Exploring the history of Wilkinsons

wilkinson

The home of family value

wilkinson

The home of family value

1930s

FROM HUMBLE BEGINNINGS IN A LEICESTER STREET TO OVER 300 STORES AND A £1 BILLION TURNOVER, THIS IS THE REMARKABLE STORY OF WILKINSONS.

"I always like to look people in the eye and know in my heart that they are getting a good deal."

James Kemsey Wilkinson, founder

1914 World War I is declared.

1918 World War I ends.

JK's brother Donald had his own hardware business in Birmingham: Wilkinson (Handsworth) Brothers consisting of 4 stores. In its early days Handsworth brothers helped Wilkinsons with stock and ultimately 2 Handsworth stores became Wilkinsons stores.

1930 JK and his fiancée Mary Cooper open the first Wilkinson Cash Store at 151, Charnwood Street, Leicester.

1932 A second shop opens in Wigston Magna, Leicester.

The BBC starts broadcasting its first regular TV service.

1934 JK and Mary are married at 8am on 22 October at St Peters Church, Highfields, Leicester. The couple are both back in the shop by 11am.

1938-9 Wilkinsons secures premises in Syston, including offices and warehousing. Six more stores open by 1939.

1937 JK's brother John joins him as a director of Wilkinsons, holding the fort during the war years. "Mr John", as he was known, worked with Wilkinsons until his death in 1956.

1937 Tony Wilkinson born.

The first purpose-built warehouse opens on Brighton Road, Leicester.

1938 Superman was born.

1939 World War II is declared.

1906 James Kemsey Wilkinson was born. He would be known to many simply as 'JK'.

1920 | 1930 | 1931 | 1932 | 1933 | 1934 | 1935 | 1936 | 1937 | 1938 | 1939

1940s

THE NAME CHANGES BUT THE DEDICATION TO HARD WORK AND VALUE STAYS THE SAME.

1941 Wilkinson Cash Stores changes its name to Wilkinson Hardware Stores Limited.

1940 JK signs up to serve in WWII with the Royal Armoured Corps and later volunteers as a Bevin Boy.

Barbara Wilkinson born.

1941 L.M. Cooper is set up to administer the warehousing and wholesale side of the business.

Three shops close temporarily during the war, but swiftly re-open once the war ends in 1945.

1949 Peter Wilson joins as purchase ledger clerk and later becomes MD.

1948 National Health Service launches.

1948 Olympic Games open at Wembley Stadium in London.

1940 | 1941 | 1942 | 1943 | 1944 | 1945 | 1946 | 1947 | 1948 | 1949

1950s

THE DEMAND FOR DIY AND THE OPENING OF THE BIGGEST STORE TO DATE.

1959 Brian Fairhurst joins as assistant to the company secretary, Peter Wilson.

11 stores now open, with an annual turnover of **£300k**.

1952 The barcode is invented.

1953 The first colour TV sets go on sale in the USA

1956 Barbara becomes secretary to her father, JK. Barbara then marries and has her first child, Karin, in 1964.

1950s Wilkinsons meets consumer demand for labour-saving devices as DIY takes off in the home.

1958 The biggest store to date opens at Charles Street in Leicester.

1950 | 1951 | 1952 | 1953 | 1954 | 1955 | 1956 | 1957 | 1958 | 1959

1960s

TONY JOINS THE FAMILY BUSINESS AND WE GO FROM STRENGTH TO STRENGTH.

> *Wilkinsons started to grow outside Leicester, our pace developed steadily, compelling us to move to bigger premises in 1970 in Worksop.*
>
> Tony Wilkinson

1960 Tony joins the family business as Branch Manager at Charles Street, Leicester. His commitment to the people who work for Wilkinsons soon sees him become the company's first Personnel Manager.

1963 The Melton Mowbray store opens, the first outside Leicester.

1964 Pampers launches a revolutionary new design in disposable nappies.

1966 England wins the football World Cup.

1964 JK becomes Chair and Peter Wilson becomes the company's second MD.

1964 Karin Swann born.

1967 The Charles Street store starts selling food.

1968 Lisa Wilkinson born.

1969 28 stores now open with an annual turnover of **£2.4 million**.

The search begins for a new head office and warehouse location.

1969 Neil Armstrong is the first man to walk on the moon.

1960 | 1961 | 1962 | 1963 | 1964 | 1965 | 1966 | 1967 | 1968 | 1969

1970s

OUR 'WILKO' OWN LABEL APPEARS AND WE START TO TRADE WITH THE FAR EAST.

1974 BIC launches the first disposable razor.

1972 Tony takes over as Chairman and oversees a period of unparalleled growth over the next 33 years.

1974 The own-label range expands to 24 products.

1970 A new warehouse and head office opens in Carlton-in-Lindrick, Nottinghamshire. Tony, as Logistics Director, is heavily involved in the installation of the highly efficient 'high bay' stacking system.

1971 United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland switch to decimal currency.

1973 Paint becomes the first ever own-label product, under the name Wilko.

1979 The company grows to 36 stores around the UK with an annual turnover of **£15.6 million**.

Wilkinsons starts to trade with buying agents Taimarque in the Far East.

1975 Brian Fairhurst takes over as MD.

1970 | 1971 | 1972 | 1973 | 1974 | 1975 | 1976 | 1977 | 1978 | 1979

1980s

EVERYDAY ITEMS TAKE CENTRE STAGE AND WE ENTER THE COMPUTER AGE.

1980 After a buying and merchandising review, Wilkinsons stops selling big, bulky items such as lawnmowers and greenhouses and instead concentrates on selling everyday items that can be taken home in a shopping bag.

1981 IBM introduces the first PC.

1980s In the early-to-mid 1980s – after 20 years of bringing up her children – Barbara becomes more involved in the business by visiting every store on the estate.

Wilkinsons opens a total of 42 stores in the 1980s.

1985 Live Aid concerts take place in London and Philadelphia.

1987 Tony sets up the Employee Trust Fund to support employees who face unexpected financial hardships and to help with the education and training of their children.

The *Hardware Trade Journal* names Wilkinsons Retailer of the Year.

Wilkinsons now has a range of 13,000 products selling to 24 million customers.

1989 Tim Berners-Lee invents the World Wide Web.

1989 78 stores now open around the UK turning over **£81 million** annually.

1980 | 1981 | 1982 | 1983 | 1984 | 1985 | 1986 | 1987 | 1988 | 1989

1990s

WE CELEBRATE TWO IMPORTANT MILESTONES AND SAY A SAD GOODBYE.

1990 Wilkinsons celebrates 60 years in business by slashing prices for customers.

1992 Tony unveils the company's 'Vision of the Future' at a seminar for 300 managers hosted by John Humphrys. Tony sets the target for Wilkinsons to become "the leader in its field by the turn of the century."

1991 Gordon Brown joins as HR Director.

1992 The 100th store opens.

Computers and an updated EPOS system installed.

Gordon Brown becomes fourth MD.

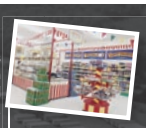
1994 Channel Tunnel opens.

1993 Brian Fairhurst retires.

1995 Barbara Wilkinson appointed to the Board of Directors.

1996 A new St. Helen's store opens with themed areas and 40,000 product lines.

Barbara becomes involved with new store openings, something that she continues to do.



1997 JK Wilkinson passes away in December.

Wilkinsons awarded the Investors in People standard, which has been held ever since.

1999 152 stores now open around the UK with an annual turnover of **£564 million**.

1995 A new distribution centre opens in Manton Wood, housing the fastest sorting system in the UK. A new head office building called JK House is constructed in 1998.

1990 | 1991 | 1992 | 1993 | 1994 | 1995 | 1996 | 1997 | 1998 | 1999

2000s

WE GO ONLINE, OPEN UP WILKO ASIA AND VENTURE NORTH OF THE BORDER.

2000 Mary Wilkinson passes away in January.

2002 Queen Elizabeth II celebrates her Golden Jubilee.

2000 A new distribution centre opens in Magor, South Wales.

2002 Wilkinsons undertakes a comprehensive team member training programme.

2003 Annual sales turnover reaches **£1 billion**.

2005 Tony retires. In his time as Chairman, Wilkinsons has grown from 11 stores to 246. Before he retired, Tony continued to sponsor the Wilkinson Community and Support Fund to aid local communities and charities, which he founded and championed during his time as Chairman. Barbara also retires from the Board of Directors.

Lisa and Karin become family directors and chairs.

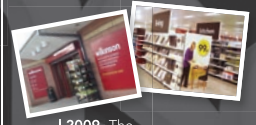
Wilko Plus launches and receives its first ever order in May.

2006 Stuart Mitchell joins as CEO.

2007 The first Wilkinson Plus catalogue is produced.

2008 Our brand is updated, and the first new-look stores open in Sheffield, Leicester and Walton-on-Thames.

Wilkinson Asia opens.



2009 The first stores open in Scotland.

2009 Barack Obama becomes the first African American president of the USA.

80

2010 Wilkinsons celebrates 80 years.

2010...

A GREAT NEW LOOK FOR A GREAT LOOKING FUTURE...

2010+ The official rollout of the re-brand programme begins with 80 stores: and Wilkinsons plans to reach the 500 store mark over the next three years.

Karin and Lisa aim to keep moving Wilkinsons forward, making its future even more exciting than its past.

2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010