

Notes on Frank Sellers and the purchase of Weldbank and Croft Mills, Chorley

In March 1934 The United Africa Company Ltd, (UAC) a subsidiary of Unilever announced that they were planning to close these two mills in Chorley. Frank Sellers, who was at that time Weaving and Preparatory Manager at Croft Mill, made an offer to purchase the mills in order to keep them open.

This document is an index to various notes and pieces of correspondence and press cuttings which survive.

The correspondence is rather one sided, most of the documents I have are letters to him, rather than from him, so we do not have the complete story.

This [undated press cutting](#) gives some background to the situation which is also alluded to in the letters from the Chorley MP to Frank.

Draft (undated) of [letter to Mr Phillips](#) (of UAC/Unilever?) In this letter Frank refers to some consultancy (as we would now call it!) he did at another UAC mill some years previously. The letters relating to this are here. [Letter reporting on Holts Mill 5th April 1928](#)

[Letter to Holts Mill 13th June 1928](#)

Copy of Frank's "[Suggested Agreement](#)" with UAC. It seems that UAC had asked a price of £32,000 for the mills and in return Frank was asking them to guarantee to buy a certain amount of cloth from them for five years. This met with a refusal from Col Beddington in his [letter of 1st May 1934](#).

Frank then wrote to [Col. Beddington on 4th May](#) suggesting that negotiation might be possible.

From this point there is a gap in the correspondence with UAC, but it seems that Frank then visited the House of Commons to meet MP for Chorley (Douglas Hacking, Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department). There are three letters from him to Frank, responding to Frank's concerns about the future of the mills. Frank appears to have raised the legality, or at any rate the morality of UAC's purchase of Rices Mill in the first place, but the MP could offer him no comfort.

[16th May 1934 letter from MP](#) [17th May 1934 letter from MP](#) [28th May 1934 letter from MP](#)

The deal did go through, though on what terms I am not sure, but it was reported here in the Northern Daily Telegraph on [Wednesday in June 1934](#). It is very likely that Frank wrote most of this piece himself. These pages from one of his notebooks contain some very similar passages.

[Page 1](#)

[Page 2](#)

[Page 3](#)

[Page 4](#)

[Page 5](#)

The newspaper article tells that UAC paid out £2,500 in what we would now call "redundancy pay" to some of the workers. It seems that Frank tried to seek a payment for himself and possibly the others in the new business, but this was politely rebuffed by Col. Beddington in his [letter of 5th July 1934](#).

In 1935 Frank sought a loan of £4,000 from the Ministry of Labour, here is their letter of [28th March 1935](#) saying this would not be possible.

This [undated press cutting](#) from some time in 1936(?) reports on developments at the Mill.

This [poetic tribute](#) to Frank was penned by one of his workers.

Frank was a lifelong keen photographer and even took his camera to London for his meetings with UAC in 1934. He took a portrait photo of Col Beddington (which he later exhibited in a competition) and also made this [montage shot](#) of Col B (in profile) and the Unilever Commissionaire.

According to Frank's note books Croft Mill remained in operation running 150-200 looms making "Government Cloths" until it was closed in 1941 by order of the Cotton Control Board. The buildings were then used by the Government for food storage throughout the war, with Frank remaining as manager.

Tony Nixon – Grandson of Frank Sellers

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