

Personal recollections of working at "Mawer and Saunders"

By John Pendered

1940 to 1944

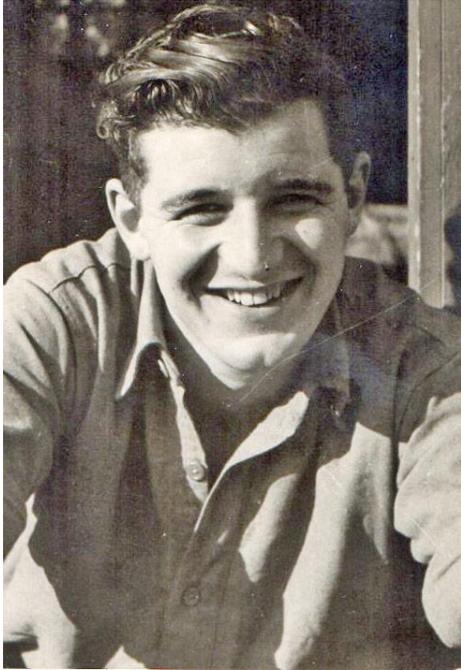
I was at Welland Park School and due to leave. My mother and father got in touch with Mr Reynolds, the headmaster. They went to see him about my future. My father, who was a driver on the railway, working in all weathers, was always keen that I should have a job working out of the weather. I had little idea of what I wanted to do. Mr Reynolds rang Mr Saunders who said he would be interested in employing me. I didn't have an interview, but my mother arranged everything. She took the lead because my father was working very unsociable hours, but my father went to the shop to see Mr Saunders Snr.

I joined Mawer and Saunders in August 1940. I was 14; it was a formal apprenticeship where I had to sign deeds. It was a four-year apprenticeship. In year one I earned 10 shillings a week, second year was 15 shillings a week, the third year was 20 shillings a week, and the fourth year was 30 shillings a week. However, because of inflation Mawer and Saunders never kept me down to those amounts. They thought I was worth a little bit more.

At that time, if you went to the pictures, a seat would cost you about 1s 3d. Of course the cheapest seats were the first few rows at the Oriental cinema on St Mary's Road, which would cost you 6d.

At Mawer and Saunders they were very good at teaching. They gave you time to take things in. Each day I had to get there at 9 o'clock. Lunch was 12 till 1. I cycled home on Great Bowden Road where I lived with my parents. The cycling kept my weight down. Indeed working at Mawer and Saunders was quite an active job as it owned and used lots of little stores in the Church Street area. You were on your feet for most of the day, perhaps moving between the different stores to fetch items for customers. At that age I didn't get tired, but I did have to have my shoes repaired about once every three weeks!

At four o'clock I went home for my tea and I was due back at half past four. It proved to be impossible to get home and back in half an hour. So it was agreed with Mr George Herbert Saunders (Mr Saunders Snr, also commonly known in the shop as "the old man") that I should start work at 8.45 am and have three quarters of an hour for my tea break. I finished work at 6 o'clock on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday. Thursday was half day. Friday was half past 6 and I think Saturday was probably 7 o'clock.



John Pendered in 1947

Mr Southgate was in charge of me. Mr Saunders Snr was responsible for pricing goods, but it was Mr Southgate who received deliveries of goods and marked up their prices. About 18 months after I joined Mr Southgate went to work for an engineering firm, so I did his job as well as mine.

Mr Greenslade was a partner in the business with Mr Saunders Snr, but he had a drink problem. Mr Saunders Snr was very straight laced; he was a church warden. So they did not really get on, continuously having rows. Mr Greenslade used to deal with the farmers and on market day you'd find him in the Market Settling Room, where there was a bar. They were so different; how they ever got together I'll never know.

Another person to work in the shop was Mr Lisle. He was very precise, always smartly turned out. He described going to work as "going to business". He was the only man in my working life who wore spats. He was there in 1940 when I joined Mawer & Saunders; he was there when I came out of the army in 1948. He said he had a tea room in Folkestone, on the High Street next to Timothy Whites and Taylors. He said he was "bombed out", but in those early days of the war nobody could go within ten miles of the coast, so people didn't go to Folkestone on holiday. Whether his business failed I don't know. He served in the shop, although he was not very good at it. He frequently fell out with the old man. He lived in The Red House virtually next to the Cottage Hospital on Coventry Road.

Just after I came out of the army in 1948 a friend of mine was getting married and I was to be the best man. I told Mr Lisle about this and he kindly offered to lend me some kid gloves. When I commented that it was possible that they would not fit. "Oh", he said "You don't wear them, you carry them!"

It was Mawer and Saunders because George Herbert Saunders's wife was a "Mawer". Now Mawer is a very big builder in Louth, Lincolnshire. Mr and Mrs Saunders Snr first lived and worked in Adam and Eve Street. It was about opposite where Pugh's is now. They used to call it the "garden of Eden". They moved from there to the premises in Church Square in 1909.

When I was first at Mawer and Saunders, working with Mr Southgate, if a batch of boxes arrived, he would price the first one and he left it to me to do the rest. At any time I could be

called down from upstairs to fetch something from one of the other stores. If someone came in wanting a gallon of paraffin I had to go to the paraffin store at the other side of Church Street. Some people might want 5 gallons. We were not really supposed to lift more than 28 lbs, but of course we did.

There was another lad working there called Peter Easterby; he was about a year older than me.

We had oil stoves for cooking, oil lamps for lighting. There was a whole range of different lamp glasses and size of wicks for the different lamps. In the villages cooking was done by oil, solid fuel and sometimes Calor gas. In the town cooking was mainly by gas. Heating in the town was mainly using coal or coke. Although electricity was in the town many people in the villages were without it. Some didn't even have running water, relying instead on a well.

Oil was kept in a locked store the other end of Church Street. I collected the bunch of 5 or 6 keys. Also in the store were creosote, linseed oil, turpentine, paraffin and methylated spirits. It was quite a good cylinder lock, but the door was not very strong. I think the single storey building was initially a stable. Next door to the store was another building which was always referred to as the "stable". It had a ladder you went up to the first floor and the first floor was concreted!

These flammables were not from a local supplier. These would probably come to Harborough on the goods train and from the station by horse and cart. We had two types of delivery, one from goods trains and one from passenger trains. We often used the passenger train. We had a telephone at Mawer and Saunders and someone from London would ring up and say they were putting something for us on the passenger train, in the guards van. The telephone number for us was "Market Harborough 16", so you could see that not many people had telephones at that time.

Of course when I was first there I had to get used to where things were. We used to do coffin furniture. Once I found a box labelled men's robes and another labelled women's robes. My mother had said that I must have a new dressing gown, so seeing the box of men's robes I thought I'd found some. But when I opened the box the robes were all white! There were boxes of large, brass-headed screws; coffin screws.

In the local villages at that time the carpenter was invariably also the undertaker. In Harborough though the undertaker was Burgesses; where Roman Way meets Church Square, near the fish shop. That is where Jack Stamp learnt his trade.

Generally people didn't store things. They didn't spend money like that. They bought things when they needed them. This was where Mr Saunders Snr had a good business head. People wouldn't spend money on what they couldn't see. That's why it was so difficult to sell cavity wall insulation and roof insulation.

Knight Brothers of Husbands Bosworth were carpenters. They might phone up and say "I'm doing a gentleman's funeral; I shall need coffin lining and screws". What you had to be careful about was getting the exact details for the writing of the coffin plate. You had to get the name accurately, make sure that it was spelt correctly. What was most important was the age. If someone was 75 I used to say "so he was 25 years less than 100" as a check back.



There were sign writers in town. Most such people worked from their own home. Later, when I was married and living in Little Bowden sign writers were just a couple of doors away. When I came home I'd give the plate to Mr Smith; he would write it out. They had a sort of varnish that they did the lettering with. They used a type of gold dust, it wasn't gold of course.

We used the buses quite a bit to deliver things to the villages. United Counties came through the town and we could put things on their bus and call the people in the village to expect a delivery.

Mawer & Saunders had used another means of delivering goods to customers. On market day, in each of the yards adjacent to the main public houses, there would be a carrier from one of the villages. For example, in the Talbot yard just off the High Street, there would be Mr Clark from Naseby with his horse and cart. For a small fee a customer's purchase could be delivered by a member of Mawer & Saunders to the carrier who would then deliver it to the customer's village. The Naseby carrier could deliver to East Farndon and Clipston as he returned his horse and cart to Naseby.

Of course Burgesses, the funeral directors in Harborough, never got their supplies from Mawer and Saunders. They used the same suppliers that we used. There was Hefford's in Harborough which used to do funerals. Mr Hefford had a pair of leather gloves which he used so often they were green.

As you walked into Mawer and Saunders I remember there was a big glass case in the middle of the shop, counters on both sides. In the big glass case were shaving things and other small items. There were nails and things in little pigeon holes. These were sold by weight on the scales at the end of one of the counters. Someone might want a pound of a certain size of nails. There was always a window display of tools (hammers, chisels, axes); the window facing the church. These items were stored in boxes under the counter. There was not a great deal of display in the shop. There were parcels of various things from 'turn buttons' to 'pig rings'.

Inside 12 months I knew where everything was stored. There tended to be two sorts of people coming into the shop. Some were very rough and others very polite. Perhaps a builder from one of the villages might come in and say "I want some arse paper, boy". The joke was about the apprentice who mistook what the builder said for "glass" paper; whereupon the apprentice asked him "do you want fine, medium or coarse". There is no record of what the builder replied!

However, Mr Hawke of Hallaton would come in and politely ask "two toilet rolls, boy". The boy might reply, "Two toilet rolls". Mr Hawke would say "don't tell everyone boy".

You got to know the customers. Ladies bought all they needed for cooking, including saucepans, kettles and cutlery. They began to be influenced by the increase in post-war advertising and would come into the shop asking for particular makes of items. For example, Prestige knives were becoming popular and being asked for by name. It was easier to sell them the exact item they had asked for, rather than telling them about alternative, perhaps better, items such as quality Sheffield steel knives.

Because it was war time Mawer and Saunders supplied suitable items such as blackout blinds, cardboard lamp shades. Mr Durrance was the tinsmith and locksmith at Eaton's on the High Street. In 1936 when Eaton's ceased trading he was employed by Mawer and Saunders and used the workshop. He made shields for the various lighted road signs to prevent the light being sent upwards. During this time there was a limited allocation of metal.

However, Mr Durrance used his skills to make specialised cooking pans with lids, for use by British prisoners of war. We fitted wooden handles to them. They were purchased by the families who, through the Red Cross, managed to get them to the soldiers, sailors and airmen.

Some things were in short supply, including batteries. When a new batch arrived there would be an immediate queue. Some things were becoming very expensive including turpentine. Most items though were not rationed.

Most things were kept upstairs. By the time you'd gone up two flights of stairs though, you'd often forget what you went up for. You'd quietly return down the stairs, look at the customer and you'd invariably remember what it was.

The old man (Mr Saunders Snr) was very good at buying property. We had a workshop and warehouse which had been the Methodist Church Hall; just off Roman Way in Kings Head Place, it's now a tile shop. Bill Durrance could make things that couldn't be bought. If someone wanted something a bit out of the ordinary, he could make it. He could make things like watering cans, the whole thing. He was paid by Mawer and Saunders; a wage earner. He might have got around £5 a week.

He also cut glass for customers. A lot of things were kept in the warehouse; all the piping, fittings for central heating, cast iron stoves, plumbers' fittings, rainwater fittings (e.g. guttering), bags of nails etc. After the war, Mawer and Saunders took on a man to sharpen lawn mowers, he had a lathe there.

Mr Saunders Snr owned the oil store, and next to it the two storey "stable" with the concrete floor. All wooden handles were kept in there. There was the converted 2 storey Methodist Hall with warehouse and workshop. Calor gas was kept there as well as galvanised baths. Mr Saunders Snr bought properties in the middle of the town because he couldn't expand any other way.

When Mr Saunders Snr's son (Maurice) took over, his ambition was to purchase properties from the original Mawer and Saunders right through to what is now the cook shop in Church Street.

Mawer and Saunders never sold larger farm equipment. That was left to Eaton's. When Eaton's ceased trading Kirby's, then in St Mary's Road, was the local supplier. However, Mawer & Saunders did supply farmers with small things, like binder twine, hay forks. Again farmers didn't stock what they couldn't immediately use. If it was good weather a farmer might come in for 3 hay forks as they had people to help with the hay making. This is before there was much powered machinery.

Farmers used to come in on Tuesday Market day. I remember in particular Mr E. T. Stafford of Laughton.

In the 1940s, to give you some idea of what people did, there was a woman who lived in one of the alley ways off the High Street. Of course, although the houses are no longer there, the alley ways remain. She was talking to another woman in Church Street: "I've just finished whitewashing my bedroom". She didn't use distemper or emulsion paint. Instead she would

buy a ball of whitening, about a third the size of a rugby ball. It would be crushed down and water added. She came into Mawer and Saunders with a bottle to buy creosote to paint her bedroom door. The creosote would have killed any woodworm, but what a smell.

I had to maintain the Leclanché cells¹ in some of the larger houses. These were sometimes used to power the bells in the servants' area, perhaps in a little room off the scullery. The bells were how the servants were called by the owner of the house. I would have to deliver some *sal ammoniac* (ammonium chloride) by bicycle, mix this with water to replace the electrolyte. They were possibly still being used as a source of electricity because of batteries being scarce in the war. One such house was The Firs on Great Bowden Road just opposite St Mary's Church. Other such houses were on Burnmill Road. I had to service the cells, sort out the wiring, renew the electrolyte and get back to the shop.

In the 1930s the only available plastic was Bakelite. This was brittle and used for things like wireless sets. Wireless (radio) sets ran on valves and took a while to warm up when switched on. When they did warm up, the whole Bakelite cabinet warmed up, and it was a very distinctive smell. By the early 1950s rubber was being replaced by plastic as insulators for copper wiring. Rubber had a limited life, people had their houses rewired every twenty years, but plastic was virtually indestructible. Plugs were 5 and 15 amp with round pins. In the early 1950s there were many different types of plug before they were later standardized.

Barnet and Soams was an electrical company from Kettering with a shop originally in Abbey Street. When that shop was pulled down they transferred I think to a shop next to the Angel Hotel. They were responsible for most of the electrics in the town. After the war a man named George Hollis was the manager but they did limited business. Indeed in the mid-1950s Mawer and Saunders were selling more washing machines than they sold; perhaps three or four a week.

Of course in 1940 very few houses had washing machines and hardly any refrigerators. Local dairy farmers gradually began to use electrically powered milking machines and, because they had electrical power, they began to purchase washing machines etc. Great Bowden Hall didn't have electricity because it would have cost some £400 to have it; an enormous sum in 1940 for the six Miss Hayes sisters living there.

The choice between electricity and paraffin was complicated. We sold a lot of paraffin at Mawer and Saunders; we also sold paraffin heaters and paraffin cookers. They all needed more attention than electrical goods. Electrical items could be turned on by a switch, but paraffin

¹ The Leclanché cell was a 'dry' electrical cell with a carbon anode, zinc cathode and electrolyte of ammonium chloride.

heaters and cookers needed filling daily. You have to purchase a funnel and a 5 gallon drum of paraffin. If you spilled the paraffin on the carpet it stank. Then you have to wash your hands. Even the wicks needed trimming once a week and replacing perhaps every three months. Unlike today the element in an electric fire might last for years.

I was working in Mawer and Saunders during those war years of 1940 through to 1944. There was not a great deal of change in the shop during that time. However some items were difficult to obtain; anything made out of metal. Of course this was the time they took away the railings which surrounded the Parish Church.

All of the buildings owned by Mawer and Saunders had their own padlock and keys. Each of the shop staff had a set of keys. These were held on a numbered board. My number was "9". After I'd been there a couple of years it was my job at 5.30 pm (we closed at 6 pm) to go around to the various buildings, make sure that the lights were switched off and the doors locked.

Of course I knew other young lads who were working in the town's outfitter shops and shoe shops. A good pair of shoes might cost £5; perhaps you could get a pair for £3 to £3.50. If I went into a shop to buy a pair of shoes the young man would give me a discount. I remember after the war Ron Jolly serving in Mawer and Saunders let someone have something off their bill; perhaps the bill came to 5 shillings and he said "give me 4/6d". Maurice Saunders said "You gave him a discount. What did you give him a discount for?" Ron Jolly replied "Well, when I go into his store he gives me a discount". We didn't consider this as thieving. However, it was always said that Mawer and Saunders paid their staff more to keep them honest.

There were a couple of reasons why items were priced at, say, 2s 11 3/4 d. One was that it was under 3 shillings. The other was that the sales assistant had to go to the till and get the change. If the cost was 3 shillings it would be easy for the sales assistant to 'pocket' the 3 shillings.

There were people who had an account at Mawer and Saunders. Some people in the bigger houses would tend to share out their wealth by shopping month by month at different stores in the town. This month they perhaps shopped at Mawer and Saunders, next month perhaps at Bells Ironmongers. Mostly, accounts were settled monthly, although there were people who did not. There was one house in Lubenham where we were told not to sell anything except by "cash on delivery". Another customer, a retired colonel, lived at Great Easton, and we repaired his lawn mowers. He was a bad payer and we insisted on him paying COD. When delivering the lawn mower, if there was nobody at the house we would bring it back to the shop. His sons, also in the army, came into the store one Saturday afternoon and said "You've still got our lawnmowers". Maurice Saunders replied "Yes, they were delivered COD." They came to an agreement and gave Maurice Saunders a series of post-dated cheques.

Mawer and Saunders had a small van. I remember that they had one even before I began working for them. With increased sales the van would go to different areas each day. Tuesdays might be Great Bowden and the Langtons, Wednesdays might be Husbands Bosworth. It was kept in a garage in Kings Head Place, between the Methodist Church Hall and what was then a row of cottages.

In the shop in the early 1940s there was one manual sales till. You wrote details of the item being sold on a paper till roll which went passed a small window on the top of the till. At the end of the day the coinage was checked against the till roll. I assume that the money would have been bagged by coin and George Herbert Saunders would have taken them to the bank. Banks had metal shoots set in their walls. Most of the money taken from customers was coins. A five pound note was "talked about". There were occasional £1 and 10 shilling paper notes. In the early 1940s we took very few cheques. When I came back in 1948 through to 1958 there were cheques. Farmers would typically pay by cheque saying "You write it out son, I'll sign it!"

By 1944 I was responsible for all the incoming goods. Mr Saunders Snr would give me the invoice on which was the cost price and the retail price, invariably in code. Each year had an alphabetical letter: 1940 was "D". This was followed by the invoice number. For example "D2565" would be for something bought relatively late in 1940 since the invoice number started at "1". Then there would be the cost price in code using Greek looking characters! So we could work out the year, when in the year and the cost price. The customer of course would be unable to understand the cost price of an item they had just bought.

Invoices were kept in the office up the stairs from the shop. Invoices were signed and dated when I completed them. Mr Saunders Snr would come in late in the afternoon to see what I had done and spot check. Although he trusted me he still did a spot check now and again.

When rake heads were delivered their price would be painted on them with cheap paint consisting of white lead and turpentine. This was a cheap and convenient way.

There was a board where the sales staff wrote "lost sales" when someone had asked for something we couldn't supply. Mr Saunders Snr would consult this when re-ordering. Maurice Saunders did put in place several stock control methods which worked considerably well.

In the 1940s Mrs Strand (who was formerly Miss Kilburn, having married Sid Strand who also worked for Mawer and Saunders) and Miss Fielding had worked in the office for years. Mrs Strand always seemed to have a new junior assistant helping her.

When I was first there, in about 1942, Mrs Ross worked in the shop. She had two boys who attended the Grammar School. She persuaded Mr Saunders Snr to give them part-time jobs. So

immediately I no longer had to sweep out the shop; one of Mrs Ross's lads did it. They didn't stay very long.

As well as twin sons, Mr Maurice Saunders also had a daughter Fiona. His boys were very young when I went away to war in 1944. In 1944 I was in the ATC, got my papers to join the Air Force. I was deferred and then in December received two letters; one discharging me from the Air Force and the other calling me into the Army. The war was going well for the Allies except for Arnhem (September 1944). I was told that if the Allies had not been defeated at Arnhem I would not have been called up.

Mr Saunders Snr knew that when I was 18 I would be called up. I was 18 in 1944. I was called up in December. Staffing was a problem for Mr Saunders Snr during the war

My mother and father were prepared for me leaving. It was accepted. However, they weren't happy with me being in the Air Force.

1948 to 1958

When I returned in 1948 I had 6 weeks off, still being paid by the Army. If you did go back to work you'd be paying income tax on both incomes. After that period of rest I returned to working at Mawer and Saunders.

Someone else had taken over my job of booking in purchased goods. Initially I did mostly counter work. I was then put in charge of the workshops, checking the time sheets. I used to love to get in the workshop and make things. Bill Durrance was still there; in fact he was there when I finally left Mawer and Saunders in 1958.

Auditing was done by the accountants Berry & Co on the High Street. After the war stock taking was done by an external company. The man, helped by one of Mawer and Saunders sales staff, went through all the stock from all of the various buildings. It took them three weeks! During the war I can't remember stock taking being done.

I enjoyed soldering. I remember later on when I was married I went into the workshop on my half day off (Thursday) and remade a new body for a wheel barrow which I had.

Between 1948 and when I left Mawer and Saunders in 1958 I recall the change in the standard of living for everyone. Just after the war everyone had an open fire, but these began to be replaced by things such as Sifono fires. These were controllable sealed fires. By 1948 there was no problem in obtaining items such as batteries. We still sold a great amount of paraffin. The villages of course were much later in getting their electricity, running water and sewerage systems.

Ironmongery staple goods were still being sold in the same way; nuts and bolts, hinges and so on. People were decidedly better off and we had more customers. Between 1948 and 1958 Mawer and Saunders had sufficient turn over to be able to employ at least ten breadwinners, hence supporting ten families. We still used the same lockups but it was someone else's responsibility to go around at the end of the working day and lock them up.

When I returned in 1948 Maurice Saunders was in charge. Mr Saunders Snr used to come in every day though, and towards the time I finally left he only came in during the mornings.

In addition to checking the time sheets I did the entire window dressing. The door to the shop was on the corner of the High Street and Church Square. There were two windows on the High Street facing West and two on Church Square facing south, towards the Parish Church. There was what was described as a tool window with things like micrometers and other engineers' tools. This was primarily because of the employer locally known as the "Aircraft" factory at the top of Logan Street.

Mawer and Saunders even sold some technical toys including Hornby trains and Meccano sets.

Further electrical tools such as electric drills gradually came in. Of course in 1940 many people had electric lighting but no electric power. This was changing rapidly by the early 1950s. However, some of the larger houses only had electrical power put in as late as 1950.

The goods placed in the other windows depended upon the time of year. One window might have lawnmowers. I saw window dressing as having two major purposes. One was impulse buying. The other reason was to show people what goods the shop had, such that later, when people wanted something, they might remember Mawer and Saunders.

It was difficult to get people to bring in their lawnmowers for the blades to be reground well before they needed to use them. After the war there was a man called John Ralph employed by Mawer and Saunders who sharpened lawnmower blades. He had a specialized lathe for the job in the workshop. He lived at Kibworth and was a fireman. If he had been called out at night he might be late arriving at work the next morning. Maurice Saunders said "That's nothing to do with me, I expect you to be here at 8 o'clock".

You set out the gardening tools in the window just after Christmas, so that when people began their garden preparation for the year the tools were ready. Lawnmowers were stored in the warehouse, previously being the Methodist Church Hall. These were initially mechanical lawnmowers, but then electrical ones gradually came in. Most of the hand mowers were Qualcast, a middle of the price range one. Perhaps there were a couple of dozen in stock. There might be a handful of the more expensive ones (e.g. Ransom). The better mowers had more

blades. A cheaper mower might have 6 to 8 blades. The better quality mowers might have 8 to 10 blades enabling them to cut finer.

Later in 1958, when Mr Maurice Saunders was in charge and I was to leave, I gave 5 weeks' notice. Mr Saunders Snr never really forgave me for leaving.

Some recollections of Mr George Herbert Saunders (known in the shop as the old man) and his son Mr Herbert Maurice Saunders (known as Mr Maurice).

The Old Man

Mr Saunders Snr lived at 27 Gardiner Street, Market Harborough. It was then known as "New Harborough"; built in the early 1900s and occupied mostly by business people.

When I joined Mawer & Saunders in 1940 I guess he was about 60. I can't put a date to when he died; I'd left Mawer & Saunders then. It was after 1952 when Mawer & Saunders had it's 50th anniversary. I would put it down to the mid-1950s. When he got to 70, he said "I'm starting again now"; it being 'three score years and ten' and him being a church warden going for that sort of thing.

He had a number of sayings which were typical of people of his generation. "Me thinks the lady doth protest too much". On marriage: "you marry for love not money, but you'd be very silly to love where there isn't any". The old Victorian saying: "if a thing's worth doing, it's worth doing well".

He was strict, but fair. I was always paid for time off due to sickness. He was generous, allowing time, which was unusual for a boss at that time.

He was typical of men being brought up during the Victorian/Edwardian period, and Maurice his son was an updated version of him. However, Maurice had been in the RAF so there were differences. For example, with the old man there were no coffee breaks, but Maurice insisted on breaks of at least 20 minutes in a five hour period.

I was in the scouts and from time to time we went camping over a weekend. I always wanted to get away mid-day Saturday, remembering that Mawer & Saunders worked late on Saturday.

We had a van driver called Mr Whittington, a typical cockney. I think his family lived in Brighton. In essence he was an uncontrollable "stranger to the truth". Whitsuntide was coming up and he said that he had Saturday afternoon off, which meant I would have a problem getting the same afternoon off to go on the camping weekend. Mr Whittington said that he's cleared his afternoon off with Mr Saunders.

When I went to see Mr Saunders about having the afternoon off, Mr Saunders said that it was fine, prior to the bank holiday. I said that I understood that Mr Whittington had also approached Mr Saunders with a similar request. This was not the case. When I offered to cancel my request because it would have prevented Mr Whittington from finishing early Mr Saunders went ballistic, saying that I shouldn't ask for time off if I didn't want it.

He rode a bicycle and mounted it by going over the back wheel. He could cycle with an umbrella up.

He was the only one with the keys to the shop; therefore he opened up and was there before the staff turned up. It was much later that I shared the keys with Mr Strand. He had the key to one lock and I had the key to the other, hence it needed two of us together to unlock the shop.

He knew the trade and he often served in the shop. In 1952 he'd been in business for 50 years.

He was very musical. He was even able to tell the exact note played by the till bell! He was a church warden and belonged to the Masonic Lodge. He was very much into Gilbert and Sullivan belonging to a local operatic group. Mr Hay of Great Bowden Hall was also very keen on amateur dramatics and brought his valet down to help Mr Saunders on with his trousers!

I knew Mrs Saunders (nee Mawer). They even invited us for tea once in Gardiner Street. Mrs Saunders was not actively involved in the business, referring to the staff as menials. She said that in the Mawer building firm the staff referred to the boss as "master". I think she was the daughter of the Lincolnshire firm of Mawer.

I can't remember seeing him with a warehouse coat on; he wore a suit.

We had these beige coloured coats. We had to buy our own. When Maurice took over we had black ones which the firm provided.

He (the old man) was polite and helpful to customers, although he didn't give anything away. Mawer and Saunders as a retail shop was there to make money.

Until 1936 Mawer and Saunders was competing with Eatons, on the opposite side of High Street. There was also Bells (owned by Eddy Bell), at the back of the parish church, and later on Kirby's on St Mary's Road. Eatons was gone before I joined. However, if we were out of some stock we would go over to Bells and purchase it. In a similar way, they would come to us.

I've no doubt that Mr Saunders looked at the prices in rival shops. M & S were better placed on the High Street than rival shops. It had a greater variety of goods and more stock than its rivals.

Mr Saunders did move with the times, but as his son Maurice said, his father did miss the boat regarding electrical goods.

The old man could be very sarcastic. As I was young and just growing up I thought this was par for the course, so I was often also sarcastic. He was a worldly wise man.

The turnover of staff was not very great. Mr Strand had been there from the early 1930s. Mr Lisle came during the war and stayed on until the 1950s, retiring moving to Somerset. The office staff grew in the early 1950s this was really when Mawer and Saunders peaked employing at least ten bread winners.

Mr Saunders Snr's first shop in Market Harborough was in Adam and Eve Street. They lived over the shop. It was directly opposite where Pugh's is now. To the best of my knowledge that shop was called Mawer and Saunders. He moved from Adam and Eve Street to the bigger premises in High Street in Easter 1909. The High Street premises already had the larger display windows when it belonged to Hatwoods.

Mr Maurice Saunders

I feel that Mr Maurice wasn't as good a business man as his father. Maurice's view was that the object of banks was to lend money to businesses. His father's view was to put money into the bank.

Maurice had joined the Air Force before I joined the Army because he was that much older. I think he was a hands-on manager.

He willed different parts of the Mawer and Saunders property to his children Colin, Ian and Fiona. His father paid for his grandsons' education at Oakham School.

When Maurice came back from the RAF he introduced tea breaks; one in the morning and one in the afternoon. He'd learnt this habit from being in the forces; the so-called NAAFI breaks. Initially we used to take it in turns to go up to Braunstone Café which was where Joules shop is now. Because of having to deal with customers you might miss your normal time. This meant that perhaps two or three of you went at the same time. When we came back Maurice would play hell because there was nobody to serve in the shop. So, the man who did the odd jobs was given the task of making the tea. We went into the little office upstairs and had our 10 minute tea-break morning and afternoon.

Maurice used to have a tea tray brought in from Wests just over the road on the High Street. He and Mr West were friends.

Maurice and his father shared an office on the ground floor. They could be heard arguing from time to time, even about the Masons. However, we've all perhaps argued with our parents from time to time.

Maurice came out of the RAF and took over the shop in about 1946. He was generous in sending me on courses. For example, there were two courses in London, one with Prestige Cookers, another with the Coal Utilisation Council. I had a week at Coalbrookdale in Shropshire. That was where iron ore was first smelted by Abraham Darby. There they made Rayburn cast-iron cookers. Models 1 and 3 were made in Coalbrookdale. Model 2 was made somewhere in Scotland.

Another course I went on was for Watts oil-fired boilers down in Lydney, Gloucestershire. Watts was a colonel in the army who met Colonel Hignett of East Langton Hall (The Grange, where he lived for 51 years). Watts convinced Hignett that he should have one of the oil-fired boilers. My course consisted of details of how to fit and maintain the boilers.

Maurice expected staff to know their subjects. One reason I was keen to get out of the ironmongery trade was because it was such a vast subject. At times there were customers who knew more about particular products than the staff did. We couldn't be expected to know about everything.

Because a member of staff had been on a particular course and become knowledgeable about a type of product they could be taken off one job to help a particular customer. On reflection I possibly went on more courses than anyone else. I was keen to do this and I had quite a good relationship with Maurice. He had quite a bit of faith in me.

At this time there were four of us and regarding pay I was probably in the top two. There was Sid Strand, Ron Jolley from Kettering, myself, and what could be described as a 'floating position'.

Maurice brought in the full day off before your annual holiday. You could finish work at 6 on Friday evening and have a day and a fortnight off. His father, like other shop keepers, made you work until the end of Saturday even prior to your annual leave. At the beginning of the year we were asked to book our holiday dates. During Maurice's time the shop never closed. This was unlike during the war when the old man would close for a holiday period; from Thursday, for ten days, until a week the following Monday.

Maurice also put in a bonus scheme. This was paid monthly and depended on the previous month's sales. Everyone got the same bonus amount, although this was a bone of contention. Everyone had different jobs to do. For example I was required to look after the workshops and

dressed the windows. With these jobs you can't be serving customers. Compared with Mrs Brown, who always just served in the shop; she would obviously take more money from customers.

With Maurice in charge more was spent on decorating. He also had the top part of the building completely rebuilt as you see it today. This didn't stop us working.

Before I had passed my driving test Maurice let me borrow the van at nights to practice driving. "Three people told me that you were out in our van last night", he would say.

Like his father, Maurice served in the shop.

The 5-day week was introduced into factories in 1950. That unsettled the staff in the shop quite a bit. Your friends working in local factories would finish work on Friday night, but you still had the whole of Saturday to work. When I first worked there we worked until 6.30 on Friday and 7 on Saturday.

Early closing was Thursday. There was an inspector who, from time to time, would come go around the various shops in the town observing that they were closing for the half day.

Maurice introduced the scheme where the four of us took it in turns to have Saturday afternoon off, finishing work at 1pm.

We always opened at 8.30 and finished at 6. Just after I left Mawer and Saunders all of the shops and the factories reduced their hours, finishing work at 5.30. Most shops went further, cutting out the afternoon tea break, so afternoons were 2 until 5, but not Mawer and Saunders.

When Maurice went on holiday nobody was formally in charge, Sid Strand had one key, and I had the other. So we could only get in if both of us were there.

Maurice got a caravan made by Reggie Marlow who lived at Ashley. He would take it to East Runton, near Cromer in Norfolk. He would even hire it to staff if they wanted. My wife and I and daughter Chris had it on two or three occasions.

He was not a Mason, but he did belong to Rotary. He was also a Town Councillor right up until he moved to Braybrooke. Town Councillors must live in Market Harborough itself. When he was first married he lived on the Crescent. His wife was a Brown from Theddingworth. Her father was a Scot and a farmer. Later Maurice and his wife moved to the top of Lubenham Hill.

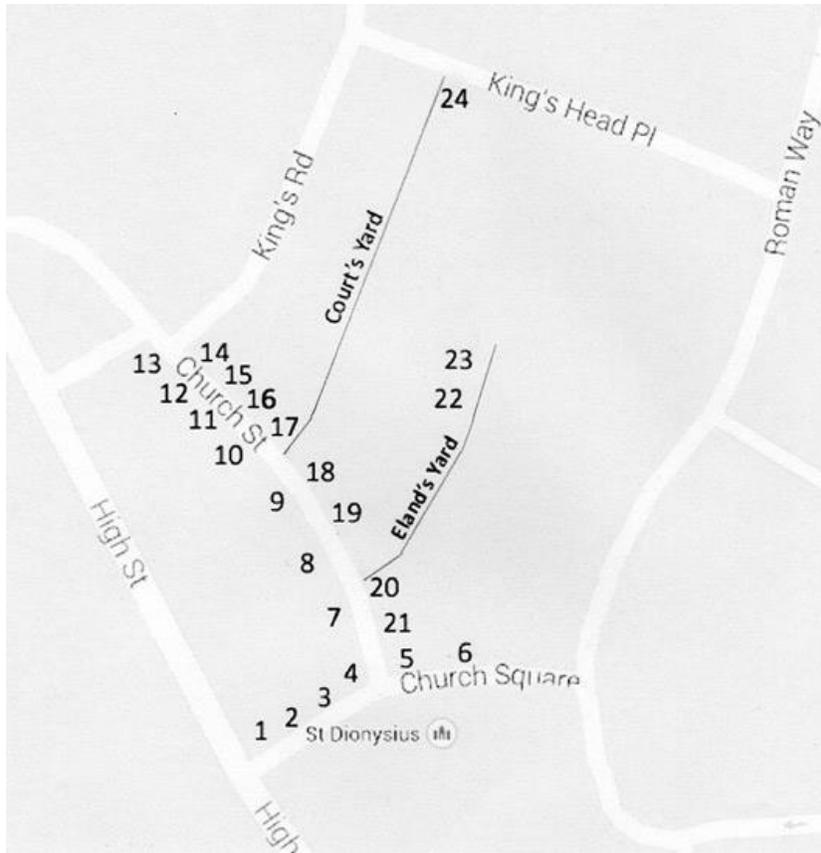
He was in the town's Dramatic Society. He had his lounge altered to be the same size as the Dramatic Society's stage so that plays could be rehearsed.

His wife Doris would criticise my window dressing. If she ran out of things at home, like brasso or shoe polish she would just come into the shop and help herself, just taking them off the shelf. Maurice said it was setting a bad example to the staff.

He died whilst Mawer and Saunders was still a business. Doris survived her husband and became the last director. When the business was wound down various properties are willed to the Maurice's three children.

I feel that Maurice lacked confidence and was perhaps a little shy. When we visited Women's Institute meeting I had to do the lot. He would sit in the back doing the crossword. Any abrupt things he said to customers were probably due to his lack of confidence.

I found the many things I learned while working at Mawer and Saunders to be highly useful during the rest of my working life.



Key (1940)

- 1 Mawer and Saunders - Ironmongers
- 2 Eastman - Butchers
- 3 Grocer?
- 4 Jeyes - Chemist
- 5 Looms - Butchers
- 6 Macfisheries = Fish monger
- 7 Murkitts Bakery
- 8 Grocers (later NAAFE)
- 9 Bales - Shoe Repairs
- 10 Gowling - Music & Radio
- 11 Varney - Paint/wall paper
- 12 Miss Mugridge
- 13 Red Cow - Public House
- 14 Nags Head - Public House
- 15 Scarborough - Penny Bazaar (later Phillips - clothing)
- 16 ?
- 17 Shoe Shop
- 18 Frost - Fruit (Bosworth family)
- 19 Webb - Outfitters
- 20 Eland - Printer and Stationer
- 21 Elliott - Clothing
- 22 M&S - Oil Store
- 23 M&S - "The Stable"
- 24 M&S - Store and Workshop