

**Olivia Greenway discovers the fascinating history behind some store-cupboard stalwarts.**

Cetty images.

# Taste Of Success

## Colman's Mustard

Mustard seeds and plants had historically been used in herbal medicine, but Jeremiah Colman began using seeds to make a hot edible spread in the early 1800s.

He used fresh water from the river at his mill near Norwich and mixed ground brown and white seeds to get a pungent mix. He founded Colman's of Norwich in 1814.

In 1823, he persuaded his adopted nephew, James, to join him. The distinctive yellow packaging appeared in 1855.

Queen Victoria issued a Royal Warrant in 1866 and Colman's Mustard is still used in the Royal household today.

European and American mustards are much milder and paler by comparison. More than five million jars of the fiery yellow condiment we all know and love so well are sold annually.



**L**URKING in our larders are store-cupboard essentials first concocted many years ago. Some of the oldest food companies in the world are British and date back centuries. For example, Geo. Watkins's mushroom ketchup was created at the start of the great Victorian age and Arthur Wilkin founded his fruit-preserving company in 1885.

Before that, Colman's Mustard saw the light of day in 1814 – a year before the Battle of Waterloo – while Fortnum & Mason's jars of deliciousness go back even further, to 1707! Here are six stalwarts that have stood the test of time, each with a fascinating history.

## Bird's Custard

Alfred Bird was a Victorian chemist from Birmingham. It was fashionable at the time for young middle-class couples to invite other couples to dinner, and a popular dessert was a fruit pie with custard.

This was usually made the traditional way with cornflower, milk and eggs. But Bird's wife couldn't enjoy this dessert as she was allergic to eggs.

So in 1837, the year Victoria became Queen, Bird got to work in his laboratory and came up with a powder that, when mixed with milk, thickened like custard and even looked and tasted like it.

It became so popular Bird started

making it commercially.

Bird's Custard remains a favourite today and is a perfect store-cupboard item, handy when putting together a dessert in a hurry.



## Fortnum & Mason Lemon Curd

William Fortnum was a footman in the household of Queen Anne, and a resourceful chap. It was at her insistence that they had fresh candles every evening.

Not wishing to see the remainder go to waste, he sold them and kept the proceeds.

In the days before gas and electricity, candles were big business, and combined with this he also had a small grocery service.

Hugh Mason, his landlord, was a builder who came to London to work on rebuilding projects after the devastation of the fire of 1666.

When Fortnum needed a business partner he asked Mason.

Their first luxury food store opened in London's Piccadilly in 1707. Fortnum's has always enjoyed a close relationship with the British Royal household, holding several warrants throughout its history, including two from Her Majesty The Queen and HRH The Prince of Wales.

Over the years, it prospered and embraced change. In fact, in 1886, it was the only store to stock a new and unusual American food product – Heinz baked beans.

In 1964, a four-ton clock was commissioned to stand outside the store on the upper storey, and on

the hour, four-foot-high models of the two founders emerge and bow to each other.

A well-known landmark on Piccadilly, this attraction still draws the crowds.

The store has continued to expand and is now known internationally, especially for its wicker hampers and vast tea emporium. It is also revered for its splendid chutneys, jams and honey.

Fortnum's resident archivist tells us that lemon cheese, or lemon curd, has remained popular throughout the centuries.

The company that now supplies Fortnum's has been making lemon curd for 30 years. They still use traditional copper pans and each jar is hand poured.



## Lea & Perrins Sauce

Lea & Perrins is another name attached to a popular store-cupboard ingredient. The product is so well known it doesn't even need a description.

According to the company history, a senior figure returned from India to his country estate in Worcestershire with a recipe he wanted to replicate.

He asked two local chemists – John Lea and William Perrins, who had a business in Broad Street, Worcester – to help.

They followed the recipe to the letter and produced large quantities of brown liquid.

Unfortunately, it tasted very unpleasant, so it was bottled, confined to the shop cellars and forgotten.

Some years later, the men found the bottles during a clear-out and decided to taste the sauce again before pouring it away.

They discovered to their delight it had improved with age – it now tasted delicious!

Word of the new sauce spread, and the enterprising men started selling it commercially. The recipe was always kept a secret, which helped add to its mystery and appeal.

In 1904 a Royal Warrant was issued by King Edward VII, and in 1906 the High Court proclaimed that only Lea & Perrins could have "original and genuine" attached to its name.

The sauce, which contains anchovies, garlic, tamarind and secret spices, is matured for up to three years before it's ready to be strained and bottled.

Today, no barman worth his salt would omit to add Lea & Perrins to a Bloody Mary, and it's also wonderful in savoury suet puddings and pies.



## Wilkin & Sons Little Scarlet Jam

Arthur Wilkin founded his fruit-preserving company in Tiptree, Essex, in 1885, in response to the Prime Minister's suggestion that the British population should make jam.

He used the village as his company's brand name. Wilkin & Sons was a huge commercial success; by 1906, 300 tons of fruit were produced annually.

A Royal Warrant was issued in 1911, and has been held ever since. Little Scarlet conserve, made from strawberries grown exclusively at Tiptree, is one of its most enduring products, first produced in 1901. The small, deep red strawberries have an intense flavour said to resemble wild Alpine strawberries.

## Geo. Watkins Mushroom Ketchup

George Watkins had a grocery business in Kentish Town, London.

In the days before refrigeration, sauces were added to pies to try to hide the taste of meat past its best.

Catsup, from Asia, was made from fermented fish. In 1830 George Watkins made a similar dark brown, spicy sauce from mushrooms.

Originally mushrooms were packed into earthenware jars with salt and left to ferment, then were boiled up, the resulting liquid strained through muslin.

Mace, black pepper and nutmeg would be added, and the liquid left to cool before bottling.

It's not really a ketchup – more a sauce. Add a few drops to a shepherd's pie – or any stew – for a flavour boost.

