

Bermondsey Street Back Stories

Number 13: Jam Yesterday – Hartley's in Bermondsey

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The London works of Hartley's

The Jam Factory Chimney

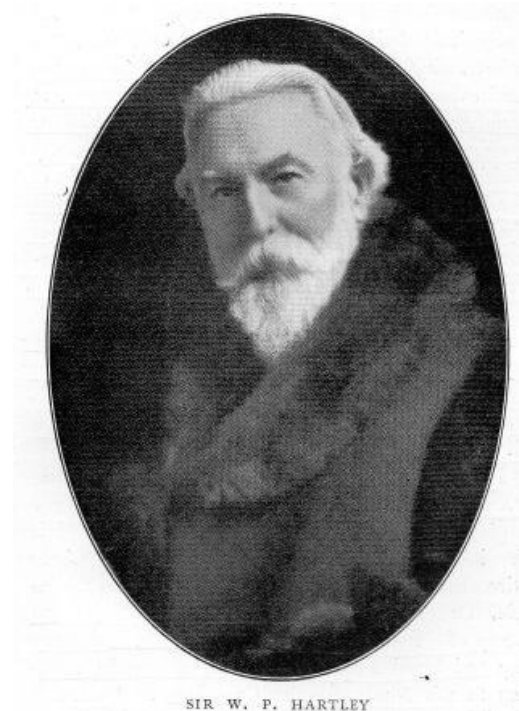
As Bermondsey has changed over the years, factories, workshops and warehouses have given way to offices, restaurants and smart apartment blocks. But one sight has greeted residents and newcomers for over a century. It is a high chimney stack that proclaims in bold white lettering, 'HARTLEYS'. This is the story of Hartley's jams and preserves – but also of the remarkable Sir William Pickles Hartley.

Sir William Hartley – Lancashire-born

He was born in 1846 in Colne Lancashire. An early photograph shows a young man of determination and ambition, but he was more than this. He was a staunch Primitive Methodist both in views and behaviour. A lifelong philanthropist and generous contributor to many causes, he made an early decision to devote 10% of his gross income to humanitarian work. This amount was to increase as years went on. Amongst many other initiatives, he funded a cottage hospital, a model village, retirement homes for his workers, a botanical laboratory and a Methodist training college.



William Hartley, aged 14



The successful Sir William Hartley

A career in jam

William left school at the age of 14 and began work in his mother's grocery shop. He started his commercial career at the age of 16 when he opened his own business in grocers' sundries. This quickly became successful until deliveries of jam from a local supplier became unreliable. When orders failed to arrive, with characteristic enterprise he began to produce his own preserves. His resolution to produce the best that he could whatever price he was compelled to charge became a hallmark of his brand which he followed throughout his business life. In 1884, the firm became William Hartley & Sons, active in the North and Midlands. It eventually expanded to London as the result of the quality of its products and increasing demand.

Hartley's new factory, Green Walk, off Tower Bridge Road

The London Works in Green Walk were built on the site of a former tannery and linoleum factory. Over 300 tanpits, a factory and offices were demolished. Only a local public house, *The Jolly Tanners* remained. Entry to the factory complex was through impressive wrought iron gates. Designed to the most modern standards of health, safety and convenience of the time, the new buildings covered two acres. The factory was opened in June 1901.



Close up of a proud gatepost



The gates after refurbishment

Fruit from Kent, sugar from Silvertown

Bermondsey's Mayor, Samuel Bevington was not entirely enthusiastic at the opening ceremony. As the head of a leather business, he regretted the gradual decline of his own industry but accepted that change was inevitable. In advance of his time, he thought the factory should be nearer to the source of raw materials. However, special trains brought fruit from the orchards of Kent to the huge Bricklayers Arms rail depot just down the road. Hartley's had their own wharf on the Thames nearby where sugar arrived from the Tate works at Silvertown.



The huge Bricklayers Arms rail freight depot from the air

All mod cons

Special fire prevention methods with automatic sprinklers and a sophisticated system of ventilation were installed. There were five internal lifts and the innovation of electricity was used for light and power. A factory inspection reported *'We were very much impressed with the sanitary arrangements and the perfect system of ventilation that you have here. Everything was clean and fresh and the workers were neat and tidy...'*

A mini-railway for heavy trolleys met the needs of workpeople involved in the moving of heavy weights. A loading bay accommodated between 15 and 20 vans. At the height of the season, there were over 2000 employees, mostly women, and there were plans to produce over 400 tons of jam per week, with storage for a huge quantity of highly glazed stone jars.

Only the best

Hartley believed that a high-class product would not only bring reputation but dividend. His claim was that *'Hartley's make only one quality – the best'*. When he received a letter from a customer asking for a sample, his reply was brief. *'Dear Sir, the name is the sample'*. In his opening speech he declared *'Our preserves and marmalade are all made direct from the fresh fruit, some of which we grow on our own farms. Fruit is gathered and preserved on the same day and filled into our stoneware jars.'*



Jam cooking in the Hartley's factory

Jam to Antarctica

William Hartley had a 'hands on' approach to quality and often arrived at the factory at 6 am to test the previous day's output. He expected his managers to be equally dedicated. The Hartley site at Green Walk was extended and new buildings were added in 1908, making it one of the largest factories in London. The name of Hartley with its trademark of a lighthouse was by then well-known and in 1911, Hartley gooseberry jam was sent with Scott to the Antarctic. An expedition years later discovered it still fresh and palatable.

Wartime adjustments 1914-18

WW1 brought production difficulties to the factories with male workers being called to the front. Women workers took over their roles. With a lack of available fruit, new varieties such as lemon marmalade and rhubarb and ginger jam filled the gap. Despite adulteration by competitors with wooden 'seeds' and the use of turnips, carrot and apple in jam, Hartley products never lost quality.

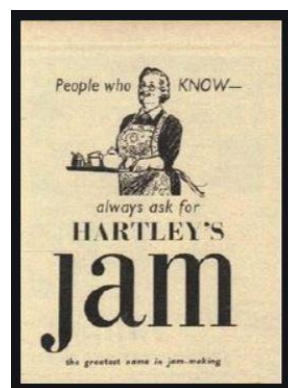
Looking after the employees

William felt that the reputation of an employer stands or falls with the treatment of those he employs. He observed, *'Our interests are mutual. My aim from the first is to do to them as I would be done by'*. Workers were paid more than in other similar businesses. Female employees were paid 20% to 40% more than those of his competitors. General wage policy was based on regular increases.



1920s Hartleys Jam employee

Both male and female employees benefited from a system of merit based profit sharing with an annual ceremony, almost like a prize-giving. Hartley believed that those who deserved it had a claim to share in the prosperity of the business and urged recipients to spend it wisely. There were occasional expenses and wage paid trips for employees. Hartley's was one of the first firms to provide dining facilities for workers and free medical care. A Social and Welfare Club, a works magazine - *The Lighthouse* - and in later years, cricket and tennis clubs were established.



The grandsons take charge

Sir William died in 1922, still closely involved with the day to day running of the firm. In one of many tributes, he was described as *'One of the most notable figures in modern industry, philanthropy and religion'*. He left five grandsons running the business in Liverpool and London.

Advertising and publicity in the 1920s and 30s

There were fluctuations in trade between the two world wars but advertisements kept Hartley jams and marmalades in the public eye. In the 1920s, celebrated West End star, Evelyn Laye promoted a new variety of marmalade, the name taken from a popular Noel Coward musical called *Bittersweet*. Publicity insisted that jam was still made *'the real jam way'* and that Hartley's *'continued the best traditions of the home jam-maker with the advantages of modern large scale and scientifically controlled production'*. There was a royal visit. In 1933, the Prince of Wales came to the factory in Green Walk to see how marmalade was made.



Early advertising for Hartley's Jams

Diversification

The inter-war years saw diversification. Canned vegetables, table jellies, pickles and sauces were added to the range of products and in 1936, Hartley's became a public company with a £1m share issue.



Hartley's preserves jar

Rationing in World War 2

In WW2, Hartley's helped to support the preserves ration. Despite the war damage and difficulties of supply, they produced many thousands of tons of jams and marmalades as well as mini-tins for the composite ration packs for the armed forces. In a departure from the customary high standards, pulp had to be used instead of Hartley's hallmark whole fruit.

Bombing

Like other factories in Bermondsey, the company opened a bomb shelter for use by employees that was also open to the public. In January 1941, the factory was hit by a bomb. The original stoneware jars had been phased out and massive stocks of glass jars were in fragments. A sticky Niagara of marmalade poured from the shattered buildings. Rescuers had to tunnel through shifting broken glass to find survivors, shoring up the excavation with timber as they progressed. Four people died and over 60 were wounded, many seriously. Nonetheless, production re-started within a week.



Hartley's stoneware jars

From the 1950s tastes were changing

Wartime rationing finally ended in 1954, but tastes were changing. Bread and jam were no longer staple foods. People went out more and enjoyed a variety of ingredients imported from all over the world. Although still profitable, Hartley's now had to compete with many other large firms supplying a similar range of products. Hartleys was a family firm, but younger members no longer wanted to enter the business.

Bought by Schweppes, then Premier Foods and now Hain Daniels

In 1959, the company was sold to the successful Schweppes organization. By 1962, the factory site at Green Walk had become offices and a distribution centre. Re-named Hartley-Chivers, the company was sold to Premier Foods in 1981, until eventually becoming a brand within the Hain Daniels group. The Hartleys brand continues, now marketed as 'the experts in Jam and Jelly'.



A recent publicity image

After 1975, the site was in light industrial and office occupation until it was rescued by the construction of a complex of modern apartments – appropriately named The Jam Factory. Many of the original buildings were refurbished. The tops of blocks where women workers used to sort and grade the summer fruits are now occupied by penthouses, but the landmark chimney remains.

