

Simpsons Centenary Facts

About the founder - a Victorian entrepreneur

- Born in Droylsden in 1861, William Simpson was a man from humble origins. The stepson of an unemployed warehouseman, his mother was illiterate and signed her name with a cross on his birth certificate¹.
- William was a cobbler's boy before securing a position in the grocery trade². He progressed quickly and was a branch manager aged 23³.
- Through his meticulous work experimenting with preservation techniques and different ingredients, William found great success running the 'Co-operative Sundries Manufacturing Society'. The rules were based on those of the well known co-operative movement.
- By his forties, William was a widower. In 1910 he married a young widow, Gertrude Rayner and together they decided to set up their own manufacturing business⁴.
- Originally a private house with stables, an orchard and a large garden, the site of the present day factory was acquired by William with his wife to start their own business⁵. He was aged 49 when the company was established in 1910.
- He and his wife Gertrude lived at their place of work for a while and their older son was born in the room currently serving as a director's office⁶. They later moved to Sale and commuted into the factory in a horse drawn carriage⁷.
- Although William overcame his humble origins and became a wealthy man, he suffered financial difficulties in the early 1920s⁸. This was partly through the effects of Excess Profits Duty (EPD) which in 1920 was levied at 60% to help deal with the post-war economic crisis⁹.

¹ Census returns and birth certificate

² E.M. Pickles, 1960, The Garden Factory: The story of Simpson Ready Foods Ltd

³ ibid

⁴ L.M.Simpson, 1990, Talk to Stretford Local History Society

⁵ Simpsons 1975 anniversary brochure

⁶ E.M. Pickles, 1960, The Garden Factory: The story of Simpson Ready Foods Ltd

⁷ ibid

⁸ Letter to Hesketh accountants 1923

⁹ <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/cabinetpapers/themes/end-war-fiscal-change.htm> accessed Nov 09