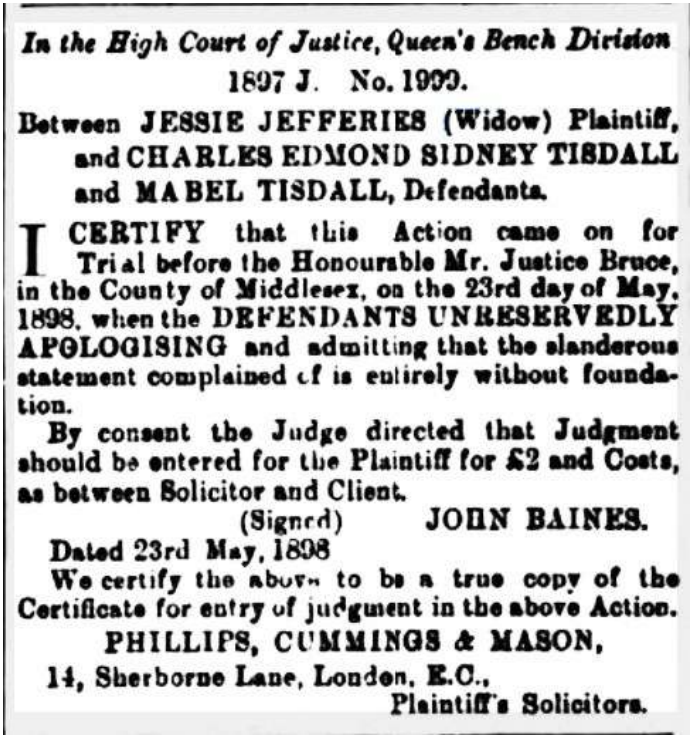
ACTION FOR SLANDER IN ACTON

Research by Peter Robins and Jean Saunders. Published in the RJS Autumn newsletter, 2020.

At first glance the archives of *The Acton and Chiswick Gazette* would not appear to offer much potential to add to our knowledge of Jefferies. But Acton was where Jefferies' widow, Jessie, lived for much of the 1890s and a browse was potentially worthwhile.



In the High Court of Justice, Queen's Bench Division

1897 J. No. 1999.

Between JESSIE JEFFERIES (Widow) Plaintiff, and CHARLES EDMOND SIDNEY TISDALL and MABEL TISDALL, Defendants.

I CERTIFY that this Action came on for Trial before the Honourable Mr. Justice Bruce, in the County of Middlesex, on the 23rd day of May, 1898, when the DEFENDANTS UNRESERVEDLY APOLOGISING and admitting that the slanderous statement complained of is entirely without foundation.

By consent the Judge directed that Judgment should be entered for the Plaintiff for £2 and Costs, as between Solicitor and Client.

(Signed) JOHN BAINES.

Dated 23rd May, 1898

We certify the above to be a true copy of the Certificate for entry of judgment in the above Action.

PHILLIPS, CUMMINGS & MASON,

14, Sherborne Lane, London, E.C.,

Plaintiff's Solicitors.

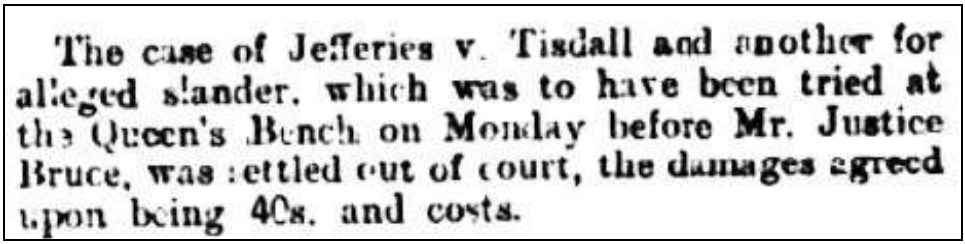
The Acton and Chiswick Gazette, 1 July 1898

To our great surprise we came across a legal action for alleged slander brought by Jessie[1] against local Acton resident Charles Tisdall and his daughter, Mabel. The notice by the Queen's Bench Division was published in *The Acton and Chiswick Gazette* on 1 July 1898. Although the case was due to be heard on 23 May 1898, a report in the same newspaper on 27 May reported that the case

[1] Checks were made in public records to determine if another Jessie Jefferies in Acton could be identified as the plaintiff but none was found.

had been settled out of court. The Tisdalls unreservedly apologised and Jessie was awarded £2 [£180 today] and costs.

The Law Reports for 1898 were examined but cases passed without discussion and valueless as precedents were omitted, so we may never know what was said.


The case of Jefferies v. Tisdall and another for alleged slander, which was to have been tried at the Queen's Bench on Monday before Mr. Justice Bruce, was settled out of court, the damages agreed upon being 40s. and costs.

The Acton and Chiswick Gazette, 27 May 1898

Slander wasn't actionable without proof of special damage; one couldn't obtain damages merely for loss of reputation, one would have had to suffer pecuniary loss. In 1891 the UK government passed The Slander of Women Act which amended the law in that any words spoken or published that imputed unchastity or adultery to any female did not require special damage to render them actionable.

To all appearances Charles Tisdall, a retired dyer, was a pillar of Acton society, a deacon at the Acton Baptist Church and an inveterate writer of letters to *The Acton and Chiswick Gazette*, chiefly criticising the local authority. At the time of the action for slander he was seventy and his daughter, Mabel, about twenty years of age. The Tisdalls, with three sons and three daughters, lived in a substantial property in the Mill Hill Park area and Jessie lived nearby[2]. Despite his financial loss and unwelcome exposure in the local press concerning the slander case, Charles Tisdall continued to represent his church at various meetings and *The Acton and Chiswick Gazette* published his many letters until his death in 1908.

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With thanks to member Michael Sherwood for legal guidance.

[2] By the time of the 1901 census, Jessie had moved to 257 Chesterfield Road in Ashford with her daughter Phyllis, perhaps to remove herself from the Tisdalls. Ten years earlier she lived at 3 Townley Park Villas, Lordship Lane, Camberwell (1891 census)to be close to Dulwich College where her son Harold was a student until December 1891. However, by 1892 Jessie was living at 158 Avenue Road, Mill Hill Park, Acton.
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