

## **JAMES KEILLER & SON - DUNDEE**

### **Richard Husband**

The company is probably best known for its marmalade which dates from 1797. The story goes that a ship travelling from Spain carrying bitter Seville oranges entered Dundee Harbour seeking shelter from the stormy North Sea and that John Keiller, a retired merchant, bought them.

He then gave them to his wife, Janet, who experimented with the fruit and produced the recipe which would have been very close to marmalade as we know it today. A jellied form of marmalade had been produced for centuries before but Janet Keiller's "chip marmalade" was the first to include thick chunks of orange peel and become a preserve.



Janet and her son James started a factory in Dundee which is said to have made the first commercially produced marmalade in the world and the company was named after James. In 1828, the name was changed to James Keiller & Son when James' son by his first wife Barbara, also called James, joined the business. James (Jnr) died in 1849.



**William Keiller (1829-1899)**

After James (Snr) died in 1839, his second wife Margaret took over the running of the business with her son Alexander and after his mother's death in 1850, Alexander must have had ultimate control over all aspects of the business. Alexander had two brothers, William who managed the marmalade factory in Guernsey, set up to avoid paying an unduly high UK tax on sugar, and Wedderspoon, who in 1864 patented a system of manufacturing marmalade

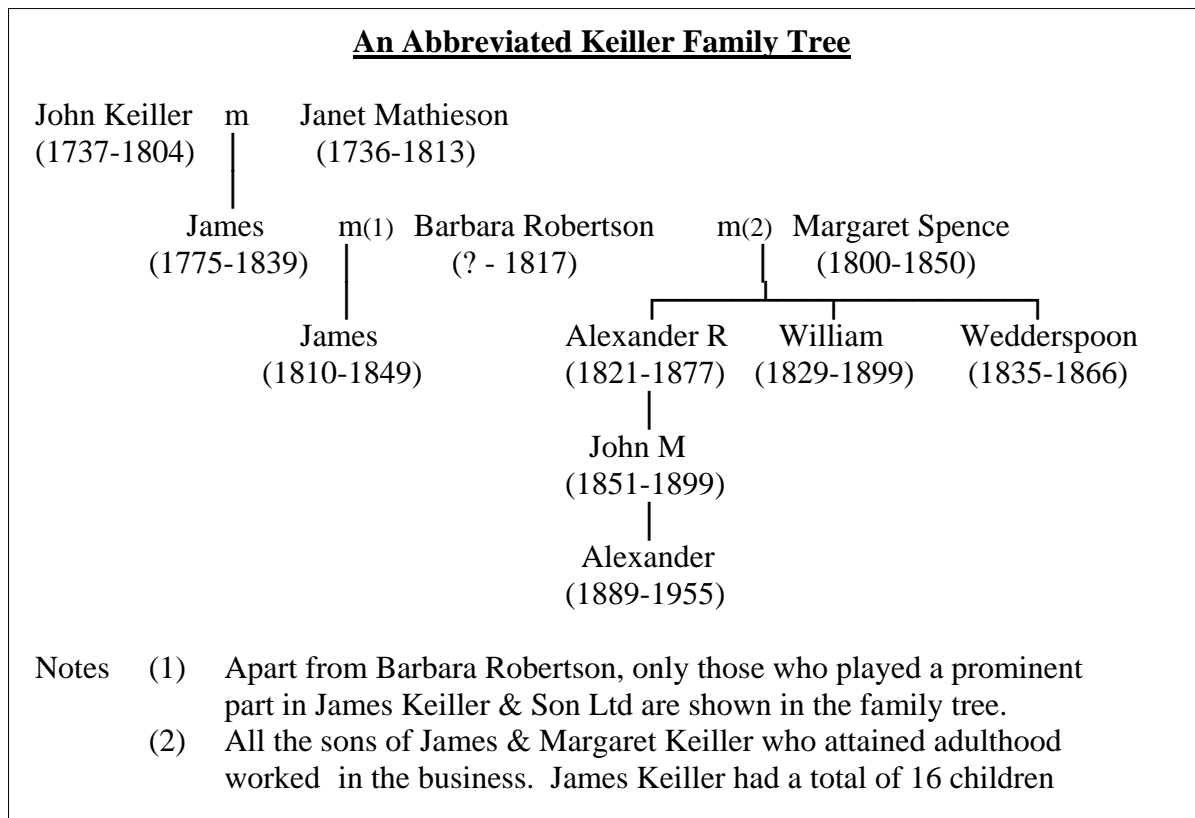
mechanically instead of by hand.

The business relationship between Alexander and his brother William was invariably very poor, mainly because Alexander considered William's factory in Guernsey should have been making a lot more profit than it did. After Alexander died in 1877, William expected to take over running the company but instead control passed to Alexander's son John. From now on, things got worse for William because John closed the Guernsey factory in 1879 which resulted in production being transferred to a new factory on the north bank of the River Thames at Silvertown in 1880. William then retired in 1884 at the age of 55. The company was incorporated in the early 1890's.



**Alexander Keiller (1821-1877)**

When John died in 1899 his son Alexander aged 10 inherited most of his great wealth and will have been involved in the business at a later date. There were now no Keillers on the company board.



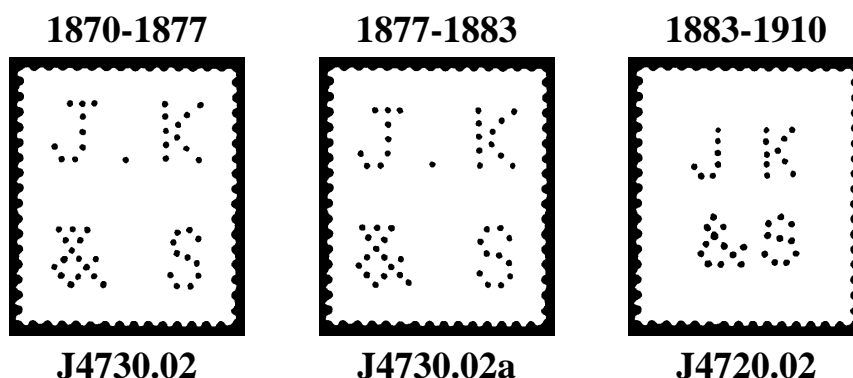
However, Alexander became absorbed in archaeology and put a great deal of his wealth into excavating the Avebury stone circle in Wiltshire and buying up the countryside around it, eventually donating it all to the National Trust. He died childless in 1955.



After the end of the First World War, James Keiller & Son Ltd was sold to Crosse & Blackwell Ltd. The sale took place in 1919.

In 1960, Nestlé acquired Crosse & Blackwell Group which still included the business of James Keiller & Son Ltd. In 2002, Premier Foods acquired James Keiller & Son Ltd from Nestlé and in 2008 transferred it to the Centura Group which it had bought from R H M the year before. Now the Centura Group, a part of Premier Foods, owned James Keiller & Son, James Robertson & Son and Frank Cooper, all marmalade makers.

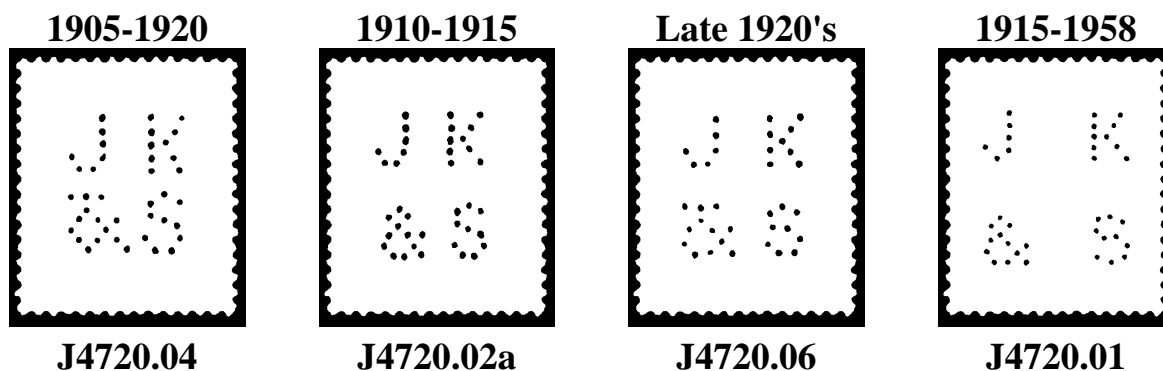
The three earliest perfin dies, which have been set out immediately below, are attributed to the company by virtue of the stamps receiving Dundee postmarks.



The fourth perfin is known to have been in use between 1905 and 1920 (J4720.04) and can now be positively identified as being used by James Keiller & Son Ltd because the company's name and the Silvertown address are printed on the back flap of this cover. The front of this cover is shown below.



The fifth perfin (J4720.02a) was previously attributed to J. Keeves & Sons Ltd, London but is now thought to have been used by Keiller. The sixth perfin (J4720.06) is known used between 1927 and 1930. Crosse & Blackwell Ltd who had bought James Keiller & Son Ltd in 1919 also used it in this period. The seventh perfin (J4720.01) has also been positively identified as having been used by the company in Dundee between 1915 and 1958. The last four perfin dies are shown below.



So as can be seen Keiller seems to have used perfins continuously, right up to the point where the company was taken over by Nestlé.