

Extract from a letter on the subject of Hand-made Cigarettes, written on 14th 1973, by Mrs. H.A. Hogwood, 35 Kildare Court, Barcombe Close, Eastbourne, Sussex.

At 15 years old I went to Abdulla's cigarette factory in Wells Street, a turn off Oxford Street in the heart of London's West End, to learn the cigarette trade. At first I was taught cutting, which meant cutting the tobacco from each end of a cigarette without chipping or creasing the paper the cigarette had been folded into by a person called a Maker.

The cutting had to be done quickly, clean and sharp taking care not to chip or cut the paper. A special pair of scissors were used which had a hole in the centre.

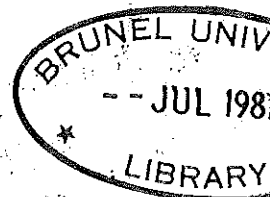
The Maker sat at a sort of desk with three sides, in front of her stood a frame called a Tray. The Tray had a perforated tin back with five shelves to hold the cigarettes after they were made. Each tray held 1,500 - 300 on each shelf. The Cutter sat next to the Maker in her own little desk, then when a pile of cigarettes were made she would take them from the Maker's desk, cut the tobacco off the ends, return the surplus tobacco to the Maker and so on until the tobacco was used up and the required amount of cigarettes were made. The Cutter had to wait on the Maker, bringing the tobacco, cases and trays, and having to weigh the trays before any cigarettes were put into them.

The Cases were the papers the tobacco was folded into and had the name Abdulla printed on them in gold lettering. They were made in another part of the factory on machines by men. They were usually English men but the male cigarette makers were Greeks, Turks, Russians and quite a number of English and foreign Jews, together with some Jewesses.

Before work started in the morning, the maker would tell her cutter how much tobacco she would want for the day. Sometimes 3 lb or more, it all depended how much was left from the day before. Off she would go with a large tin box to the Tobacco Room where the Foremen - the men in charge of each room - weighed out the amount of tobacco each cutter required for her makers.

When a cutter was quick and careful enough she was given another maker, until in all she would be cutting <sup>for</sup> and looking after four makers. When you think that the

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cutter had to take four tin boxes into the tobacco room and get maybe 2, 3 or 4 lbs in each, bring them back, get four trays, weigh them and run back up to the machine room to get the cases, all before starting cutting you can be sure she was pretty busy all through the day. Wages were 10/- a week, and it was up to a cutter to learn how to make cigarettes and become a maker as soon as she could. A maker worked 'piece work', that meant making as many cigarettes as possible in the working week, usually about  $49\frac{1}{2}$  hours as far as I can remember. But that was when the factory was not very busy. A cutter could become a maker but she would have to teach herself. That would be practising with her maker's tobacco and 'Klonky' whenever the maker had gone to lunch or was late coming in in the morning.

There were two kinds of cigarette Flat and round. The makers making the round ones did not get so much pay per 1,000 as they were easier to make. The flat ones were harder, as each had to be folded into some parchment called a 'Klonky' which was folded into a particular shape. The tobacco was folded into the 'Klonky' the case of paper was put on one end and the tobacco pushed through the other end with a 'Pusher'. This was a piece of thin bamboo with a handle on the end. The maker also required the tray that stood in front of her, a small pair of scales, a loz weight, a piece of fine sand paper, french chalk in a paper pot, a pusher and of course a klonky.\*

Cigarettes were not all the same size. For the larger ones the maker was paid 1/- per 1,000, smaller one  $\frac{3}{6}$  per 1,000. When I was a maker, after a time I worked on the larger cigarettes and could make as many as 3,000 a day, but of course I had to work very hard. I had a small clock in front of me and every 15 minutes I would try to make 75 cigarettes, in that way it gave me some idea how I was going.

It wasn't just making a cigarette, it had to be perfect. No creases, not too tight or too loose and no chipped ones. The weight had to be right, so many to the oz, small cigarettes 21 to the oz, large ones 19 to the oz. Every so often throughout the day the Foreman would come round ( he was a Greek, an awful man) to weigh some of the cigarettes in the tray. If they were too heavy or too light he would just throw them out to be torn up by the cutter and remade. I've said

very special cigarettes because some of the customers would not smoke a machine-made cigarette for love nor money, saying there was too much dust put into the centre of them. This could have been true, I don't know, but we never heard of any injury to health in those days. I was sacked in late 1919.

After I left Abdalla's I worked at a Tobacconist's shop near Paddington Station. That meant serving customers with packet cigarettes, snuff and loose tobacco when not busy making hand-made cigarettes. After a time people got used to having to smoke machine-made cigarettes as the hand-made were so much more expensive. I think it would be hard to find today a firm that makes cigarettes by hand, perhaps somewhere in the east or west end of London or no doubt some place abroad.

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\* The Klunky was put on to the desk, the sand-paper was to keep the desk smooth and the french chalk was to make it shiny and slippery.