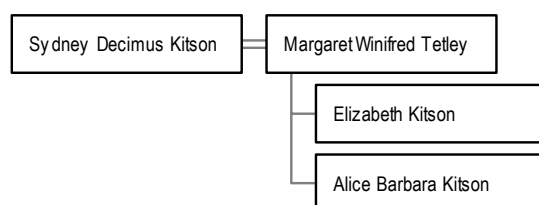


## Sydney Decimus Kitson



Sydney's middle name of Decimus signifies that he was either the tenth child or tenth son of James Fretwell J<sup>nr</sup> and indeed a Cambridge Alumni record suggests the latter :...*Youngest and 10th s. of James [locomotive engineer]...*. However, from the children I have accounted for over the two marriages of James, I have Sydney as the 11<sup>th</sup> child of 12, and the 7<sup>th</sup> of the five sons – so clearly there are some gaps in my information on the Kitsons.

Sydney Kitson was born on 26<sup>th</sup> June 1871, the third child and second (?) son of James Kitson and his second wife Elizabeth (née) Hutchinson. He was baptised on 7<sup>th</sup> August of that year at St. John's Church, Roundhay.<sup>#</sup> As a young lad he was at the same preparatory school as his older brother Francis, Yarlett Hall, Staffordshire, for the 1881 census.<sup>#</sup>

Sydney completed his education at Charterhouse and then at Cambridge where he entered Trinity College in the Michaelmas term of 1889 and where he gained his BA in 1892 and from where he graduated with an MA in 1896.<sup>v</sup> Sydney, unlike most of the male Kitsons, did not join the family firm but qualified and practised as an architect. The following account of Sydney's professional progress is taken from the DSA Architect Biography Report, interspersed with supplementary information from the Cambridge University Alumni, 1261-1900. Sydney Decimus Kitson was articled to Edward John May from 1893 to 1895, and was an assistant to William Douglas Caröe in 1896. He commenced independent practice in 1897 in Leeds. Kitson worked in partnership with Francis William Bedford from 1897 to 1904.

Having established himself professionally, Sydney, at the age of 31 and of Chapel Allerton, married Margaret Winifred Tetley of Headingley, on 19<sup>th</sup> February 1903 at St Michael's Church Headingley. The wedding party included five witnesses – C Harold Tetley, Gladys Tetley and the groom's father C.F. Tetley. Representing the Kitsons were James and Elizabeth Kitson, Sydney's parents.<sup>v</sup>

Margaret, who was born on 30<sup>th</sup> March 1879<sup>v</sup>, came from the Tetley brewing family. Tetley's has a history that is inextricably linked to Leeds and spans over 175 years. In 1822, Joshua Tetley set up his brewing business just yards away from where Tetley's Brewery Wharf is today. Margaret's parents were Charles Francis Tetley and Alice Margaret (née Atkinson) who had married at St John the Evangelist, Leeds, in 1875.<sup>vii</sup>

I have been able to trace her life through the three census nights prior to her marriage to Sydney. In 1881 Margaret and her older brothers Charles and Francis were staying with their maternal grandfather at St. John's, Queens Drive, Ilkley.<sup>viii</sup>

John W Atkinson	56	Solicitor	Leeds
John C Atkinson	24	Solicitor	Leeds
Frances G Atkinson	22		Leeds
Emily Atkinson	21		Leeds
Arthur R Atkinson	19	Mining Engineer's pupil*	Boston Spa, Yorkshire
Charles H Tetley (G-son)	4		Leeds
Francis E Tetley (G-son)	3		Leeds
Margaret W Tetley (G-dau)	2		Leeds
Jane Lilley	63	Cook	Adel, Yorkshire
Mary Palliser	31	Serving Maid	Bedale, Yorkshire
Martha Walton	27	Waiting Maid	Carlton, Yorkshire
Eliza E Smith	30	House Maid	Methley, Yorkshire
Mary I Smith	16	Kitchen Maid	Ilkley
Gertrude A Marginson (Vis)	25	Nurse (Domestic)	London, Middlesex
Annie J Laurie (Vis)	16	Nurse (Domestic)	Lanarckshire

\* under the tutelage of one of the Kitsons?

John Atkinson would have been assisted in caring for his three young grandchildren by the two nurses who were with the household. The likely reason for the three Tetley children being away from home was that their mother Alice, at home at Headingley cum Burley for the same census, had just given birth to a baby daughter. Their maternal grandmother, Marianne Atkinson, was also with the Tetley family at this time to assist her

daughter Alice at the birth and with the new born infant. Charles Tetley was described as JP for the Borough of Leeds and Brewer and Maltster.<sup>ix</sup>

Ten years later the family was together at 47 Cardigan Street, Headingley, and now we have a name for the infant born in 1881. Another son had also been born in the intervening period.<sup>x</sup>

Charles F Tetley	42	Brewer	Leeds
Alice M Tetley	38		Leeds
Charles H Tetley	14	Scholar	Leeds
Francis E Tetley	13	Scholar	Leeds
Margaret W Tetley	12	Scholar	Leeds
Gladys Tetley	10	Scholar	Leeds
Michael H Tetley	3		Leeds
Ann Ledgard	59	Cook	Mirfield, Yorkshire
Lucy Wyland	35	Domestic Servant	Northamptonshire
Caroline King	28	Domestic Servant	Grasby, Lincolnshire
Rhoda Nicholson	22	Domestic Servant	Cross Gates, Yorkshire
Gertrude A Marginson	17	Domestic Servant	Methley, Yorkshire
Dora Nicholson	35	Domestic Servant	Louth, Lincolnshire
Jane Marginson (Vis)	42	Dressmaker	London

(There seem to be a number of Marginsons and Nicholsons in the Atkinson/Tetley households which is all a bit confusing!).

For the 1901 census, two years before her marriage to Sydney Kitson, Margaret is at home with her parents who have now moved to Spring Bank, a substantial house and land holding on Headingley Lane, and only a stone's throw from St Michael's Church in which Margaret and Sydney were married. The census transcriber has helpfully given the full names of the household members. The presence of a Sick Nurse suggests that one of the family was unwell at this time.<sup>xi</sup>

Charles Francis Tetley	52	Brewer	Leeds
Alice Margaret Tetley	48		Leeds
Margaret Winifred Tetley	22		Leeds
Gladys Tetley	20		Leeds
Edmund Herbert Tetley (Bro)	32	Brewer (Superintending)	Leeds
Kate Tetley (S-in-L)	30		Kensington, London
Sophia Lambden	32	Cook	Hampshire
Lucy Steel Smith	31	Waiting Maid	Sheffield
Alice Mary Claridge	32	House Maid	Crowle, Lincolnshire
Ellen Minnie Longe	28	Waiting Maid	Ufford, Suffolk
Florence Aldridge	23	House Maid	Leeds
Gertrude Tyler	20	Kitchen Maid	Lincolnshire
Mary Pogson(?)	63	Sick Nurse	York

Sydney was elected to the FRIBA on 3<sup>rd</sup> December 1906, his proposers being Edward John May, John Belcher and Harry Sutton Chorley. Prior to the First World War he had an extensive local practice operating from various Leeds premises including Greek Street Chambers and Lloyds Bank Chambers, Vicar Lane. Commencing work in 1899, Sydney was involved with the design of the Brahan building in Perth and the Cartwright Memorial Hall in Bradford. His residential address over this period of his life was at Gledhow

His service in the Great War with the Yorkshire Hussars, from 1914-1919, rising from Captain in 1914 to Major in 1918. He also served as APM for Nottinghamshire during the First World War, the demands of his duties sowing the seeds for the lung disease which was to plague him for the rest of his life. He was mentioned in Secretary of State's List for valuable services. After the war he lived in London for a time, subsequently moving to Boston Spa, Yorkshire and finally to Kidlington, near Oxford. Whilst there he was appointed Justice of the Peace and he became honorary secretary of the RIBA in 1928. He was an authority on the Norwich School of art and after completing his term in as secretary of the RIBA he devoted his time and energy to writing a book on the English watercolourist John Sell Cotman. This was finally published in the Spring of 1937, shortly before his death at Kidlington on 1<sup>st</sup> July 1837. The Leeds Art Gallery was a beneficiary of Sydney's estate through his bequest of one of the greatest collections of work by Cotman. Sydney also made a smaller bequest of artworks to the Fitzwilliam Museum, Trumpington, Cambridge.

The following obituaries from the Times are both given here as they each provide a different focus on Sydney's life. The one on the left balances his worklife and his extramural activities, and gives some family detail. The one on the right relates more to his love of art, and also reminds us that Sydney was unwell, and suffering, for many years before his death.

## Obituary

### MR. S. D. KITSON

#### THE NORWICH SCHOOL OF ARTISTS

Mr. Sydney Decimus Kitson, F.S.A., F.R.I.B.A., who died on July 1 at the age of 66, was professionally an architect, but, though both in partnership and on his own account he did a good deal of work in Leeds and other places in the North of England, he was much better known as an authority on the artists of the Norwich School, John Fell Cotman in particular.

Kitson had a keen appreciation of Cotman as a painter, but the special value of his work was on the biographical side; tracing the migrations of the artist, identifying the subjects of his pictures, and clearing up questions of dates. When last September Mr. Russell J. Colman, of High Point, Norwich, gave a private view of the Cotman water-colours in his possession after their conservation treatment by Mr. Kennedy North, Kitson was responsible for the arrangement of the drawings, including some which had been found underneath others in the course of remounting. Kitson published more than one book on Cotman, the last and most important appearing this year.

Kitson, who was the son of Mr. James Kitson, of Elmet Hall, Leeds, and half-brother of the first Lord Airedale, was educated at Charterhouse and Trinity College, Cambridge. After travelling abroad he was articled to E. J. May, in London, entering into partnership with the late F. W. Bedford, F.R.I.B.A. Among the many buildings for which they were responsible were the Leeds Board of Overseers buildings, the Leeds School of Art, police station, and free library, and several vicarages and banks in the city. After Bedford's death in 1907 Kitson designed several banks in Leeds and the neighbourhood, the Leeds Maternity Hospital, and a long list of other buildings ranging from parish halls to business premises.

From 1910 to 1912 Kitson was president of the Leeds and Yorks Architectural Society, serving on the Council of the Royal Institute of British Architects during the same period. For several years he acted as honorary secretary of the R.I.B.A. He served in the War with the Yorkshire Hussars. His wife died in 1932 leaving two daughters.

*The Times 6th July 1937*

### MR. SYDNEY KITSON

"A. P. O." writes:—

The death of Sydney Kitson has taken away a very genial companion in many spheres and, above all, a most valuable worker in the history of English art. His life had been seriously threatened for many years and perhaps death may be said to have been warded off for so long only by his indomitable courage and by his determination to complete, and to leave to the world as his memorial, the work on Cotman upon which he was engaged for the last decade of his life. In a sense the book owed its origin to the illness which happily did not prevent its completion, for it was only when he was obliged to retire from active practice as an architect and to spend some time in a Norfolk sanatorium that he fell under the spell of Cotman as an architectural draughtsman.

Beginning as a mere hobby or pastime, his interest soon became more absorbing and his insight into the artist deepened; and as his enforced leisure was backed by ample means he was able to follow up his researches in every direction and to build up at home an unrivalled apparatus of documents and photographs and, in the end, a very considerable collection of Cotman's drawings and water-colours. The actual work of writing the "Life" followed a very serious recurrence of his illness some two years ago on his return from a cruise, but it was cheerfully and methodically pursued to the end, and he was able to see the book issued last Christmas and to enjoy the very favourable reception with which it was met on every side, as by far the most complete and trustworthy account of Cotman's life and as the groundwork upon which all future study of the artist must be based.

But if his later years were dominated by this interest, it was far from cutting him off from all others, and if, perhaps, he will be most missed by the friends whom he did not fear to tire with his hobby, he will be mourned in many other circles to which he was endeared by his steady and sterling helpfulness, sound sense, and ready, if sometimes somewhat pungent, humour, open-hearted hospitality, and generosity without ostentation.

*The Times 9 July 1937*

Winifred predeceased Sydney and died on 27<sup>th</sup> February 1932, just before her 53<sup>rd</sup> birthday. The 6<sup>th</sup> July obituary refers to two daughters and these were Elizabeth Kitson and Alice Barbara Kitson, born respectively in 1905 and 1907. I am not sure whether they married, but assume that at least Alice did as the Times of 1<sup>st</sup> June 1934 carried the following engagement notice.

#### MR. W. G. E. ARMITAGE AND MISS A. B. KITSON

The engagement is announced between William Guy Elkanah Armitage, son of Major W. P. Armitage, M.C., of Bandolier Kop, N. Transvaal, and Alice Barbara, younger daughter of Mr. Sydney D. Kitson, of Thornbury House, Kidlington, Oxford, and of the late Mrs. Kitson.

Both daughters lived to a ripe old age. Elizabeth died on 10<sup>th</sup> June 1992 and Alice on 19<sup>th</sup> February 1999.

- 
- <sup>i</sup> Cambridge University Alumni, 1261-1900.  
<sup>#</sup> St. John's Baptism Register 1826-1890.  
<sup>iii</sup> RG11/2686/p19.  
<sup>iv</sup> Cambridge University Alumni, 1261-1900.  
<sup>v</sup> Certified copy of Marriage Certificate MXD346985.  
<sup>vi</sup> <http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.com/~rftetley/dat41.html#18>.  
<sup>vii</sup> FreeBMD Birth and FreeBMD Marriage Index; CE30/A/458.  
<sup>viii</sup> RG11/4337/p9.  
<sup>ix</sup> RG11/4538/p9.  
<sup>x</sup> RG12/3709/pp30-31.  
<sup>xi</sup> RG13/4246/p1.  
<sup>xii</sup> FreeBMD Birth Index; <http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.com/~rftetley/dat41.html#18>