

ANYONE FOR A CURRY?

William Hall

My late mother used to tell a tale about my early love of curry. She alleged that at the age of four I consumed a chicken vindaloo in a local Indian restaurant. Apparently, the chefs came out of the kitchen to stare in wonder at the young local boy eating their fiery hot curry.



Whether that was true or not, I certainly remember the curry mother would make on a Monday with Sunday's leftover roast chicken. She would reach for the Sharwood's mild madras curry powder, throw in some onions, tomatoes and sultanas and make my favourite teatime meal, with accompaniments of rice, mango chutney and pineapple cubes.

James Allen Sharwood was born in Islington, London in 1859 to a chemist father and school-mistress mother. Educated at Heath Mount School in Hampstead, he worked initially in the City of London's insurance world, before managing a wine distributor.

He opened a wholesale grocery business in 1889 at 77 Carter Lane, London, incorporating as limited company in 1899.



He spoke French, Italian, Spanish and German and travelled widely, bringing back produce and spices from around the world.

On a visit to India in the early 1890s James Sharwood is believed to have met the Viceroy, Lord Dufferin whilst delivering some supplies to the Viceroy's French chef. The chef was so grateful he recommended Sharwood to a local spice maker PVS Vencatachellum who traded at 1 & 2 Popham's Broadway, Madras.

Sharwood became the importer into Great Britain of their "Vencat" curry powder in 1893. It was a mix of turmeric, coriander, chillis and four other secret ingredients.



“Madras Curry Powder” was registered as a trademark by PVS Vencatachellum in the UK as far back as 1894 and was only removed from the trademark register in 2016.

In 1899 Sharwood’s opened a purpose built factory at Offley Works, Vauxhall, just south of the Oval cricket ground, to manufacture their range of chutneys and pickles.

The Offley Works were sold in 1962 when Sharwood’s was bought out by Cerebos, which in turn was sold to Rank Hovis McDougall in 1968.

Sharwood’s began to use perfins around 1910 and continued into the 1920s. O2010.03 can be found on the stamps of KEVII and KGV with just ten values recorded to date. Two dies may be represented as a more rounded ‘O’ appears in the late 1920’s examples of this perfin.



Many thanks to *Roy Gault* for the stamp illustrations, sadly I have no copies of my own.

James Sharwood retired in 1927 to Cape Town, South Africa where he died in 1941.

The Offley Works site was converted about ten years ago into seven news style houses and a commercial space for offices and a canteen. Sharwood’s are now part of Premier Foods and continue to sell a range of curry powders and sauces, along with mango chutney, poppadoms and naan breads. Gosh, I’m hungry now!