represent you with all my crude ideas of politics and to support the Progressive Party on their broad principles. I have done so, and at this moment see no reason why I should not continue to do so in the future."

John Pyott's perspicacity as regards the irrigation of the country is interesting. As far back as 1903 he had shown great interest and foresight in getting the Sundays River Scheme off the ground. Before 1912 and the Irrigation and Conservation of Waters Act, irrigation had been almost completely ignored throughout South Africa, yet agriculture was one of the prerequisites of becoming a self sufficient nation.

In touching on the protection policy it may be pointed out that in no dominion were the aims purely economic - they were social and political as well. Though tariffs and bounties might exact a price in money, they gave a return which was greater than material wealth namely they prevented the disintegration of the rural population.

The Customs Tariff of 1889 in the Cape introduced at the time of the customs union with the Orange Free State; was assailed by some as a protective tariff. It did make an important concession to local manufacturing interests by reducing the duties on imported raw materials like leather and timber. However, it also reduced duties on machinery and mining tools and was therefore not a genuine protective tariff. The political and economic rivalry between the two land-locked Boer Republics and the two British coastal colonies prevented a truly protective tariff policy.

While Pyott was Whip in the Upper House of the Cape Parliament he was a member of the Select Committee which sat for the purpose of enquiring and reporting on the condition of

the manufacturing industries of the Cape Colony. In 1908 he had once again to campaign in preparation for the Legislative Council elections. He was also serving on the Industrial Commission at this time. On the 13<sup>th</sup> January, 1908 Pyott wrote that they were in the last week of the election (it was to take place on the 21<sup>st</sup> January) and that most of his time was taken up with addressing public meetings in the evening. He was unsure of the political climate as the depressed state of the economy led to mixed feelings amongst the electorate. His own inclination was to spend more time on his personal business problems but as he had stood for re-election he was unable to back down at that stage. As it happened he lost his seat on the Legislative Council but was immediately approached to stand for the Assembly. He felt that he could only agree to this on the condition that some of the prospective candidates dropped out.

Pyott had served a very useful part on the Legislative Council and had been instrumental in formulating definite ideas on Colonial Industries and other touchy issues which were dear to the manufacturer's hearts.

## CHAPTER VI

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### **THE MANUFACTURERS UNION**

In an address given at a public meeting of the South African Liberal Association in Cape Town on 30<sup>th</sup> September, 1904, John M Stephen, President of the Chamber of Commerce spoke on the Fiscal Question as effecting S.A. Industries. His views on many aspects reflect those of John Pyott's. He too was a firm advocate of making the Colony self supporting, and also felt very strongly on the matter of protecting one's own industries. Under the Customs Tariff which had existed until 1903 there had been a certain measure of protection although the then Premier called it a revenue-producing tariff. The various industries did advance albeit slowly under that tariff. However, with the Customs Convention things altered radically to the detriment of the British Colonial Colonies. The principal Colonial Industry which was prejudiced by the new tariff was that of agriculture. The reduction of the duty of 2 shillings per bag on wheat, oats, barley and hay plus the altered railway rates gave local farmers little hope of competing against the growers of Australia and South America for the Transvaal market. The wheat farmers especially should have been encouraged to grow sufficient wheat to meet the needs of the country. Besides the advantage of keeping money in the colony which would ordinarily otherwise not remain there, should Britain be involved in war they would not be affected. The finest classes of Cape wheat compared favourably with any in the world. While a good loaf of bread could not be baked out of flour milled from purely Australian or Californian wheat, it could from the best Cape product.

Intimately connected with the wheat duties were those placed on imported flour. When the framers of the tariffs proposed such a disproportionate duty on flour compared to wheat not have calculated the percentages of yield or the cost of milling. The standard of excellence attained by some of the colonial mills could be favourably compared with any in the world. The machinery was of the most modern as were the milling procedures. However, imported flour costs almost less than the locally produced product because of the tariffs imposed on the latter.

In connection with the bakery and confectionery trade another serious defect in the Convention was to be noted i.e. all ingredients which had to be imported for making cakes and biscuits were very highly taxed. The importance of this to the baker was obvious.

In a letter to the General Manager of the Railways (Cape Government) Port Elizabeth Pyott noted with regret the Prime Minister's refusal to reduce by 25% imported produce milled in the Colony, to help millers meet the competition of overseas manufactured goods. He hoped that the case would not be lost sight of at the Customs Conference of 1905.

In an undated speech John Pyott held forth on the Colonial Industries: 'This is a point that one always approaches with a good deal of caution upon a public platform in P.E. and feeling that I am one of those Octopuses that has the misfortune of owning a Mill I do so now with a good deal of hesitation, but since the past Government has cut our suckers to such an extent that today we are unable to feed ourselves – and gentlemen, millers are not the only octopuses about - I not only want to put in a plea for millers for fair play but also for all other industries which manufacturers have started by hard work and energy and have placed their capital in, which not only give work to the people of the country, consuming the produce of the country and consuming the money in this country. Manufacturers of this country do not ask for anything unreasonable. They ask for fair play and I am pleased to see the note that the leader of the Progressive Party has struck in connection with the industries of this country. Gentlemen, I maintain that no true success can be attained until we begin to learn to live more within ourselves instead of living upon the products of other countries.

Both John Stephen and John Pyott firmly suggested the formation of a Manufacturers Association with branches spreading throughout the Colony and possibly affiliated to similar associations in O.R.C. Transvaal and Natal, it would:

- a) be able to voice opinions which would be treated with respect by the legislation,
- b) have as its' main objective the welfare of those interests on which the prosperity of the country depended;
- c) encourage interdependence between town and countryside.
- d) The Association could possibly induce an early meeting of the signatories to the Customs Convention to induce them to re-arrange those things which were detrimental.

By June of 1905 it was evident that John Pyott was determined to form a proper Manufacturers Association. In a letter to Mr Richard Rothdubel – a pioneer South African furniture manufacturer and a founder member of the S.A. Manufacturers Association (for-runner of Federated Chamber of Industries) – he stated that the Midland Manufacturers Association had raised the required £120 necessary for the appointment of a new Secretary. However, their proviso was that Mr Thomas Bagnell be appointed to the post and should be in a position to travel the Colony in the interests of the Colonial Industries. He had, had

experience as he had been secretary of their Association for some years and his ability was proven.

Pyott hoped to get up a combination of manufacturers before the Customs Conference was held in October, 1905. He pointed out that they had done nothing as far as East London was concerned for they were not in close contact with their Secretary but a Mr Reid would call on him and Pyott had no doubt that they would contact Rothkubel directly on the subject.

In a letter to Thomas Bagnell explaining why the situation of Secretary to the Manufacturers Association was vacant Pyott wrote as follows:

“I was invited to attend the Executive Meeting of the Cape Town Manufacturers Association on behalf of the Port Elizabeth Manufacturers and at that meeting told them that I was not satisfied that their Association was doing all it might do for Colonial Industries. Meeting Mr Ross (Chairman)? Next day he informed me that they had decided to dispense with their Secretary. I told him that I thought that this was not before time. I pointed out that I had very little to report to the Port Elizabeth Manufacturers when I got round and should like to meet the executive of their Association with the object of considering ways and means whereby Colonial Industries would be brought to the front in the next six months.” This meeting was duly arranged and Pyott recommended the appointment of a new Secretary, the securing offices and a typist. He also recommended that they interview Bagnell for the post before considering anyone else. His letter continues: “My scheme as laid before them was to have a guarantee fund of, say, between £300 and £400, half of this to be found in Cape Town, two thirds of the balance by the Port Elizabeth or Midland Association, and the remaining third by East London, King Williams Town and Queenstown. This, I felt would be a guarantee of a Secretary’s salary, office and travelling expenses, for six months, and suggested, in the event of their appointing a proper Secretary, that he work Cape Town for, say, a month or six weeks including the district. He should then come around to Mossel Bay and endeavour to start an Association there. From Mossel Bay on to Port Elizabeth and spend about a week or ten days working up this place. After a visit to Grahamstown, the next place would be the East London district; and any other place in the Colony where the manufacturers are carrying on business. As you were aware, there will in all probability be considerable opposition from Natal and the Transvaal to a policy of protection for Colonial Industries. I then suggested that this man (i.e. the Secretary – ed) after doing the Colony ought to go on to Natal and work up via Maritzburg to Pretoria, Johannesburg and probably Bloemfontein, stirring up enthusiasm and forming Associations as he goes along. This would be of great assistance to our delegates to the Conference if we had a certain amount of support from the manufacturers of the other States”.

Pyott indicated that the Secretary's post was to become permanent only if the Association were worked up satisfactorily. He felt strongly that Bagnell was the man for the job and was sure that the manufacturers would take a greater interest in their own affairs after they had been visited by the Secretary. They badly wanted to feel that something definite was being done.

"I may say that at my last interview with Dr Jameson and Mr Walton upon the subject of Colonial manufacturers being represented at the forthcoming Conference I urged that every trade should send a delegate to Cape Town to place their views in regard to their own particular manufacturers before the delegates who are to represent the Cape Colony at the Customs Convention. I tried to get a promise from Dr Jameson that we manufacturers should have direct representation amongst those delegates, but without success; although I think that combined action on the part of the Associations would secure that point. You might give me your views on this matter".

In postscript Pyott congratulates Bagnell on his election to the post. In a letter to Mr E.H. Walton M.L.A on 13<sup>th</sup> June, 1905 Pyott points out the following "... I take the opportunity of bringing before you the fact that I have seen an agreement between the Government of the O.R.C. (Orange River Colony) and a firm of manufacturers here in the Leather trade who are contemplating starting business in Bloemfontein, and they are offered by the above Government a bonus of 5 shillings on Cattle hides; one shilling on Sheep and Goat skins; over 3 shillings per pair on children's boots and 18 shillings per pair on men's. As the matter is a very serious one for the manufacturers in this Colony I trust that the Government will do something in the matter without delay, as I do not see how this system (bonus) is going to work in with the Customs Conference. Strong representations ought to be made by our Government of the O.R.C. that these bonuses should be held in abeyance in the meantime...."

The discovery of gold and diamonds gave the original stimulus to manufacture but the Great War provided the greatest boost to manufacturing industry. Practically all manufacturing industry, as well as most agricultural enterprises is dependent on protected or sheltered markets.

## CHAPTER VII

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### **FORBES AND CAULFIELD AND THE RUMANIAN FOREST SCHEME**

Five years after Forbes and Caulfield were founded they were formed into a private limited liability company with Mr William Forbes and Mr W.F. Caulfield as Managing Directors. They were wholesale general merchants and their premises were in Queen Street and the Victoria Quay. Amongst the specialities carried by the firm mention must be made of Washburn Crosby's Gold Medal Flour which was apparently unable to be surpassed for bread making. It was presumably primarily for this commodity that Pyott depended on them.

They were also agents for Peark's Tea, Izol Disinfectants and the Eureka Company of Rock Falls, Illinois, U.S.A. who supplied them with a fine display of buggies, Cape carts, Spiders and Landaus.

In 1900 and 1901 Pyott bought a large number of shares in Forbes and Caulfield. They were also responsible for involving him in various speculations. One of these was the purchase of a forest in Rumania. Pyott hoped to be able to use his own wood for the sleepers required for the railway for the Sundays River scheme. It has been suggested that the S.S. Newton was used for the transportation of the timber but no concrete evidence has been found to verify this. The scheme was never a success and Pyott found himself throwing good money after bad. In addition to this with the South African economy lapsing into a depression at that time Forbes and Caulfield found themselves becoming insolvent and whereas they had owed Pyott £2 938 in 1904 by 1905 they owed him £12 000. He in turn mentioned to William Kinnear in Dundee that it was well nigh impossible to extract money from them and went on to say, "If only you knew the underhand work that has been going on you would be disgusted with the whole crowd" and again "I do not grasp all the Forbes and Caulfield business but to me it is the rottenest concern that I ever had anything to do with".

On August 21<sup>st</sup> there was to have been an extraordinary meeting of Forbes and Caulfield Pty Ltd. to discuss their position. However, it had to be cancelled as Caulfield went up country and without his representation the company could not be put into liquidation. Pyott thought that the matter might have to go to the Supreme Court. "My experiences of those men are enough to make me lose faith in mankind". He has set a good many stories going



about my injustices to him and also retaining my friend (presumably Lawson Brown) to wind up the estates. I hoped to have him face to face to go into the matter but he has turned tail and fled". Needless to say they were also involved in the Rumanian Forest business with Pyott. In the same month John Pyott bought 100 shares in Pyott Limited from Henry Forbes for Pyott Ltd. at 27 shilling and 6 pence each as he did not want them 'hawked about town'. Forbes then informed him that Caulfield wished to sell 250 and asked whether Pyott would buy any further. Pyott put him off as he wanted to see first how Mr Caulfield stood with Forbes and Caulfield and how he had managed to transfer them into his wife's name.

In connection with the forest business, Pyott informed Kinnear that the sleepers were poor and bemoaned the bad speculations that they had been landed with by Forbes and Caulfield. In July of 1905 he made a concerted effort to sell the sleepers to the Railways. He writes as follows:

"With reference to my last interview with you re 20 000 Oak Sleepers now lying at P.E. as there is no possibility in the near future of carrying out my scheme of running a branch railway from Bluecliff down to the Sundays River Valley, and as the sleepers are only eating their heads off in storing charges and at a great loss to myself I beg to offer the sleepers to you at 2 shillings and 1½ pence per sleeper and trust your department can see it's way clear to purchase the same ...." He goes on to say that the department had some time previously examined the sleepers. He also points out that he stood security for a contract to the tune of £1 000 through the Robinson Bank and forfeited this money to the Railways when the contract was not carried out.

Pyott mentioned that they were having a meeting of the shareholders late in July and in the meantime were endeavouring to work out the Rumanian business to the best advantage but confessed that their losses were going to be heavy. He did not have any confidence in Caulfield and his hopes that after the disaster of his present business he would be able to start again in a small way. 'His reputation in the past will prevent him from going very far and I need not assure you that he will never get a penny of credit from this firm and I question whether he will get it anywhere else'. Mr Forbes was unfortunately a drunk although a fairly decent fellow, so he would not consider the reconstruction of the business at the present time.

In September, 1905 the Rumanian Forest balance sheet was sent to John Pyott by a Mr Williams (Manager in Rumania) but he found it rather puzzling. He mentioned that had he not been schooling himself for the previous six months the balance sheet would have been a tremendous shock. Luckily he had been anticipating the worst and the worst had not come to pass i.e. they were able to pay the money which had been borrowed from the Rumanian Bank. With the unsatisfactory statement to hand it was obvious that Kinnear with whom Pyott was conferring on the matter would have to go to Rumania.

Although Kinnear felt that Williams had not been receptive to Pyott and the company's interests Pyott did not altogether agree for he felt that they were not able to cope with the business because they did not know anything about timber, they were far away from Targoju and had been unable to get reliable men to manage the business and were sceptical that any reliable men existed in the country. Forbes had pointed out that Williams was spending lavish sums of money but they had no other alternative but to keep him on. 'To have gone any further with Forbes would have been madness, as up to that point he had been a failure and the whole country i.e. Rumania had been up in arms against him' things were in such a muddle that he would never have straightened them out without a knowledge of the language so it was imperative to place practical businessmen at the head of the business although it was at some expense.

With regard to the whole scheme Pyott put forward three alternatives; abandonment, sale or carrying on with the present manager or the Head Saw Miller that Forbes had and who seemed fairly honest.

The title to the property was not a very secure one and if they tried to sell they would have to be sure that the buyers understood that they would take the titles as Pyott had them and under the same conditions. With regard to the timber it was possible that they could sell it as it stood to the Bulin Holtz Company but they would have to be wary that the Government did not come down on them for the taxes.

Complete abandonment on the other hand was also a risk. Pyott was not sure whether one could do this without further trouble. 'Why I come to discuss this point is that I notice

from your letter of 24<sup>th</sup> August, to Williams that there is a deficiency of £2 500 to £3 000 . Now, if this is going to continue, my advice is to throw the whole thing up without any further trouble, but I can scarcely realise that there is a direct loss of that amount. In plain English it means that they have sold £5 000 worth of wood and to prepare and sell that wood it has cost close upon £8 000. Am I correct in this assumption? If so get rid of the thing for once and for all. Whatever you do make it a clear point that whoever takes it in hand gets no more cash from us!

When John Pyott discussed the matter with Mr Scrimgeour who was a timber merchant, the latter advised in favour of abandonment as far as he could assess the situation. The Baroness in Rumania from whom they had bought the Forest, in addition to everything else was pressing a claim of £1 000 and the loss in the previous ten months trading did not appear to bode well for the future. The suggestion that Mr Mudie should go out to Rumania with Mr Kinnear seemed an unnecessary expense as the latter was quite capable of discussing the problems with Mr Williams on his own. 'Mr Kinnear, my feeling in this matter is very strong. I would rather live on a crust than go through the same suspense and anxiety that I have experienced every Thursday until I see the contents of your letter in this connection. This may seem like the 'funks' but it is the absolute truth'.

Pyott after a few further points specified that he was prepared to leave the decision as to the handling of the business to Mr Kinnear but the one condition was that they should lose no more money.

'I am prepared to face my present loss of £13 000, but further than this I will not go.

In the event the project was abandoned and a rather unsatisfactory venture came to an end.

## CHAPTER VIII

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### PROPERTY

John Pyott owned considerable property over the years. Prior to his marriage he lived in a house in Queen Street. It was here that both he and his brother George were married. Soon afterwards he moved to Elizabeth Street and it was in this double-storied home that Maggie and Bob spent the first years of their lives. In 1896 the family moved to Balbeuchly House, Middle Avenue until 1899, when they returned to Elizabeth Street until their beautiful home 'Kinnoull' was built at 62 Park Drive. The erf was number 3234 and in size covered 34 102 sq. feet. The property stretched from Park Drive down to Hallack Road at the back and it was on this part of that land that the stables were situated. The building of the house was commenced in 1903 and was completed in 1904. Carpenters were brought out from Scotland to work on the homestead and when their task was completed they were retained as maintenance staff at the factory. Most of the timber, cornices, skirting's, ceilings, flooring, doors and in fact cement were bought from John Scrimgeour and Son of Port Elizabeth. The bay windows at the front of the house were of particular interest as they were made of conves glass. It was noted in 1906, however, that when the house was closed for any length of time it seemed prone to damp. While the Pyott's were overseas the housekeeper, Mrs Halse, was instructed to open blinds and ventilate it.

An interesting snippet on the furnishing of the house is recorded in a letter from John Pyott to Mr Binnie:

'I am sorry to trouble you again but I have got particular beans over the carpets I selected, not for the quality but the outrageous colour which my wife say does not harmonise with the furniture, so much so that my wife is disposing of them and putting down the old ones again. My object in writing to you is to ask you to get the previous suppliers to send out a small range of samples so that my wife and daughters can select what they require. They want a shade of green, but what shade I don't know, - with scallops of roses on the border. ....'

William Kinnear obviously gave Pyott his ideas on the garden at 'Kinnoull' but the worthy owner of that house replied as follows:

'I note what you say about gardening but I can assure you that it is not in my line, but I try to impress upon the missus that it is a fine thing to keep down her proportions and especially good for the complexion, and by that means she does most of it'

In 1940 'Kinnoull' was worth £6 230 which indicates its' graciousness and size. After John Pyott died in 1947 the house was sold and later sub-divided into flat lets. A few years ago it was demolished and Elizabeth House was built on the site. The ground had long since been sub-divided. A watercolour of 'Kinnoull' by Simone Garr hangs in the entrance hall of the block of flats. Only the number 62 Park Drive appears on the painting, and there is nothing on the plaque to indicate that the house was owned by John Pyott, which seems a pity.

In June, 1905, John Pyott owned the following properties:

- 1) Dwelling in Park Lane; 2) Middle Avenue; 3) York Road; 4) Prince Alfred Road; 5) Kent Road and later in the year he acquired the Forbes and Caulfield Stores in Queen Street and at the Grahamstown crossing.

Most of the houses were let. At this time the Prince Alfred Street houses rental was reduced from £3.15 shillings to £3.10 shillings. After having accepted tenders for the painting of Balbeuchly House from R Hamilton of Fryer Bros. it was advertised to let in May, 1905. It drew only one response and the rental of £7.10 shillings was considered too high! A month later a letter was sent to the P.E. Advertiser cancelling the advertisement.

In November 1906 a house in Prince Alfred's Road was to let. It comprised 4 rooms and a kitchen. Letting often proved a difficult task and maintenance costs (i.e. leaky roofs) were too high. In the same year Pyott acquired another property in Fettes Road which he let. It had 5 rooms and a kitchen. Apart from letting dwellings Pyott was anxious to get tenants for the stores lately occupied by Forbes and Caulfield. He offered the premises (3 storeys' and 200' x 30') to Messrs' Mayer and Coy. for a factory and wrote as follows:

'The premises are those which belonged to the late firm of Messrs' Forbes and Cauldfield Ltd. and are situated in the Grahamstown Road at the point known as Grahamstown Crossing. The site is a good one, having easy access to the town and being possessed of a Railway siding commends itself very favourably for the purpose for which it is required or to anyone requiring accommodation for receiving, storing and forwarding of goods..... As to the selling price I am not in a position to give you that at the moment, but the rental I am prepared to put down at £25 per month, which sum, however, does not include the Municipal Tenants rates. The quit rent on the property is £10 per annum.

This offer obviously came to nothing.

In November 1911 Mr Charles Macdonald, Pyott's secretary and the person who handled most of John Pyott's business especially while he was away, reported that there had been two enquiries about the Grahamstown Road store – one from a mattress factory and the other from Isaacs the 'furniture people' who had the audacity to offer £12 when told that the rent was £20. However, he thought that they would take the place as they were in dire need of accommodation near to their premises. By 1915 Mosenthal and Co. were renting the building. On 11<sup>th</sup> March, 1914 Pyott indicated that he was prepared to sell Balbeuchly House, Middle Avenue. It is interesting to note that the electric lighting was installed in No 1 Kent Road for the first time in April, 1917.

Some of the properties continued to present problems and at the end of October, 1922 Charles Macdonald wrote as follows to John Pyott: 'I intended speaking to you on the subject of your houses in Prince Alfred Road. If you remember I brought the subject up at the beginning of the year and you were to consider the matter. I had a talk with Bob Gillies the other day and he tells me that they were in a bad state. The roofs are gone and have been patched time and again and the verandas are just hanging on as it were.

The floors now being below street level are in many places rotten and in some cases badly need relaying. On top of all this there is a drainage question looming in the near future and if you are called upon to put in closets in the four cottages you will never get your money back for such an outlay. They stand at £805.5 shillings for the two taken over from Mr Whiting and £672 for the two built by yourself.'

On 7<sup>th</sup> November, exceptionally heavy rains were experienced for four days and there were complaints from all the properties of leaking roofs. Broad Street was apparently like a river and although some water got into the Mill and Silo basements no serious damage was done.

In 1912 Pyott decided to sell his land at Bayville and in a letter to Mr F McVleland of the South African Loan Investment and Trust Company, indicated that he was prepared to sell at £7 000 including the former's commission of 2½% and also that he would accept half in cash and the balance in Bond or Secured Bills. The possession of the property could be arranged with Mr William Pyott and could be at short notice in the event of bringing off a sale of the bulk of the stock on the farm. The sale of the property was not effected quickly for in July, 1912 Pyott in a letter to William indicates the lowest price he would accept for the farm was £5 500.

John Pyott owned one of the first motor cars in Port Elizabeth and it is amusing to note that he experienced problems which still apply to motorists today. In 1906 Charles Macdonald wrote that Pyott would have to pay £20 – £25 for a new set of tyres and some internal parts and said that he had had an offer from a buyer if Pyott was prepared to sell.

However, a few days later Macdonald wrote again : 'Mr Mudie and I were out for another spin in your motor car as far as Swartkops. We did the journey both ways splendidly and without a hitch. We came home from the 7<sup>th</sup> milestone to St. Pauls in exactly twenty minutes without stoppage. It is as far as I can see a machine which requires a little studying and manoeuvring and as Reeves says he understands it better each time he takes it out. I await your reply to my previous letter re the selling of it'. In the event it was never sold it was used again on a cart for the Pyott's golden wedding anniversary.

The next thing to which J.P. turned his active mind was the possibility of a Motor Tramcar. To this purpose he had one Alexander Clarke of Leith, a civil engineer and inventor, draw up blue prints and specifications for a suitable vehicle in 1907. This was intended to supersede the electric tram as it would be cheaper to run, more convenient and more efficient. The idea was never carried out.

One of the first Motor cars in P.E. owned by Pyott and again pressed into service at their 50th Wedding Anniversary in 1935.

## CHAPTER IX

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### **THE BISCUIT INDUSTRY**

The biscuit industry in South Africa did not have an easy passage to self-recognition. In common with many other industries it had to fight a deep-seated prejudice against local goods in favour of imported articles. There was widespread belief that it was worth paying double for a biscuit baked in England, Scotland, Ireland or Wales. However, they reckoned without John Pyott who recognised the fact that there was room for local production. He first made boiled sugar goods and handmade biscuits. When it became evident that a wider market was developing in Port Elizabeth's hinterland he took over a bakery and began making bread, cakes and jams as well. Most of the ingredients – sugar, flour, butter, cheese and syrup – were imported because South African raw materials were lacking in both quality and quantity. The Government gave a rebate on the overseas sugar but as soon as Natal was in a position to refine their own sugar, this was largely brought into use. Initially any failure in the confectionery art was attributed to the sugar but gradually problems such as humidity at the coast, flavouring, colouring and packaging were recognised and mastered. The sweets produced in the early days were of the simplest nature and it was not until the early years of this century that the quality reached the point of protective duty.

The manufacture of biscuits was progressing well when a small plant which had been imported in 1901 was offered to Pyott. It was bought for £130, including an engine and boiler, which was dear at the price as it bore evidence of the rumour that it had made the journey to the Diamond diggers and had then been turned back as the buyer could not pay the freight. When it reached Grahamstown it was dumped as it was not considered worthwhile transporting it any further. In attempting to put this machinery in order, John Pyott was inspired to go overseas to explore biscuit manufacturing in the United Kingdom. As a result he purchased from Europe the newest biscuit-making machinery, including 'stamper' and ovens. This plant served until December, 1903 when the fire completely destroyed the factory. Fortunately it had been paid for long before this time.

A lesser man might have read failure into the holocaust of the blazing store but John Pyott's answer to fate was to make a fresh start immediately on a scale larger than before. A new factory was built in Broad Street and an attempt was made to produce biscuits of better quality and type. However difficulties arose in regard to the right flour for high class biscuits. As long as soft flour was able to be imported, there were no problems. Various local millers tried to make soft flour but were unsuccessful and Pyott became convinced



that only flour ground on stone was suitable for the type of biscuits he wanted to produce. He discovered his mistake when a stone mill was installed. It was not the stones but the soft quality of the wheat that was needed so a properly equipped roller mill was introduced and the correct quality wheat imported.

In 1905 South Africa found itself in the depths of a depression and to a certain extent Pyott Ltd was affected. On replying to a Mr Mammond who was seeking a job Pyott indicated that it was 'difficult' to keep our own hands employed' and likewise he advised another applicant against returning to South Africa from Scotland at the present time. At this time two new machines were installed at the factory as there was an urgent need to increase production. Pyott himself felt that he could not spare the time to be one of a deputation to Jameson, representing the Colonial Industries. Things were obviously hard, as the Hon. J Mitchis M.L.C. for Cradock was approached by Pyott asking him to use his influence as a director of the Handels Maatskappy to get business for Pyott's with that Company. A more concerted effort was also made to obtain business through advertising. A direct approach was used by means of distributing handbills and printed packets. In order to give their new Citrus Guava Jam an 'extra push' samples were distributed. It was admitted that the price was high but on the other hand the quality of the jam was reputedly excellent. When Pyott wrote to Kinnear he passed on direct advertising suggestions. In 1899 John Pyott spent £290 on advertising. Later 2-3 000 small pocket books for advertising were ordered; also posters for new seasons jam. Tip Top Caramels, jam tit bits & Miladi Cream Cakes, and tins for Caramels, Nougat & Turkish delight.

In July of 1905 Pyott felt that they were unable to start a branch business in Cape Town as the Biscuit factory was already working overtime each night to fill local orders. It was agreed by the Directors to duplicate men and machinery in this department. Although the factory was very busy they were behind on hand goods from the bakehouse as Henegan (one of the employees) was on a spree again. Reid and Gouldin two of the travellers were in agreement that he should be replaced with men from Scotland. They were also in need of a panman as they felt that they were not up to the level of the competition in these products. They were also having problems with the quality of the sugar which was received in very bad condition. In addition a Mr Farrow reported that a new Biscuit Factory was to open to Durban which would constitute more competition for Pyott's. "Our big neighbours" i.e. Orange River Colony and the Transvaal undercut the price of meal by 1 shilling and this was causing concern. By the end of the month Henegan had returned, the bakehouse orders were almost caught up and the mill was working day and night shift. The company was fortunate to secure a Railway contract for suppliers of flour which was worth £20 000 – £25 000.

With regard to ships in the roadstead, the 'Loftus' offloading quantities of wheat and the 'Catherina' was expected but they hoped she would be delayed as their silo was full. Some

good orders came in from some of the travellers but Colouhoun's orders did not cover the expense of keeping him in the O.R.C. In the event when the 'Catherina' did begin offloading the quality of wheat was seen to be very poor.

Even though the times were in general hard, Pyott's appeared to be doing well. Pyott reported to Kinnear that business was good and that they had gone through approximately 5 000 sacks of wheat. 'Orders for the Bakehouse have just been slightly greater than our capacity even with me spending two days with them to try and push matters along'. To James Mudie in Dundee he wrote 'Matters with Pyott Ltd. slip along smoothly and it works like a well-oiled machine'. On 4<sup>th</sup> September, 1905 he reported to Mudie on biscuits ("Boy Mixed") jam, confectionery and fancies and also on their travellers Farrow, Colquhoun and Smith. "The Trades and Industrial Exhibition opened on Thursday afternoon and has been a great success. Mrs Pyott has got a stall and is selling for the benefit of YMCA funds but there is a great want of ready cash. The exhibit of Colonial Manufacturers is very far from our own one – some soap bricks and furniture about all there is. Mr Walton (M.L.A.) landed on Wednesday morning by rail and we had luncheon at the club with him on Wednesday and then he laid the foundation stone of the New Coledgate (sic) School at four o'clock. Savage then invited all the Merchants and leading men to lunch with him on Thursday and from there he drove down and opened the Exhibition at three o'clock this afternoon. There has been nothing definite done about railage rates but he holds out hopes that Jameson at home is endeavouring to get matters amicably settled through the Home Office." Business in general is very dead and the merchants complained bitterly at the club luncheon given for Mr Walton.

An interesting light is thrown on the other businesses in town – there were rumours that one of the big 'houses' were in difficulties. Mr J. G. Mc Farlane had come out to take over 'Mackie Dunn & Co' until the 'crisis' was over, and Mr Fryer was on the road out. (Rumour had it that Stephen Freser and Co. were 'in for £30 000 with this other firm') However, it appeared that Mosenthal and Savage were again coming to the forefront. ....I do not think that we can look to an improvement in trade until we begin to get better returns from our Farmers in wool and other produce.

Pyott felt that the Transvaal was a good potential market for their goods and to this end had sent one of his travellers, Farrow, to investigate the position. To break into the field in the Transvaal it was necessary to be doing business with every sound retail grocer in Johannesburg and the rest of the Colony and not merely have their goods bought up by those who hoped to sell again and make a profit. If the former could not be achieved the Transvaal market would have had to be abandoned. However, in 1906 a Johannesburg branch was opened.

The economic climate in Port Elizabeth caused intense competition in the Milling business between the different companies in P.E. and John Pyott suggested a conference to arrange prices amongst themselves so that the cut-throat prices could be raised. As the matter was of great importance the millers were given a week to consider their course of action. However, news of the proposed higher wheat price leaked out and there was immediately an extraordinary demand for the commodity. It was then suggested that an Eastern Province Milling Company be formed but Pyott was not in favour of this scheme as he felt that the power would be taken out of their hands and placed in those of the South African Milling Company. However, he did feel that it might be made workable if Pyott Ltd amalgamated with the Algoa Mill and the Milling Co. Absorbed the other two businesses. In that way they would have the Milling of the Eastern Province under their control. Pyott's actually milled a third of the wheat that came to Port Elizabeth. It was also unanimously decided to ask that the difference between the duty on wheat and its' product should be 1 shilling and 6 pence per 100 lb. instead of 1 shilling. The price of meal was to be advanced by 1 shilling a sack and all agreed to follow suit.

In 1907 John Pyott was exhibiting his wares in Cape Town. Mr James McLagan was handling the business down there. He organised that a stock of fancy confectionery of all types be made ready for exhibition purposes and also glass front tins for the machine made biscuits. A complete stand was to be sent down to Cape Town on the train together with Pyott's motor car once they knew what space had been allotted to them for display purposes. Interest was obviously shown in the exhibit for Pyott suggested 'you quote them for biscuits only. As soon as we have fixed you up a confectioner, the lower classes of confectionery may be quoted then, as also your stock of Apricot and Plum jam, unless they want assorted. If they are keen buyers I am afraid that we could not cope with the business and pay freight round to Cape Town'.

When Pyott came off the Legislative Council he took up his position in the factory and set about making a concerted effort to cut down the cost of production. Times were still hard and they had decided not only to prune their staff to the minimum but also reduce the salaries paid by 10%. At this time Robert Pyott returned from overseas where he had been gaining experience in the biscuit business. Pyott reports that he was pleased to see him but wished that they were busier so that they could offer him something in his line. He was sure though that some branch would be able to absorb him. Later in the year business improved considerably and the traveller for Pyott's, Mr Goulden was able to report considerable success in Cape Town, Johannesburg and Durban. Mr Myles who was running the Johannesburg branch was doing so economically.

James MacLagan at Woodstock in the Cape found that there was a great demand for jam and had consequently contracted for more fruit than in previous years. In Port Elizabeth

too they expected to do bigger business in the jam line as two of their competitors had retired and Pyott's were practically the only makers in the Eastern Province at that time. The price of jams was very low which left a small margin with which to work. The increase in the production of jam led to the shortage of tins. This caused Pyott to investigate making their own tins. He endeavoured to solder some but could not obtain a result which satisfied him. He asked William Kinnear to contact the English Condensed Milk Co. And enquire where they had obtained their machinery for tin making. Pyott was desirous of improving the appearance of the wooden packing cases and thought of acquiring a small printing machine to print on the boxes and give them a neater look. He also wanted a machine which would plane the wood.

By 1909 the economic position had begun to improve. The new season opened up a considerable demand for cakes so the factory was anxious to receive a peel cutting machine as soon as possible. The current cleaning machine which had recently been installed proved to be a great help. At this stage butter and margarine were still being imported. Later Pyott's were to use up to 98% of local raw materials, in this way the Company literally poured gold into South African coffers and their altruistic policy helped not only the local producers and manufacturers but also put Pyott Ltd. at the head of the leading biscuit factories in the Union.

In 1910 Pyott toured inland seeing what the prospects of an inland mill would be. However, it became obvious that there was no room for new milling ventures. It is an indication of John Pyott's tremendous drive and enthusiasm that he was always on the lookout for new and interesting enterprises. In this year the Company made a new profit of £7 900 as against a loss of £4 000 the previous year. By 1912 it became obvious that they would not sell the ground on which the old factory had stood in Princes Street so they erected a bioscope hall (The Gaiety Theatre) at a cost of £2 000 and let it for 3 years at £20 per month. During the war years between 1914 and 1918 Pyott's were kept very busy with Military Ship Biscuits. In 1915 they also ground mealies for the Military. They found that their Christmas goods too were particularly in demand. Both the factory and the Milling side were kept hard at work. In 1916 Pyott bought Humphrey & Martins Bakery business in Cape Town as an outlet for their mill products. It was taken over by Pyott Ltd in 1918. The depot which had been operating in Durban had had a great increase in sales. All the goods had been manufactured in Port Elizabeth and then sent around to Durban to compete against the local manufacturers. As the venture had been successful it was decided to go further and open up operations there in a similar fashion to the ones in P.E. and in Woodstock. (completed in 1914) The ground was purchased and the factory was commenced in 1920. The new business was to be floated as an entirely separate concern and was to be known as Pyott (Durban) Ltd. The capital was to be £100 000 and was being

offered to shareholders in Pyott Ltd. Miss J Pyott, Mrs Cordiner and Mrs W Kinnear were offered shares at 2 shillings and 6 pence each.

In July, 1935 John Pyott mooted the idea of a merger of all the principle biscuit manufacturers in the Union. However, Mr Boumann was not interested and eventually the subject was dropped. At this time Mr James Mudie passed away. He had been an integral part of Pyott's and his demise was sorely felt. On 30<sup>th</sup> November, 1943 James McLagan died. He had been in control of the Woodstock Branch from its' beginnings. He retired in 1934 owing to ill health but was Resident Director until 1937.

In the years between 1898 and 1924 Pyott's won over 70 medals (gold, silver and bronze) for their exhibits on shows. The variety of awards bears testimony to the number of products manufactured by the firm.

In 1947 the new factory in Darling Street was commenced. At this time it was decided that it would be more economical to manufacture in one centre, so the Durban and Cape Town factories were closed down. From October, 1949 Pyott's concentrated purely on biscuits. In 1947 when John Pyott died his brilliant business brain was lost to the company but the loyalty and tradition he built up was transferred to his son, Mr Robert Pyott who became Chairman of the Company. The new factory took three years to complete. The pride in efficiency and work continued and permeated the whole concern from the manager down to the Coloured sorters and packers.

The present Managing Director, Mr Sholto Shirras (1977) is the third generation to be involved in Pyott Ltd. His grandfather Alexander Leith Shirras was chief engineer for John Pyott and it was he who installed all the machinery in the Broad Street factory, later to become the Gaiety Theatre. His father, Alexander Milne Shirras subsequently became Managing Director and now has followed in his footsteps.

## CHAPTER X

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### FAMILY AFFAIRS

In 1908 John Pyott's mother died at Rustic Cottage, Ancrum Road, Dundee. Prior to Mrs Pyott's death John Pyott had written to William Kinnear saying, 'I note what you say with regard to my own people in Rustic Cottage. No doubt the cold weather has much to do with my Mother not feeling much strength'. Mrs Mahaffy was not well at this time; in fact her condition was reported to be critical. Pyott was, however, fairly philosophical and stated 'she is an old woman and not likely to be with us very much longer, but we can only hope for the best'.

In 1910, George Pyott Senior passed away. His granddaughter, Jemima was his sole beneficiary.

John Pyott's brother William remained farming at Bayville after Pyott himself had sold up. In June, 1914 William had a fire and all his stables were burnt and his horses lost. John wrote to him as follows:

'I understand you have lost all your horses and that it is most difficult for you and Mrs Pyott to get about. Mrs Pyott, Nancy, and I are leaving for England on Saturday and if it will assist you in any way we could let you have the mare Flossy (Nanc's riding horse) until we return as there is no-one to work her while Nance is away. Our old horse Prince is getting pretty well done up and I was just discussing with Mr Mudie the getting of another horse in place of it and if you thought Prince would be of any assistance to you, you could have him as soon as we could get another. Kindly write Mr McDonald on the matter'. It is not recorded whether William availed himself of the offer or not. Obviously Mrs Pyott and Nance were in England for the best part of the year although Pyott himself returned earlier. In November he went down to Cape Town to fetch his wife and daughter. They had apparently experienced a pleasant return trip and only regretted not having seen any German steamers, the First World War having commenced. In 1915 Pyott sent a donation of £25 for the starving Belgians. He intimated to Sir Edgar Nolton that he wished to appear anonymous. Two of Pyott's sons served in World War I, Ian and Earnest. The latter was wounded in Flanders in 1916 and so returned to his medical studies in Edinburgh. In May, 1916 Ian entered the War with a tank regiment. In June of that year he was transferred to the Royal Flying Corps. He served there with great distinction and in 1917 was the third man to shoot down a Zeppelin. For this he was awarded the Distinguished Service Order. His father and brother Ernest went with him to Buckingham Palace to receive his medal. It was a proud day for them all. In a letter to Jemima (his niece) Pyott wrote 'Well what do you think of your **BOY IAN**? I wonder what his Grandfather and Mother would have

thought!’ And again to Mrs Reid to whom he was sending goods for a bazaar in aid of War Funds. ‘Yes our boy has done well but he is now back in the thick of it in France and we hope for the best’. The girls too were at this time very busy working for the war effort. Mrs Peggy Russell recalls that she, Nance and Elsie gave a party at the end of the War (1918) at Kinnoull for the boys returning home. They spent two days preparing and the dining room table was laden with eats. In the middle of the fun John Pyott emerged and proceeded to tell the lads that their mothers were waiting up for them so home they all went – with the food uneaten! In 1918 the Spanish Influenza epidemic hit South Africa. It was reported that the Works at the factory had been practically closed for a fortnight and that the death toll had been very heavy.

At this time Pyott made soup and took it to the homes of those who were laid low. It was just another example of John Pyott’s goodness to his fellow men.

In 1920 he was sent to Australia on Government business and Mrs Pyott and Nance went with him from Port Elizabeth. On their arrival in Cape Town, Olive, who was nursing at the Rondebosch cottage Hospital, decided that she wanted to go too. Then it was decided that the voyage would do Bob good as he had been ill so a last minute application was made for passports for these two. On their return to Cape Town all except Bob continued on to England where they received news that Bob had undergone an emergency operation. John Pyott had also actually gone on the sea voyage to Australia to recover his health as he had found the tensions of having sons participating in the War great. It was during 1920 that Ernest became Resident Surgeon at the Hospital. He later married Ida Sadler, a nurse.

The Pyott’s all spent time overseas. Maggie and Bob were educated at the Methodist College, Belfast as boarders, whilst Nance, Frank and Elsie went there as day scholars. Later Maggie, Elsie and Nance went to Dresden, Germany to finish school. Maggie had a lovely contralto voice and wanted to go on stage and Elsie had the potential to become a concert pianist but their father did not approve of these careers for his girls. Maggie later married Jim Elsworth who had studied law at Cape Town, and Elsie married his brother Jack, when he came to Port Elizabeth after having served with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Rhodesian Regiment in East Africa. Ian and Ernest were both educated at Watson’s College, Edinburgh. Years afterwards when John Pyott had an enquiry as to the character of Mr James Allan, the head of the College he wrote: ‘Two of my sons finished their education under him and have resided in his house and there is no one I know of whom I could better recommend. Your boy will have the comfort of a real home. My boys although having left for some years still on their return to Edinburgh look upon Mr Allan’s house as their own.’

Olive received her education at Cheltenham College, England. It is interesting to note that Miss D Dobson's House account for her at Glenlee, Malvern Road, Cheltenham was £7.1.7 pence in 1918.

In 1923 the Pyott's once again planned an overseas trip. John Pyott wrote to Thomas Cook and Son and confirmed that they would join a Mr E Crage and his wife on a tour of India, China, Japan and America. They sailed for the East on 24<sup>th</sup> December, 1923 and intended returning to South Africa towards the end of the following year.



## CHAPTER XI

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### **RESERVE BANK, NORTH END LIBRARY, HOSPITAL, CHURCHES, SCHOOLS AND SPORTING BODIES**

**The Reserve Bank** - The Reserve Bank was managed by a board of twelve directors, of whom six (including the governor and two deputy governors) were appointed by the Government and six were elected by the stockholders from person's representative of commerce, finance, agriculture and other industries. On the 8<sup>th</sup> August, 1923 John Pyott was informed by W H Clegg, the Governor of the Bank that he had been elected to the Board of Directors. He served conscientiously in this capacity for many years and it was rumoured that he had bought a tremendous number of shares in the Bank at one stage to help it out of its difficulties. On the 10<sup>th</sup> July 1941 he received the following letter from the Bank:

'The Board have learnt with much regret of the ill-health of Mr Pyott which has necessitated his resignation, as conveyed in his letter of the 3<sup>rd</sup> June, 1941 as a member of the Board. In accepting his resignation as from that date, the Board wishes to place on record their appreciation of his long service as a Director and sincerely hope that he will make progress towards a full recovery of his health'.

His son, Robert, took his place on the Board and served on it for 19 years. Besides his Reserve Bank activities Pyott was a Director of the Aegis Assurance and Trust Company, Pyott (Durban) Ltd and Lennon Ltd. He was also a member of the Civil Service Club, Cape Town, the Port Elizabeth Club and the Chamber of Commerce.

**North End Library** – In 1906 it was decided to establish a library at North End. John Pyott was approached for a donation towards the building of the institution and gave £100. Nothing was done until 1909 when the Trustees of the North End Library applied to the Town Council for a loan of £1 000 to be used in the erection of suitable buildings. The Council consented to the loan on condition that John Pyott, Alfred Herbert Brookes and John Wynne all of Port Elizabeth stand surety for the £1 000 and the interest thereon. On 28<sup>th</sup> June, 1909 the following resolution was passed:

That the North End Library do hereby engage and agree to hold harmless and indemnified Alfred Herbert Brookes, John Wynne and John Pyott, who have agreed to guarantee payment of the loan by the Town Council of Port Elizabeth to the Library for One thousand pounds sterling (£1 000) and the interest thereon, as well as such persons who have indemnified or may indemnify the said guarantors in respect of such their guarantee for any

sum or sums they or any one or more of them may be called upon to pay and may have to pay in connection with such guarantee and indemnity respectively.

The Trustees who were indebted to the Town Council for the £1 000 were Daniel McLaren Brown, John Pyott and John Wynne. The interest rate on the money was 5½% per annum and the capital amount was to be due and recoverable by the 1<sup>st</sup> May, 1914. The Chairman and Secretary who signed the resolution were C. E. Butters and W. M. Steers respectively.

The Library building which stood on the site of what is now the Netherlands Bank, Harrower Road was opened on the 8<sup>th</sup> October 1909. The present North End Library was completed in 1934.

**Hospital** – It is recorded that as early as 1890 John Pyott donated £25 to the Hospital funds. From that time on he always readily gave or lent money for this purpose. In 1915 he gave £50 to the new Hospital Equipment Fund and in 1919 loaned them £5 000 for the Nurses Quarters. January, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1924 saw the repayment of the loan and £1 726.10 shillings and 9 pence were despatched to Thomas Cooks Agency to pay for another of Pyott's overseas trips. In recognition of his benevolence one of the blocks at the Hospital was called the Jeffrey (for his mother's maiden name) Pyott block and today there is still very much in evidence a Pyott Ward.

**Churches and Schools** - Pyott was a deeply religious man whose philanthropy did not stop at his own church only. His contribution to the Hill Presbyterian Church in every way was manifold. The Rev. McRobert became a firm friend and was often a visitor at 'Kinnoull'. Pyott was held in high esteem by all denominations. He donated cakes and sweets for the Wesleyan Bazaar and was at a later date invited by the Rev. Arthur Cragg to attend the opening ceremony of the new Lecture Hall and class rooms at the South End Wesleyan Church.

Pyott's reticence in letting his generosity be known is well illustrated in the following note to Mrs Humphrey of the Y.W.C.A. 'In reply to your remarks in reference to mention being made in the press of my donation please note that I have no desire of publicity being given thereto and my name must not appear through the medium indicated'. He gave a large amount of money to this organisation and also to the Salvation Army. He would never give cash to beggars but would give them a ticket for a meal and bed at the Salvation Army premises. In 1921 he sent 12 100 bags of Bakers flour and 2 200 bags of rough meal on a monthly basis to the Salvation Army until £75 had been worked up.

In October, 1914 he granted a loan to the Port Elizabeth Federation of the English Churchmen's Society for the completion of the contract price of St Mark's Mission Building, Buchingham Road. The Secretary of the Association Mr. Alfred Middleton also enclosed the deed of Transfer No. 994 with a diagram of ground on which the building stood and Pyott was to retain this until the whole sum had been repaid. By December, 1915 this had been done. Pyott continued to give donations to the Mission. He loaned money for St Columbus Presbyterian Church and the interest on the loan (6%) he donated to be used for the purpose of building a hall or buying a Manse for the minister. In 1944 he lent £600 for New Brighton Church Building and £1 000 in 1947.

As early as before the turn of the century Pyott was being approached for donations towards the local school funds. Each year he gave £2.2 shillings towards the North Grey Institute's Prize Fund. However, he was not only approached by local authorities but in 1907 Thomas Bagnall, Secretary of the South African (sic) asked him to give something towards the prizes to be given to school children for essays written for the exhibition. Needless to say he did not ask in vain.

On the 15<sup>th</sup> May, 1916 Pyott sent a cheque of £15 to Mr W.W.A. Way of the Grey Institute, being the first monthly payment towards the construction of a new playing field for Football at school. The field is situated on the MacLean Rd. side of the grounds and Frank and Peggy Pyott and their two daughters who lived opposite, reported being woken in the morning by the sound of the bugles. The field is named the Pyott field in honour of its' donor.

**Sporting Bodies** – Though John Pyott took little active part in sport himself he was very interested in it, especially football, and can almost be looked upon as a patron of sport in Port Elizabeth. He was Vice-President of the Olympic Club for many years and in 1907 turned down the nomination for this position in the Eastern Province Football Association, as he was to be overseas during that year. He was also the Hon. President of the Pioneer Amateur Football Club for a long period. This club was attached to the factory and many of the employees were members. It was not only in Port Elizabeth that these offices were offered to Pyott for in 1908 he was asked to be Vice-President of the Cape Town Merchants Association Football League. However, this he declined. In the same year it was decided to form an Association Football Club for Shop Assistants in Port Elizabeth and Pyott accepted nomination as Vice-Chairman of this body. He refused appointment as Hon. Vice-President of the Standard Football Club and later the Caledonia Football Club, but accepted the

nomination to the post in the North End Rugby Football Club, and also the Amateur Athletic and Cycling Union for 1920.

John Pyott was a member of the Port Elizabeth Bowling Club and it is interesting to note that his subscription for the year of 1907 was £1.11.6 pence. In the same year he wrote to the Secretary of the Gardens Bowling Club, Upper Orange Street, Cape Town and accepted election as an Honorary member of that Club. He also presented the PYOTT CUP which is one of the trophies competed for annually at the South African Bowling Championships. He was responsible for the bowling greens at North End Park.

He took an interest in golf and in 1912 sent a cheque of £10 to a Mr Rowling to cover the cost of ten Debentures in the North End Golf Club. In 1914 he mentioned the following to Bob Pyott, 'We have had the Ladies Golf Tournament on all week and would you believe it the weather so far has been perfect although I cannot say the same about the scoring!' Tennis also benefited from Pyott's generosity. In 1914 Charles Macdonald, Pyott's Secretary, wrote to a Mr George McIvor about the trophy for the Mixed Doubles Championships of the Port Elizabeth Institute Lawn Tennis Club and said "Mr Pyott is agreeable to donating the larger Cup costing about £9, however, as to the name of the cup Mr Pyott feels that there are so many about bearing his name that you might call it the 'Kinnoull Cup' after the name of his house.'

In 1920 he rejected the Vice-Presidency of the Prince Alfred's Park Tennis Club as he was to be overseas for the year.

He was a Vice President of the Union Cricket Club for some time although he confessed to knowing very little about cricket. The Croquet Club too approached him to hold office but this he turned down. So it was few sports in Port Elizabeth that did not know the name of John Pyott.

Besides sporting bodies Pyott played an active role in several agricultural Societies and Farmers Associations especially before 1912 when he was intimately involved with the Sundays River Scheme.

Something which is probably little known to Port Elizabeth citizens is that on the 29<sup>th</sup> May, 1923, John Pyott sent the Town Council £100 as a contribution towards the purchasing of the Donkin Pictures. These portraits of Sir Rufane and Lady Elizabeth Donkin were painted by H Mayer in the possession of Miss Violet Donkin until she decided to offer them to the Port Elizabeth Town Council. Today they hang in the City Hall.

## CHAPTER XII

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### **THE GOLDEN WEDDING ANNIVERSARY – 1885 - 1935**

On Thursday, June, 20<sup>th</sup> Mr and Mrs John Pyott celebrated their Golden Wedding Anniversary. All of the Pyott's children with their respective husbands and wives were able to be present on the great day. Mr and Mrs James Elsworth, Mr and Mrs James Ross and Mr & Mrs J. C. Elsworth came from Rhodesia, Mr and Mrs Ian Pyott from Durban and Dr. and Mrs Ernest Pyott arrived from England their voyage timed especially for the occasion.

The anniversary celebrations began with a family breakfast party numbering 26 at Mrs Randall Thomson's home. Later during the sunny, cool and windless morning an informal gathering was held on the beautiful green lawns of 'Kinnoull' for about fifty relatives and intimate friends. Tables were set out on the grass, where tea was served. A huge wedding cake adorned a central table. Round the base was a lovely arrangement of golden narcissi and maidenhair fern. From the top of the cake were alternate golden bells and slippers, and the crowning decoration was a beautifully fashioned book on the leaves of which were written "1885 – 1935" and opposite "Page 50".

The long veranda in the front of the house was massed with bunches and baskets and bowls of the most beautiful flowers, mostly reflecting the golden theme. Mr Atinton proposed the toast and touched on the wonderful success John Pyott had achieved, beginning in a small way and going on to become known throughout South Africa. It was not only in the material sense that he had made his mark – he was loved and respected by all. In replying to the toast Mr Pyott's speech was noticeable for its' quiet Scots humour. After the cheering had quietened down a strange procession was observed advancing up the driveway – it turned out to be the sons and sons-in-law drawing Mr Pyott's "Honeymoon Car" an old Stirling which John Pyott had imported from Glasgow in 1901. This was in fact Port Elizabeth's oldest car. It had no hood or windscreen, and was built rather like a low four wheeled dog cart, the seats back to back. The engine was at the back and the petrol tank in front. This ancient car, loaded with equally ancient luggage, was labelled "To Hankey", as it was there that Mr and Mrs Pyott spent their Honeymoon fifty years ago. The hero and heroine were drawn down the driveway in this contraption to the strains of "For they are jolly good fellows".

The E.P. Herald of 22<sup>nd</sup> June, 1935 noted the following:

Mrs John Pyott was dressed in a handsome frock of wine red with felt hat to match. Her daughter, Mrs Randall Thomson, who had all the arrangements of the delightful reception in her hands, wore a neat tailored frock of brown and white flecked tweed. Mrs Jim Elsworth wore a tailor-made grey flannel costume and Mrs Jack Elsworth was in a smart brown frock with white and brown collar and front.

Mrs Jim Ross was becomingly dressed in a pretty navy matelassé frock with light blue belt and blue posy, while Mrs Frank Pyott looked nice in a silver grey costume with long cape to match.

Mrs Ernest Pyott smartly tailored suit was of slate grey and navy striped cloth, and Mrs Ian V Pyott, from Durban looked handsome in a biscuit coloured crepe dress. The day concluded with a family dinner at the Port Elizabeth Club.

### **PHOTOGRAPH**

Back row, left to right	:	Peggy and Frank Pyott, Olive and Randall Thomson, Norah and Ian Pyott.
Middle row	:	Min & Ernest Pyott, Nance & James Ross, Elsie & Jack Elsworth
Front row	:	Ida & Bob Pyott, Mr & Mrs John Pyott, Maggie & Jim Elsworth

**LATER YEARS**

Mrs Annie Pyott died in December, 1942. As the Rev. W.D. Campbell said 'A man cannot be shown without his stage, his setting. The background of John Pyott's life was the faith and love of a devoted wife. Between them there were no secrets, no hopes that were personal or selfish, no sorrows which were borne alone and unshared. To have lived together for almost 58 years together in harmony speaks for itself of understanding, loyalty and integrity'.

John Pyott passed away at 'Kinnoull' on the morning of 24<sup>th</sup> July 1947. He had been failing in health for some months. In life he had achieved all a man could wish to achieve, success in business, success in society and success in his soul. There were few who did not benefit from his munificence. He brought from his native land Scotland. A sterling worth of vision.

In a touching speech at the 48<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting of Pyott Limited held on the 27<sup>th</sup> February, 1948, Robert Pyott, his son, and successor as Chairman of the Company, said, 'Before proceeding further it is my sad duty to record the death in July, last year of our esteemed Chairman, Mr John Pyott. His life was devoted to the building up of this business which stands today as a wonderful monument to his great ability, steadfastness of purpose and untiring energy. To the end of a long life of 85 years his main interest was the well-being of this Company and its' employees, and we will all miss his cheerful presence and wise council which guided our destinies over such a long period'.

After a service at the Hill Presbyterian Church, John Pyott was buried at the South End Cemetery.

## ERNEST

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Now Ernest is an ex M.D.  
Renowned for generosity,  
His money floating through his hands,  
Just like the trickling golden sands,  
He hurt his hand, the right one, from  
Unskilful handling of a bomb  
This is a blessing in disguise,  
We think, for otherwise  
With two good hands to give, we say,  
He'd give just all he had away.

## IAN

---

Ian the wit of the familiee,  
Fills the day with repartee,  
Nora the jewel in his crown,  
Decided she could not let him down,  
So for his sins,  
Presented him with twins.



## FRANK

---

And now comes our baby, Frank,  
Who has his sisters four to thank,  
His older brother three also,  
Who brought him up as he should go,  
A worthy Benjamin to be  
Of such a striking familiee

## MAG

---

And now you see my turn comes too,  
The oldest of the lot of you,  
No gift outstanding that I know,  
Except the wondrous way I sew,  
Rejoicing in the name of Mag,  
I fear I cannot boast or brag,  
Sufficient honour 'tis to be',  
The eldest of this familiee.

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