

1

00:00:14,840 --> 00:00:18,080

2

00:00:20,140 --> 00:00:22,139

Hello and welcome back to Unexpected

3

00:00:22,139 --> 00:00:25,137

Essex. I'm your host, Eri Berry and I am

4

00:00:25,137 --> 00:00:27,802

so excited to bring you Episode 2: By

5

00:00:27,802 --> 00:00:30,467

Their Fruits Shall Ye Know Them - The Jam

6

00:00:30,467 --> 00:00:32,466

Makers of Essex. Today's episode explores

7

00:00:32,466 --> 00:00:34,798

the fascinating history of one of this

8

00:00:34,798 --> 00:00:36,797

county's - if not the country's - hottest

9

00:00:36,797 --> 00:00:38,796

exports. I'm talking, of course, about

10

00:00:38,796 --> 00:00:41,128

Tiptree Jam, produced by Wilkin and Sons

11

00:00:41,128 --> 00:00:43,460

Limited in the Essex village of Tiptree.

12

00:00:44,560 --> 00:00:46,403

Now, to be fully transparent, if anyone

13

00:00:46,403 --> 00:00:48,247

is wondering, this is not a sponsored

14

00:00:48,247 --> 00:00:50,090

episode. I've not received any payment of

15

00:00:50,090 --> 00:00:52,955

any kind for the creation of this and it

16

00:00:52,955 --> 00:00:55,482

was born out of a genuine love of Tiptree

17

00:00:55,482 --> 00:00:57,448

Jam and my curiosity surrounding how it

18

00:00:57,448 --> 00:00:59,695

all started. But given how I have adored

19

00:00:59,695 --> 00:01:02,222

this jam since I was small, this had to

20

00:01:02,222 --> 00:01:04,469

form one of the first episodes of the

21

00:01:04,469 --> 00:01:07,112

podcast. Tiptree itself is an interesting

22

00:01:07,112 --> 00:01:09,867

name for a village, and the origin of

23

00:01:09,867 --> 00:01:12,277

it reputedly comes from a Saxon named

24

00:01:12,277 --> 00:01:14,343

Tippa who visited from the Blackwater

25

00:01:14,343 --> 00:01:16,753

settlement nearby. Tippa found a tree on

26

00:01:16,753 --> 00:01:19,164
a plateau and named it Tippa's Tree,

27

00:01:19,164 --> 00:01:21,230
which over time shortened to Tiptree.

28

00:01:22,070 --> 00:01:24,686
Now Tiptree as a village wasn't in the

29

00:01:24,686 --> 00:01:26,648
Domesday Book, with the area instead

30

00:01:26,648 --> 00:01:28,938
being listed under the Great Forest of

31

00:01:28,938 --> 00:01:31,554
Essex as land for feeding pigs. The area

32

00:01:31,554 --> 00:01:33,843
wasn't well populated, mostly due to the

33

00:01:33,843 --> 00:01:36,132
land not being ideal for growing crops

34

00:01:36,132 --> 00:01:38,749
on. That's not to say, however, that no

35

00:01:38,749 --> 00:01:41,365
one was there. The 17th and 18th century

36

00:01:41,365 --> 00:01:43,000
court records show significant criminal

37

00:01:43,000 --> 00:01:45,289
activity. Smugglers would use the area as

38

00:01:45,289 --> 00:01:47,579

a sorting ground for goods they were

39

00:01:47,579 --> 00:01:49,214

transporting up the Blackwater Estuary.

40

00:01:49,214 --> 00:01:51,830

It is said that locals would turn a deaf

41

00:01:52,030 --> 00:01:54,177

ear to the nocturnal activities of the

42

00:01:54,177 --> 00:01:55,710

smugglers, sometimes finding their horses

43

00:01:55,710 --> 00:01:57,550

had been borrowed and returned overnight,

44

00:01:57,550 --> 00:02:00,310

lathered up, with a keg of brandy left on

45

00:02:00,310 --> 00:02:02,150

the doorstep to buy their silence.

46

00:02:02,990 --> 00:02:05,155

Nothing of what I've just described makes

47

00:02:05,155 --> 00:02:07,629

it sound like the ideal place to grow

48

00:02:07,629 --> 00:02:10,103

fruit and to make jam though, given that

49

00:02:10,103 --> 00:02:12,578

the soil was pretty rubbish, how did we

50

00:02:12,578 --> 00:02:15,361

get to that point? In the 1st place, our

51
00:02:15,361 --> 00:02:17,835
story starts with a man named John Mechi,

52
00:02:17,835 --> 00:02:20,000
who made his fortune through the creation

53
00:02:20,000 --> 00:02:21,856
of Mechi's Magic Razor Strop, a

54
00:02:21,856 --> 00:02:23,712
sharpening tool for straight razors in

55
00:02:23,712 --> 00:02:25,877
London. Mechi used the proceeds from this

56
00:02:25,877 --> 00:02:27,732
endeavour to purchase 130 acres of

57
00:02:27,732 --> 00:02:29,588
marshland and a farmhouse adjoining the

58
00:02:29,588 --> 00:02:31,753
high side of Tiptree Heath. He rebuilt

59
00:02:31,753 --> 00:02:34,048
this into a property named Tiptree Hall

60
00:02:34,048 --> 00:02:36,331
and bought more land to further expand.

61
00:02:36,331 --> 00:02:38,613
Mechi wasn't just an inventor, he worked

62
00:02:38,613 --> 00:02:40,896
out ways to improve the land quality

63
00:02:40,896 --> 00:02:42,527

through experimental farming. Some of

64

00:02:42,527 --> 00:02:44,483

these involved tanks of manure pumped

65

00:02:44,483 --> 00:02:47,092

through a system of pipes using a steam

66

00:02:47,092 --> 00:02:48,722

powered engine. Yep, steam-powered manure

67

00:02:48,722 --> 00:02:51,331

everyone. The way of the future. Over the

68

00:02:51,331 --> 00:02:53,287

next few years this dramatically improved

69

00:02:53,287 --> 00:02:55,896

the quality of the soil and he was

70

00:02:55,896 --> 00:02:57,853

growing a significantly higher yield of

71

00:02:57,853 --> 00:03:00,135

crops than his neighbours were, so this

72

00:03:00,135 --> 00:03:02,092

demonstrated what was possible with this

73

00:03:02,092 --> 00:03:04,543

particular area of land. But this is not

74

00:03:04,543 --> 00:03:06,437

the last time you'll hear me mention

75

00:03:06,437 --> 00:03:09,189

Tiptree Hall in this episode. So

76

00:03:09,189 --> 00:03:11,745

now I need to introduce you to Arthur

77

00:03:11,745 --> 00:03:14,301

Charles Wilkin who grew up in Tiptree in

78

00:03:14,301 --> 00:03:16,218

a property called Trewlands and he

79

00:03:16,218 --> 00:03:18,455

started his adult life working in the

80

00:03:18,455 --> 00:03:21,330

City of London as an office boy. This was

81

00:03:21,330 --> 00:03:24,206

not his cup of tea and he missed the

82

00:03:24,206 --> 00:03:25,803

countryside greatly. Arthur was an

83

00:03:25,803 --> 00:03:27,720

interesting character being a strong non

84

00:03:27,720 --> 00:03:29,957

conformist and a radical Liberal with a

85

00:03:29,957 --> 00:03:31,874

capital L having worked under Samuel

86

00:03:31,874 --> 00:03:33,791

Morley, a prominent liberal in his

87

00:03:33,791 --> 00:03:36,646

hosiery business. This left a powerful

88

00:03:36,646 --> 00:03:38,403

impression on Arthur, who promoted

89

00:03:38,403 --> 00:03:40,160

temperance and valued scrupulously on.

90

00:03:40,630 --> 00:03:42,755

Business practises that he embodied

91

00:03:42,755 --> 00:03:44,999

throughout his life. Eventually, he took

92

00:03:44,999 --> 00:03:46,944

the lessons he'd learned in the city and

93

00:03:46,944 --> 00:03:48,888

returned home to Trewlands at the age of

94

00:03:48,888 --> 00:03:50,590

24 to grow fruit on the farm.

95

00:03:51,590 --> 00:03:54,110

There he hired a couple of foremen who

96

00:03:54,110 --> 00:03:55,1000

specialised in fruit growing and plant

97

00:03:55,1000 --> 00:03:58,414

nursery work. Arthur married Mary

98

00:03:58,414 --> 00:04:00,622

Swinbourne from Coggeshall and they had

99

00:04:00,622 --> 00:04:02,830

three sons, including Charles, who is

100

00:04:02,830 --> 00:04:04,670

particularly important to this story.

101

00:04:05,270 --> 00:04:07,310

Initially, the fruits grown at Trewlands

102

00:04:07,310 --> 00:04:09,350

were being transported to London by

103

00:04:09,350 --> 00:04:11,050

train, but they weren't travelling

104

00:04:11,050 --> 00:04:13,090

particularly well, often arriving in a

105

00:04:13,090 --> 00:04:15,777

completely unsellable condition. One day,

106

00:04:15,777 --> 00:04:17,833

on returning from taking fruit to the

107

00:04:17,833 --> 00:04:19,595

station and seeing his wife purchasing

108

00:04:19,595 --> 00:04:21,651

jam, he suddenly realised that there was

109

00:04:21,651 --> 00:04:23,707

nothing stopping him from making jam from

110

00:04:23,707 --> 00:04:26,056

the fruit he was growing on the farm

111

00:04:26,056 --> 00:04:28,830

himself. At the time, making

112

00:04:28,830 --> 00:04:31,210

your own jam wasn't just something people

113

00:04:31,210 --> 00:04:33,590

were doing for a hobby. Cheap foreign

114

00:04:33,590 --> 00:04:35,630

imports of traditional grain crops were

115

00:04:35,630 --> 00:04:36,990

decimating the British agricultural

116

00:04:36,990 --> 00:04:39,710

sector to the point where in 1884, Prime

117

00:04:39,710 --> 00:04:41,070

Minister William Gladstone publicly

118

00:04:41,070 --> 00:04:43,110

encouraged farmers to pivot to growing

119

00:04:43,110 --> 00:04:45,490

fruit and manufacturing jam in order to

120

00:04:45,490 --> 00:04:47,870

boost the sector. So Arthur teamed up

121

00:04:47,870 --> 00:04:50,590

with a couple of friends and they started

122

00:04:50,590 --> 00:04:52,970

business together in June of 1885 under

123

00:04:52,970 --> 00:04:55,010

the name the Britannia Fruit Preserving

124

00:04:55,010 --> 00:04:57,050

Company. They had very strict policies

125

00:04:57,050 --> 00:04:59,324

that the jams should be free of glucose,

126

00:04:59,324 --> 00:05:01,138
free of colouring and free of

127

00:05:01,138 --> 00:05:03,556
preservatives, and said that it had to be

128

00:05:03,556 --> 00:05:05,673
known as a conserve to distinguish it

129

00:05:05,673 --> 00:05:07,789
from jam made from imported fruit, which

130

00:05:07,789 --> 00:05:09,905
was known as a preserve. These days

131

00:05:09,905 --> 00:05:12,021
they're all known as conserves. The jam

132

00:05:12,021 --> 00:05:14,137
was of amazing quality and an Australian

133

00:05:14,137 --> 00:05:16,254
merchant arranged to buy every jar from

134

00:05:16,254 --> 00:05:18,370
their first production as he was so

135

00:05:18,370 --> 00:05:20,184
impressed with it. New varieties were

136

00:05:20,184 --> 00:05:22,602
soon added to the range and in 1886

137

00:05:22,602 --> 00:05:24,718
Arthur sent a sample to Prime Minister

138

00:05:24,718 --> 00:05:26,230

Gladstone with a letter enclosed.

139

00:05:27,590 --> 00:05:29,735

Right Honourable Sir, I am one of the

140

00:05:29,735 --> 00:05:31,344

farmers who followed the valuable advice

141

00:05:31,344 --> 00:05:33,489

you gave your tenants to grow fruit and

142

00:05:33,489 --> 00:05:35,903

make jam. As a corn grower on 250 acres,

143

00:05:35,903 --> 00:05:38,048

nothing but ruin seemed staring me in the

144

00:05:38,048 --> 00:05:39,925

face. But the system recommended by you

145

00:05:39,925 --> 00:05:41,802

has to a great extent retrieved my

146

00:05:41,802 --> 00:05:43,947

position. This is the first year of my

147

00:05:43,947 --> 00:05:45,824

making jam and when you have an

148

00:05:45,824 --> 00:05:47,701

opportunity to taste it, I should be

149

00:05:47,701 --> 00:05:50,176

grateful for your opinion of it. Prime

150

00:05:50,176 --> 00:05:51,505

Minister Gladstone was greatly impressed

151

00:05:51,505 --> 00:05:53,632

with the sample he received and wrote a

152

00:05:53,632 --> 00:05:56,373

letter in response. Sir, your letter has

153

00:05:56,373 --> 00:05:58,513

given me the most sincere pleasure. I

154

00:05:58,513 --> 00:06:00,653

have the impression and hope that what

155

00:06:00,653 --> 00:06:02,793

are now infant undertakings may grow into

156

00:06:02,793 --> 00:06:05,239

a considerable trade. I thank you for the

157

00:06:05,239 --> 00:06:07,073

agreeable present which has this day

158

00:06:07,073 --> 00:06:09,519

arrived. So 1886 was a momentous year, as

159

00:06:09,519 --> 00:06:11,353

not only did Arthur receive glowing

160

00:06:11,353 --> 00:06:13,493

feedback from the Prime Minister, but it

161

00:06:13,493 --> 00:06:15,939

was also the year that we first see

162

00:06:15,939 --> 00:06:17,773

mention of the Little Scarlet strawberry

163

00:06:17,773 --> 00:06:19,913

being grown on the farm. This particular

164

00:06:19,913 --> 00:06:21,441

variety of strawberry was originally

165

00:06:21,441 --> 00:06:23,581

grown in the US and this successful

166

00:06:23,581 --> 00:06:25,829

cultivation led to the first batch of

167

00:06:25,829 --> 00:06:27,924

Little Scarlet Jam a couple of years

168

00:06:27,924 --> 00:06:30,020

later. Now, if you haven't tried this

169

00:06:30,020 --> 00:06:32,115

jam, I cannot recommend it highly enough.

170

00:06:32,115 --> 00:06:33,911

Apparently there's up to 70 strawberries

171

00:06:33,911 --> 00:06:36,605

per jar and I absolutely love it. And I'm

172

00:06:36,605 --> 00:06:39,300

not the only one. It's a best seller and

173

00:06:39,300 --> 00:06:41,994

even James Bond is noted as eating it in

174

00:06:41,994 --> 00:06:43,790

the novel From Russia With Love.

175

00:06:44,910 --> 00:06:47,437

Two years later, in 1888, the business

176

00:06:47,437 --> 00:06:49,603

became a limited company. However, in

177

00:06:49,603 --> 00:06:51,769

their first year they experienced some

178

00:06:51,769 --> 00:06:53,934

bad debts and significant expenses. They

179

00:06:53,934 --> 00:06:56,822

were in a deficit of £1400, which

180

00:06:56,822 --> 00:06:59,349

would be about £235,000 in today's money.

181

00:06:59,349 --> 00:07:02,237

In Arthur's own words, he needed a lion's

182

00:07:02,237 --> 00:07:05,125

heart to go on. But things improved and

183

00:07:05,125 --> 00:07:08,012

by 1893 Arthur was chairman with his sons

184

00:07:08,012 --> 00:07:10,539

joining as directors. One of the sons,

185

00:07:10,539 --> 00:07:13,066

Charles, who I mentioned earlier, was an

186

00:07:13,066 --> 00:07:14,910

accountant who fully embraced. Role

187

00:07:14,910 --> 00:07:16,590

within the company travelling the world

188

00:07:16,590 --> 00:07:18,270

to learn more about production methods

189

00:07:18,270 --> 00:07:20,230

and bring back any lessons from other

190

00:07:20,230 --> 00:07:22,957

companies. In the early years of

191

00:07:22,957 --> 00:07:25,272

the 20th century, the name of the company

192

00:07:25,272 --> 00:07:27,298

was causing some confusion. It turns out

193

00:07:27,298 --> 00:07:29,324

there were over 20 other companies who

194

00:07:29,324 --> 00:07:31,350

were all called Britannia, and it wasn't

195

00:07:31,350 --> 00:07:33,665

as though anyone could just do a quick

196

00:07:33,665 --> 00:07:35,402

Google search to check for the

197

00:07:35,402 --> 00:07:37,138

availability of names. In 1905, the

198

00:07:37,138 --> 00:07:39,164

company changed its name to Wilkin and

199

00:07:39,164 --> 00:07:41,190

Sons Limited, which has been known as

200

00:07:41,190 --> 00:07:43,795

ever since. In the same year, there was a

201

00:07:43,795 --> 00:07:45,531

further exciting development in the form

202

00:07:45,531 --> 00:07:48,168

of electricity. The factory was finally

203

00:07:48,168 --> 00:07:50,143

plugged in, however, it did take another

204

00:07:50,143 --> 00:07:52,400

30 years for the village of Tiptree to

205

00:07:52,750 --> 00:07:55,457

also get hooked up to the grid. Arthur

206

00:07:55,457 --> 00:07:58,234

was known for doing a lot for his

207

00:07:58,234 --> 00:07:59,969

community, vigorously campaigning for the

208

00:07:59,969 --> 00:08:02,052

introduction of the Crab and Winkle

209

00:08:02,052 --> 00:08:04,135

railway line from Kelvedon to Tollesbury.

210

00:08:04,135 --> 00:08:06,911

He also formed an old age relief in

211

00:08:06,911 --> 00:08:08,994

Tiptree which distributed about £4600

212

00:08:08,994 --> 00:08:11,771

across the 12 years that it ran. It

213

00:08:11,771 --> 00:08:13,853

finally finished in 1911 when the

214

00:08:13,853 --> 00:08:16,283

government of the day introduced a state

215

00:08:16,283 --> 00:08:18,866

pension. The company also built houses

216

00:08:18,866 --> 00:08:21,227

for its workers in and around Tiptree. By

217

00:08:21,227 --> 00:08:23,589

1910, there were 29 of these cottages and

218

00:08:23,589 --> 00:08:25,655

there are still workers living in these

219

00:08:25,655 --> 00:08:28,422

today. King George

220

00:08:28,422 --> 00:08:30,599

the 5th granted the company the Royal

221

00:08:30,599 --> 00:08:32,777

Warrant, which is quite an accolade. It's

222

00:08:32,777 --> 00:08:34,954

a formal document that allows a company

223

00:08:34,954 --> 00:08:37,442

to display the Royal arms to signify that

224

00:08:37,442 --> 00:08:39,620

they are regular suppliers of goods or

225

00:08:39,620 --> 00:08:41,797

services to the Royal Household. This can

226

00:08:41,797 --> 00:08:43,974

only have helped their reputation and by

227

00:08:43,974 --> 00:08:46,463

this time they were exporting as far away

228

00:08:46,463 --> 00:08:48,329

as Sudan, Nigeria, Myanmar and the

229

00:08:48,329 --> 00:08:50,1000

Falklands. Sadly, 1913 saw the death

230

00:08:50,1000 --> 00:08:53,310

of Arthur, who was greatly missed by

231

00:08:53,310 --> 00:08:54,960

colleagues, and his sons, including

232

00:08:54,960 --> 00:08:57,270

Charles, took over the running of the

233

00:08:57,270 --> 00:08:59,250

company. That same year, the company

234

00:08:59,250 --> 00:09:01,230

purchased John Mechi's old farm, Tiptree

235

00:09:01,230 --> 00:09:03,210

Hall, and its surrounding land for

236

00:09:03,210 --> 00:09:05,520

expansion. In the autumn of 1914, the

237

00:09:05,520 --> 00:09:08,160

First World War kicked off and while 15

238

00:09:08,160 --> 00:09:10,140

of the English factory workers were

239

00:09:10,140 --> 00:09:12,450

granted exemptions from being sent to the

240

00:09:12,450 --> 00:09:14,760

front line, it was still difficult to

241

00:09:14,760 --> 00:09:16,740

function with parts of the factory

242

00:09:16,740 --> 00:09:18,804

closed. This didn't stop the company

243

00:09:18,804 --> 00:09:20,322

though, and they managed to get 8000

244

00:09:20,322 --> 00:09:22,875

boxes of jam sent to the soldiers on the

245

00:09:22,875 --> 00:09:25,169

front by 1917, 73 employees joined the

246

00:09:25,169 --> 00:09:27,845

forces and of these eleven were killed,

247

00:09:27,845 --> 00:09:30,522

14 wounded, four became prisoners of war,

248

00:09:30,522 --> 00:09:33,198

three were promoted to officer rank and

249

00:09:33,198 --> 00:09:35,110

three received the Military Medal.

250

00:09:36,070 --> 00:09:38,460

Jam was clearly popular with the British

251

00:09:38,460 --> 00:09:40,851
servicemen on Sunday during the war. A

252

00:09:40,851 --> 00:09:42,900
biplane from the nearby airstrip at

253

00:09:42,900 --> 00:09:44,949
Stow Maries flew over the Tiptree factory

254

00:09:44,949 --> 00:09:47,339
as everyone left Sunday service at the

255

00:09:47,339 --> 00:09:49,730
church and dropped a yellow and blue

256

00:09:49,730 --> 00:09:51,779
streamer to the people below. The

257

00:09:51,779 --> 00:09:53,486
streamer had three simple words

258

00:09:53,486 --> 00:09:55,877
emblazoned on it: SEND MORE JAM. Wilkin

259

00:09:55,877 --> 00:09:58,609
and Sons Limited were only too happy to

260

00:09:58,609 --> 00:09:58,950
oblige.

261

00:10:01,350 --> 00:10:03,854
In 1917, the Wilkin Provident Trust was

262

00:10:03,854 --> 00:10:06,001
established with the motto By their

263

00:10:06,001 --> 00:10:08,748

fruits shall ye know them. This

264

00:10:08,748 --> 00:10:11,293

meant that Charles gave a share of the

265

00:10:11,293 --> 00:10:13,201

profits to the employees that was

266

00:10:13,201 --> 00:10:15,110

proportionate to the value that those

267

00:10:15,110 --> 00:10:17,019

individuals had to the business. The

268

00:10:17,019 --> 00:10:18,927

company continued to prosper, with sales

269

00:10:18,927 --> 00:10:21,472

in 1920 exceeding £100,000 for the first

270

00:10:21,472 --> 00:10:24,274

time. The 1920s saw

271

00:10:24,274 --> 00:10:26,431

a new generation of employees join the

272

00:10:26,431 --> 00:10:28,896

company and it was also the decade when

273

00:10:28,896 --> 00:10:31,053

Queen Mary, consort of King George the

274

00:10:31,053 --> 00:10:33,209

Fifth, was gifted a dollhouse by King

275

00:10:33,209 --> 00:10:34,750

George's cousin, Princess Marie Louise.

276

00:10:35,750 --> 00:10:38,472

Now you might be wondering, Eri, this is

277

00:10:38,472 --> 00:10:41,194

quite the pivot. What on earth does this

278

00:10:41,194 --> 00:10:43,916

have to do with Tiptree Jam? Stay with

279

00:10:43,916 --> 00:10:46,297

me or will become clear because this

280

00:10:46,297 --> 00:10:48,339

wasn't just your average doll's house.

281

00:10:48,339 --> 00:10:50,380

The completed doll's house was the

282

00:10:50,380 --> 00:10:52,421

product of over 1000 contributors, with

283

00:10:52,421 --> 00:10:54,803

everything being made to scale. One of

284

00:10:54,803 --> 00:10:56,844

the contributions to this doll's house?

285

00:10:56,844 --> 00:10:59,226

Tiny, perfectly to scale jars of Tiptree

286

00:10:59,226 --> 00:11:01,948

Jam. If you have a look in the

287

00:11:01,948 --> 00:11:04,670

show notes, there's a link to a page

288

00:11:04,670 --> 00:11:06,446

on the Royal Collection Trust website.

289

00:11:06,446 --> 00:11:08,729

And if you scroll down to the second

290

00:11:08,729 --> 00:11:11,297

photo of a kitchen table and look on the

291

00:11:11,297 --> 00:11:13,580

right hand side of that table, you'll be

292

00:11:13,580 --> 00:11:15,863

able to spot the Tiptree jam jars sitting

293

00:11:15,863 --> 00:11:18,146

next to a miniature plate of boiled eggs.

294

00:11:18,146 --> 00:11:20,429

Honestly, I had no idea that this doll's

295

00:11:20,429 --> 00:11:22,141

house existed until I started the

296

00:11:22,141 --> 00:11:24,139

research for this episode, and I'm now

297

00:11:24,139 --> 00:11:25,851

itching to visit Windsor Castle, where

298

00:11:25,851 --> 00:11:27,849

it's still on display. Anyway, back to

299

00:11:27,849 --> 00:11:30,806

Tiptree in the 1930s. The

300

00:11:30,806 --> 00:11:32,641

1930s were generally rough for everyone

301

00:11:32,641 --> 00:11:34,475
financially. The Wall Street crash of

302

00:11:34,475 --> 00:11:36,616
1929 plunged the US into a Great

303

00:11:36,616 --> 00:11:38,757
Depression. As the saying goes, when the

304

00:11:38,757 --> 00:11:41,203
US sneezes, the rest of the world catches

305

00:11:41,203 --> 00:11:43,955
a cold. And the impact of the crash was

306

00:11:43,955 --> 00:11:46,096
felt in England too, with exports from

307

00:11:46,096 --> 00:11:47,625
Britain dropping by half. Naturally,

308

00:11:47,625 --> 00:11:49,766
Wilkin and Sons Limited felt the squeeze

309

00:11:49,766 --> 00:11:51,906
too. Given that Charles was originally an

310

00:11:51,906 --> 00:11:53,741
accountant, he had a clear understanding

311

00:11:53,741 --> 00:11:56,188
of where the pain points were, and that

312

00:11:56,188 --> 00:11:58,634
meant that he had to make some tough

313

00:11:58,634 --> 00:12:00,947

decisions. Firstly, he put the company

314

00:12:00,947 --> 00:12:03,580

profit. Into stocks and shares rather

315

00:12:03,580 --> 00:12:05,570

than reinvesting them into productivity

316

00:12:05,570 --> 00:12:08,356

assets. Secondly, and sadly, he had to

317

00:12:08,356 --> 00:12:11,036

reduce staff numbers. 1939 saw another

318

00:12:11,036 --> 00:12:13,009

rough period, not just for the company

319

00:12:13,009 --> 00:12:15,546

but for the world as the Second World War

320

00:12:15,546 --> 00:12:17,965

kicked off. The important thing to

321

00:12:17,965 --> 00:12:19,606

remember is that the factory is

322

00:12:19,606 --> 00:12:21,522

relatively near to the coast, so the

323

00:12:21,522 --> 00:12:23,711

threat of bombing was very real and once

324

00:12:23,711 --> 00:12:25,900

again the war effort led to a labour

325

00:12:25,900 --> 00:12:27,815

shortage with a number of employees being

326

00:12:27,815 --> 00:12:30,748
called up to fight. Then

327

00:12:30,748 --> 00:12:33,253
in 1941, something happened which was to

328

00:12:33,253 --> 00:12:35,400
change the distribution of Tiptree Jam

329

00:12:35,400 --> 00:12:36,832
permanently. Rationing was introduced.

330

00:12:36,832 --> 00:12:39,337
This meant that the company was only

331

00:12:39,337 --> 00:12:41,484
allowed to deal with retailers rather

332

00:12:41,484 --> 00:12:43,273
than directly with their customers.

333

00:12:43,273 --> 00:12:44,705
Supplying through retailers continued

334

00:12:44,705 --> 00:12:46,852
after the war, despite initial hostility

335

00:12:46,852 --> 00:12:48,999
from retailers who weren't impressed that

336

00:12:48,999 --> 00:12:51,146
they hadn't previously been allowed to

337

00:12:51,146 --> 00:12:54,009
stock Tiptree Jam. But the Jam was so

338

00:12:54,009 --> 00:12:56,156

popular they relented and continued to

339

00:12:56,156 --> 00:12:58,904
stock it anyway. Charles passed

340

00:12:58,904 --> 00:13:01,403
away in 1942 and the next generation

341

00:13:01,403 --> 00:13:03,546
stepped up, with his nephew Thomas

342

00:13:03,546 --> 00:13:05,688
becoming the new managing director and

343

00:13:05,688 --> 00:13:07,473
Thomas's brother, another Arthur, as

344

00:13:07,473 --> 00:13:10,115
chairman. Despite the constant risk of

345

00:13:10,115 --> 00:13:11,896
bombing, the company was very fortunate

346

00:13:11,896 --> 00:13:14,271
in that they managed to get through the

347

00:13:14,271 --> 00:13:16,349
war without a single direct hit. Though

348

00:13:16,349 --> 00:13:19,318
at one point the tail of a bomb broke off

349

00:13:19,318 --> 00:13:21,397
and landed in their orchard, the actual

350

00:13:21,397 --> 00:13:23,772
explosive part of the bomb hit a nearby

351

00:13:23,772 --> 00:13:25,256

hardware store. Fortunately, despite 250

352

00:13:25,256 --> 00:13:27,038

properties being damaged in the bombings,

353

00:13:27,038 --> 00:13:28,819

there were no fatalities in Tiptree

354

00:13:28,819 --> 00:13:31,760

caused by this. So after

355

00:13:31,760 --> 00:13:34,640

the war finished in 1945, things began to

356

00:13:34,640 --> 00:13:36,440

improve. Government price fixes lifted

357

00:13:36,440 --> 00:13:38,600

and 1947 saw the company experience

358

00:13:38,600 --> 00:13:40,760

record profits. In 1948 they expanded

359

00:13:40,760 --> 00:13:42,920

into Suffolk, purchasing 100 acres, which

360

00:13:42,920 --> 00:13:45,440

was harvestable a few years later. This

361

00:13:45,440 --> 00:13:47,960

was also the year that sugar rationing

362

00:13:47,960 --> 00:13:50,120

was abolished. By the 1950s, those

363

00:13:50,120 --> 00:13:52,280

investments I mentioned earlier that were

364

00:13:52,280 --> 00:13:55,160

made in the 30s had also borne fruit,

365

00:13:55,160 --> 00:13:58,040

if you'll pardon the pun, and they were

366

00:13:58,040 --> 00:14:00,835

reinvested into the factory. At this

367

00:14:00,835 --> 00:14:03,374

point, the company owned 1000 acres and

368

00:14:03,374 --> 00:14:05,913

in 1954 they received the Royal Warrant

369

00:14:05,913 --> 00:14:08,451

for both jam and marmalade from Queen

370

00:14:08,451 --> 00:14:10,627

Elizabeth II, which further boosted sales

371

00:14:10,627 --> 00:14:13,367

overseas. By the 1960s,

372

00:14:13,367 --> 00:14:16,208

the company was keen to grow and needed a

373

00:14:16,208 --> 00:14:18,734

cash injection. To do this, a lot of

374

00:14:18,734 --> 00:14:20,628

research was done into varieties of

375

00:14:20,628 --> 00:14:22,522

strawberries that would crop well but

376

00:14:22,522 --> 00:14:24,416
still taste delicious, and the less

377

00:14:24,416 --> 00:14:26,310
valuable fruit trees were removed. The

378

00:14:26,310 --> 00:14:28,835
jars had shrunk from 16 ounces to 12

379

00:14:28,835 --> 00:14:30,730
ounces in response to jam consumption

380

00:14:30,730 --> 00:14:32,939
levels dropping. This was also the moment

381

00:14:32,939 --> 00:14:35,149
that saw the introduction of twist off

382

00:14:35,149 --> 00:14:37,359
caps, which I'll be honest, I never

383

00:14:37,359 --> 00:14:39,253
thought about in terms of whether

384

00:14:39,253 --> 00:14:42,081
anything preceded them. In 1971,

385

00:14:42,081 --> 00:14:44,727
the 4th generation of the family was in

386

00:14:44,727 --> 00:14:47,043
the boardroom and the years that followed

387

00:14:47,043 --> 00:14:49,027
saw further modernisation of the factory

388

00:14:49,027 --> 00:14:51,012

along with the refurbishment of the

389

00:14:51,012 --> 00:14:53,327

employee homes as well. 1979 again saw

390

00:14:53,327 --> 00:14:55,642

record profits and something that I find

391

00:14:55,642 --> 00:14:57,957

really interesting is that the growth of

392

00:14:57,957 --> 00:14:59,611

the operations was funded strictly

393

00:14:59,611 --> 00:15:01,265

through profits only, rather than

394

00:15:01,265 --> 00:15:03,249

borrowing money to fund those endeavours

395

00:15:03,249 --> 00:15:06,046

instead. The 1980s saw

396

00:15:06,046 --> 00:15:08,969

the return of lemon curd, another one of

397

00:15:08,969 --> 00:15:10,796

my favourites, more Christmas puddings

398

00:15:10,796 --> 00:15:12,988

and gift packs. Production hit 3600

399

00:15:12,988 --> 00:15:15,911

tonnes and 32% of these were exported to

400

00:15:15,911 --> 00:15:17,738

almost 50 countries. The company

401

00:15:17,738 --> 00:15:20,296

celebrated its centenary in 1985 with the

402

00:15:20,296 --> 00:15:22,853

opening of the museum, which is well

403

00:15:22,853 --> 00:15:25,776

worth a visit if you happen to be

404

00:15:25,776 --> 00:15:28,334

passing, and a garden party for employees

405

00:15:28,334 --> 00:15:30,680

at the Gatehouse. There was also a

406

00:15:30,680 --> 00:15:32,120

special annual general meeting that was

407

00:15:32,120 --> 00:15:33,560

held for shareholders at Tiptree Hall.

408

00:15:34,430 --> 00:15:36,270

Thomas, who had been running the company

409

00:15:36,270 --> 00:15:38,373

since the 1940s by this point and was

410

00:15:38,373 --> 00:15:40,739

known as Mr Tom in his last years within

411

00:15:40,739 --> 00:15:42,579

the business, set up a share ownership

412

00:15:42,579 --> 00:15:44,419

scheme allowing employees to share in the

413

00:15:44,419 --> 00:15:46,780

success of the company. Shares were

414

00:15:46,780 --> 00:15:49,302

bought back over time and held on trust

415

00:15:49,302 --> 00:15:51,508

for the employees. That trust still holds

416

00:15:51,508 --> 00:15:53,715

just under half of the issued share

417

00:15:53,715 --> 00:15:56,494

capital. But the 1980s weren't all

418

00:15:56,494 --> 00:15:58,682

sunshine and rainbows, with a company

419

00:15:58,682 --> 00:16:01,235

being impacted by the hurricane of 1987.

420

00:16:01,235 --> 00:16:03,058

This uprooted trees, damaged buildings,

421

00:16:03,058 --> 00:16:05,976

and the wind picked up salt from the

422

00:16:05,976 --> 00:16:08,529

sea, which blew inland and burned the

423

00:16:08,529 --> 00:16:10,352

plants. Despite the hurricane, late

424

00:16:10,352 --> 00:16:12,541

spring frosts and droughts, the companies

425

00:16:12,541 --> 00:16:15,242

still persisted. Further expansion in the

426

00:16:15,242 --> 00:16:17,507

1990s led to the company opening a jam

427

00:16:17,507 --> 00:16:19,772

shop in Tiptree in 1994, along with the

428

00:16:19,772 --> 00:16:22,319

tea room a bit later, which in 1996 saw

429

00:16:22,319 --> 00:16:24,301

50,000 people visit across the year. The

430

00:16:24,301 --> 00:16:26,848

tea room is still there and I had a

431

00:16:26,848 --> 00:16:28,547

lovely traditional cream tea when I

432

00:16:28,547 --> 00:16:30,245

visited earlier this year for research,

433

00:16:30,245 --> 00:16:32,793

which is a terrific excuse for a scone to

434

00:16:32,793 --> 00:16:35,058

be honest. And if you're in the area,

435

00:16:35,058 --> 00:16:37,605

it's one of the best cream teas I've ever

436

00:16:37,605 --> 00:16:39,870

had and I have had quite a few.

437

00:16:40,990 --> 00:16:43,038

Although the factory has been redeveloped

438

00:16:43,038 --> 00:16:45,427

over time, it's still fascinating to see

439

00:16:45,427 --> 00:16:47,817

that not everything is done by machine.

440

00:16:47,817 --> 00:16:50,547

Fruit is still sorted by hand, but the

441

00:16:50,547 --> 00:16:52,937

factory fills over 100,000 of the little

442

00:16:52,937 --> 00:16:55,667

one ounce jars in a single day. 300

443

00:16:55,667 --> 00:16:58,057

jars are labelled and packed by machine

444

00:16:58,057 --> 00:17:00,105

every minute, but smaller exports are

445

00:17:00,105 --> 00:17:02,982

still packed by hand. Jam

446

00:17:02,982 --> 00:17:05,093

consumption has continued to drop over

447

00:17:05,093 --> 00:17:07,555

the years, but Wilkin and Sons Limited

448

00:17:07,555 --> 00:17:09,314

still flourishes. They've also bought

449

00:17:09,314 --> 00:17:11,425

other producers, from Burnham Mustard and

450

00:17:11,425 --> 00:17:13,888

Thursday Cottage to a patisserie firm in

451

00:17:13,888 --> 00:17:15,999

Witham and Coles Puddings, a Christmas

452

00:17:15,999 --> 00:17:18,461

pudding company also based in Essex. The

453

00:17:18,461 --> 00:17:20,924

company also cut the ribbon to new

454

00:17:20,924 --> 00:17:23,035

bungalows at Gatehouse Mews, which were

455

00:17:23,035 --> 00:17:25,497

built for retired members of staff. And

456

00:17:25,497 --> 00:17:27,960

in 2016, Tiptree Fruit Gin liqueurs were

457

00:17:27,960 --> 00:17:30,423

released in a range of flavours including

458

00:17:30,423 --> 00:17:31,830

damson, strawberry, rhubarb and my

459

00:17:32,140 --> 00:17:34,394

favourite raspberry. This has proven very

460

00:17:34,394 --> 00:17:36,647

popular and led to further products

461

00:17:36,647 --> 00:17:39,276

including a range of spirits with an

462

00:17:39,276 --> 00:17:41,530

RAF theme, Spitfire Vodka, Hurricane Gin

463

00:17:41,530 --> 00:17:44,159

and Lancaster Spiced Rum. That tearoom

464

00:17:44,159 --> 00:17:46,788

I mentioned earlier is no longer the

465

00:17:46,788 --> 00:17:49,417

only one with a number of tea

466

00:17:49,417 --> 00:17:52,046

rooms popping up across the region. And

467

00:17:52,046 --> 00:17:54,675

2025 marked 140 years of jam making

468

00:17:54,675 --> 00:17:56,929

with Wilkin and Sons Limited receiving

469

00:17:56,929 --> 00:17:59,558

yet another Royal Warrant, this time from

470

00:17:59,558 --> 00:18:02,511

King Charles the Third. When

471

00:18:02,511 --> 00:18:04,836

I began the research for this episode, I

472

00:18:04,836 --> 00:18:07,452

knew that I would be learning a lot about

473

00:18:07,452 --> 00:18:09,778

the quality of one of my favourite things

474

00:18:09,778 --> 00:18:12,104

to spread on toast. What I wasn't aware

475

00:18:12,104 --> 00:18:14,429

of was how the values held by Arthur

476

00:18:14,429 --> 00:18:16,464

Charles Wilkin are still embodied by the

477

00:18:16,464 --> 00:18:18,208

company today. Throughout the years, it's

478

00:18:18,208 --> 00:18:19,952

clear that even through periods of

479

00:18:19,952 --> 00:18:21,696

hardship, the largest employer in Tiptree

480

00:18:21,696 --> 00:18:23,731

has stood firm to its principles. The

481

00:18:23,731 --> 00:18:25,475

refusal to compromise on quality, the

482

00:18:25,475 --> 00:18:27,510

holding of shares in trust for employees,

483

00:18:27,510 --> 00:18:29,836

the company cottages for staff to live in

484

00:18:29,836 --> 00:18:32,374

and even the annual Strawberry Race that

485

00:18:32,374 --> 00:18:34,261

sees strawberry pickers compete for the

486

00:18:34,261 --> 00:18:36,463

title of fastest picker of Little Scarlet

487

00:18:36,463 --> 00:18:38,350

strawberries. By their fruits shall ye

488

00:18:38,350 --> 00:18:40,551

know them still rings true all these

489

00:18:40,551 --> 00:18:43,386

years later. To this day, Tiptree Jam

490

00:18:43,386 --> 00:18:45,072

is exported around the world. Those

491

00:18:45,072 --> 00:18:47,040

adorable one ounce mini jars are perfect

492

00:18:47,040 --> 00:18:49,289

for hotels and other catering. So I have

493

00:18:49,289 --> 00:18:51,257

a question for my lovely listeners. How

494

00:18:51,257 --> 00:18:53,225

far away from Essex have you spotted

495

00:18:53,225 --> 00:18:55,474

Tiptree Jam in the wild? And if you've

496

00:18:55,474 --> 00:18:57,161

tried it, what was your favourite

497

00:18:57,161 --> 00:18:59,410

flavour? Let me know in the comments on

498

00:18:59,410 --> 00:19:01,378

social media or via e-mail. You'll find

499

00:19:01,378 --> 00:19:03,627

the details in the show notes. Thanks so

500

00:19:03,627 --> 00:19:05,595

much for listening. I hope you've enjoyed

501

00:19:05,595 --> 00:19:08,125

our deep dive into the history of a very

502

00:19:08,125 --> 00:19:10,374

Essex company. I would love it if you

503

00:19:10,374 --> 00:19:12,394

could hit like and subscribe or even just

504

00:19:12,394 --> 00:19:14,123

share this with other people who are

505

00:19:14,123 --> 00:19:15,851

interested in all things Essex. It's a

506

00:19:15,851 --> 00:19:17,580

huge help to a small independent show.

507

00:19:18,060 --> 00:19:19,796

Until next time, take care, stay safe,

508

00:19:19,796 --> 00:19:21,780

and I'll see you in the next episode.

509

00:19:23,470 --> 00:19:39,830