

JOHN KITCHEN
CHEMICAL INDUSTRY PIONEER
A SOAP STORY
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IN THE summer of 1854-5, John Kitchen, former grocer and candlemaker from Reading, England, arrived in Melbourne, Victoria, with three young sons and little money, to begin a new life. They were soon able to buy some cheap candle frames, and they commenced making tallow candies in a small rented room in what is now South Melbourne. The business grew. From this small beginning they became within thirty years Australia's chief manufacturers of candies and soap, and John and his sons were all living with their wives and families in large houses in the exclusive residential suburb of Kew.

The company, J. Kitchen and Sons, continued to prosper both in Victoria and interstate, taking over many rivals, and was eventually taken over in its turn by Unilever in 1914, becoming the basis of the firm now trading as Lever and Kitchen. The story of this takeover is given from the Unilever viewpoint in chapter three of the book *Unilever Overseas - The Anatomy of a Multinational 1895-1965* by D. K. Fieldhouse. The book records that, 'In 1914 the Kitchen business was by far the largest soap and candle manufacturer in Australia. Founded as a small tallow and candle firm at Melbourne in 1856, it had grown by somewhat the same methods as Lever had used in Britain - promotion of branded quality products coupled with the acquisition of rival firms.'

Much of the firm's success has been credited to the drive and business acumen of John's second son, John Ambrose Kitchen, who had managed the business side, and histories of the firm prepared by Unilever have naturally centred on him. But his father, John, was also a very interesting character, and his knowledge and experience must have been basic to their survival in the beginning days.

There was a family tradition that John Kitchen was born at York, but in fact he was born on 30 June 1799 in the little village of Long Crowmarsh on the bank of the Thames in Oxfordshire. An old stone bridge across the river leads to the important Berkshire town of Wallingford. John's father, Thomas Kitchen, was a master maltster and his mother Sarah was the daughter of a Wallingford freeholder, John Hambleton, and his wife Mary. Records of baptisms at St Mary Magdalen church, Crowmarsh, show that John had an elder sister Eliza baptised on 15 November 1797. His younger

brothers and sisters were Thomas who became a bootmaker in Wallingford and had a large family, Charles who is said to have died in America, Sarah who married the eldest son of the Rev. Isaac Caterer, minister of the Congregational church at neighbouring Peppard, Joseph who became a tailor, and William of whom we have no details. There also seems to have been a sister named Mary Ann who married James King, a boyhood friend of John Kitchen. James King later conducted a school in Wallingford, and John's mother Sarah lived with the Kings for some time in her old age. Their son Joseph was later pastor of the Congregational church in South Melbourne. Two sons of the Caterer family also came to Australia, becoming school masters in Adelaide, one being head master of St Peter's College.

There is a family story that John wanted to be apprenticed to the father of his friend James King who was a builder, but his parents decided he should be apprenticed to his Uncle Burgis who was a wholesale grocer at Benson, a few miles north of Crowmarsh. Among other things he learned from his uncle the trades of soap and candle making, as candies and soap were at that time commonly made by the grocer.

In 1825, John aged about 26 married Ruth Freeman, daughter of the Rev. Ambrose Freeman, a Methodist minister of Reading and his wife Elizabeth. There were Ambrose Freemans baptised in Reading right back to the early seventeenth century, and the names Ambrose and Freeman were given to several of the next two generations of Kitchens. John recorded on his second marriage certificate that the marriage had taken place at Bristol in 1825. He and Ruth seem to have remained in Gloucestershire for some time, as their daughter Eliza was baptised on 6 August 1826 at the Wesleyan chapel in the small Gloucestershire hamlet of Alkerton close to Eastington near Stroud.

By 1829 John and his family were living at Watlington in Oxfordshire, about five or six miles from Crowmarsh and Wallingford where others of the family lived. In the next few years five children were baptised in the Wesleyan chapel at Watlington. Soon afterwards they moved to Reading where the next child was born in October 1840. Reading was Ruth's birthplace, and she undoubtedly still had relatives there, perhaps including her parents. Here John was established as grocer and provision merchant in what is now and probably was then, a very central position in Broad St, the main street of the town. This was the business for which he had been trained, and it is likely he had been in a similar business during his nine or more years in Watlington.

John seems to have been a man of strong ideas and commitment to causes,

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without regard to consequences. He was a staunch Protestant and was for some time superintendent of the Methodist Sunday School. He was also a very earnest temperance preacher when the cause of temperance was in its infancy, and met with much opposition. He believed in prophesying future events from the bible, and in Australia was very active among the Christadelphians, a new sect founded in 1848 by the American, John Thomas. These people had a similar belief in biblical prophesying, and claimed to be returning to the practices of the earliest Christians.

There is a family story that John announced that the world was about to end on a particular day, and on that day got on a white horse and led his followers to the top of a hill (one version says it was Wantage Hill) to observe the destruction of the world. His prophesies and temperance preaching seem to have made him unpopular, and to have been bad for his business. Also the 1840s were hard times in England. There was mass unemployment, and many people were short of food. Whatever the reason, John left the grocery business, and by 1851 was librarian to the Literary, Scientific and Mechanics Institution in London Street, Reading. His address was given in the 1851 census as 21 Crown Street, Reading. The older members of the family had also found employment by this time. Eliza, the eldest, was running a preparatory school; Sarah and Maria aged 22 and 20 respectively had set up as milliners and dressmakers at London St, Phillip was working as a watch and clock maker, and John Ambrose as a solicitor's clerk.

In an 1853 directory John advertised as 'Berkshire Agency, Wholesale and Retail, Gutta Percha Soles, Tubing etc. - The Gutta Percha Company, London' at 134 London Street. The following year the advertisement read - 'John Kitchen, Boot and Shoe Maker and Gutta Percha Depot, 133-134 London St.' In setting up this business he was probably helped by his brother Thomas in Wallingford, who was then listed as a bootmaker. The use of gutta percha is now almost entirely restricted to the covers of golf balls, but John was then able to advertise it for many purposes, particularly for the soles of children's shoes, to keep their feet dry, and for tubing and pipes, especially for pumps. Following the discovery that rubber could be vulcanized by mixing with sulphur and then heating, vulcanized rubber and more recently plastics have replaced gutta percha for almost all purposes.

In January 1853 John's wife Ruth died. She had reared eight children, and one other child, John, had died as an infant. All the family except Theo, aged fourteen, were old enough to look after themselves, and the girls were established away from home. Conditions in England were still bad, and future prospects of employment for a man over fifty and for his young sons, were not good. The decision was made for John and three sons to try their fortune in Australia where gold had recently been

found.

On 10 October 1854, John Ambrose, aged 19, accompanied by his 21 year old cousin Henry Hambleton Kitchen from Wallingford, sailed from Liverpool on the *Champion of the Seas*, a new fast American-built timber clipper of James Baines and Co's Black Ball Line. It was the largest sailing ship at that time, with a captain noted for fast trips, and for pressing on regardless of weather. A week later, on 17 October, John sailed from London with Philip, nearly 23, and Theo on the *New Great Britain*, a small sailing ship carrying only 106 passengers and crew. A younger son, Joseph, remained in England at that time, coming to Australia much later. John's daughters all remained in England.

The *Champion of the Seas* arrived at Port Melbourne on Christmas Day after a very fast trip of 75 days (the record at that time was 74 days by a sister ship, *Marco Polo*), though the passengers landed officially next day, 26 December. John and the other sons arrived eight weeks later on 19 February after a voyage of 125 days, or more than four months. The shipping records list them under the name of 'Kitching'. John Ambrose and Henry seem to have separated after they landed, Henry going first to the gold fields. In 1859 he settled in Mansfield where he ran a general store until he died in 1901. It is reported that John Ambrose arrived with only eight sovereigns, a capital he needed to augment, and he seems to have spent part of this sum on papers and books which he sold around Melbourne and also at the Caledonian Diggings, 27 miles away. Having increased his funds and found that he had enough to live on for a few weeks, he tried for gold himself at the Mount Blackwood field. While there, a message reached him from his father who had now arrived in Melbourne, and he walked back the 55 miles to rejoin his family. Probably he had spent most of his savings, and had nothing much left for the coach fare.

John was an experienced candle-maker, and he found work managing a small candle-making business in Prahran. Candles were required in great quantities, both in the towns and among the miners, and soon the family decided they should start their own candle-making business. It is said that they obtained cheap candle frames by buying them out of bond from the Customs, and that they obtained fat from the local butchers, carting it in a small barrow. They began in 1855 in a small rented building at the corner of Moray and York Streets, South Melbourne, then known as Emerald Hill. In 1856 they moved to a row of three very small tenement houses in Bridport Street, living in the front of the building and making tallow candles at the back.

The following year, 1857, they were ordered out of Emerald Hill because of

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their 'noxious trade', though the original one month's notice was extended to five months, partly because of the support John received in the Council from James Service, a councillor from 1855-59, first chairman of the council, and later premier of Victoria.

Emerald Hill had achieved municipal independence in 1855 from Melbourne which had badly neglected the area, and the new council had to spend much of its energy and money on cleaning up the town, and eliminating practices more applicable to the country. Most of the area was low-lying with lush growth and was used by Melbourne people as well as locals for grazing stock. Many people kept pigs, and butchers were upset by proposals to ban slaughtering and pig-keeping from the town area. There is no record of any complaint against the Kitchens' candle-making, but the council had appointed an inspector of nuisances' (he was also surveyor and collector of rates) who would be keen to remove all doubtful practices from the town.

In November 1857 the Kitchens asked for a twelve-month extension, and the following May 1858 they suggested the council apply for land west of the Hobson's Bay railway for a slaughter-house, and asked that part of the land be leased to them for candle-making. This plan did not eventuate, and in late 1858 or early 1859 they moved to a site just outside the Emerald Hill boundary, at the corner of Sandridge and Emerald Hill Roads (now Crockford and Ingles Streets), next door to the still existing Fountain Inn. Here, if not before, they were able to employ some paid labour, and it is also recorded that they were making soap.

Trouble came early in 1860. Late in the evening of Monday 27 February fire broke out in the factory and a workman sleeping in the hay above gave the alarm. John and his three sons were sleeping in an adjacent building. At that time there was a volunteer fire brigade in Emerald Hill, but the United Insurance Companies had their own brigade based in Melbourne and led by William Bencraft, a magistrate. The Argus of Tuesday 28 February 1860 reported,

'Last night, shortly before 12 o'clock, a fire broke out in the premises of Messrs. Kitchen and Son (sic), tallow-chandlers, Sandridge Road. The premises were built of wood, and, fortunately, were situated apart from any others, because, from the combustible nature of the materials, no hope of extinguishing the flames could have been entertained from the beginning, and within a very brief period nothing remained of the building but the brick chimney. Mr. Bencraft and his fire brigade were on the spot within 18 minutes from the time when the first note of the alarm-bell was struck, and he had scarcely made his appearance when one of the most disgraceful riots took place

that it has even been our lot to witness. Sandridge possesses no fire-brigade, but Emerald Hill does, and the men of that brigade were early on the spot. Seeing that nothing could save the building, and that all that was necessary was to play upon the flames, Mr. Bencraft announced himself, and desired that the hose be placed in the hands of his men. This the Sandridge men refused to do, and - how the quarrel arose we cannot say - in a few seconds more one of the Melbourne brigade was thrown down, struck, and abused, and an effort was made to take away his tomahawk. Mr. Bencraft ran to the rescue of his man, and was struck on the helmet by a negro so heavy a blow with a piece of paling that he fell to the ground, when he was jumped upon, and kicked in the face, having his clothes torn, and receiving injuries oil his right leg and hand. A paling was partially torn down, and the row would probably have become more serious but for the arrival of some mounted troopers, who drove the mob from the vicinity of the fire on to the road. One of the assailants of Mr. Bencraft was caught and handed over to the police, and some others, we believe, were recognised and will be proceeded against. The fire brigade deserves every encouragement, and certainly they must, at least, be protected by the arm of the law when in the discharge of a dangerous and important duty.'

The *Age* of the same date had a shorter and more restrained report, saying, 'the Melbourne Brigade was murderously assaulted by the mob, but for what reason we are at present unable to state'. John is said to have stated that the building was worth about £400 but was insured for only £300. Stock and equipment were not insured, and were worth about £700. He suspected the fire may have been started by a man he had to dismiss three weeks earlier as his work was not considered satisfactory.

The dispute at this fire led the members of the Emerald Hill brigade to disband 'as far as the Insurance Companies are concerned'. Their foreman wrote to the council stating that this was 'in consequence of the extraordinary conduct of the Companies' Superintendent' who had threatened to arrest two members of the brigade, alleging they had disobeyed his orders as a magistrate. The brigade members requested the council to organize a system 'for the prevention and extinction of fires within the district', and said they would be happy to cooperate if allowed, and that 'in the interim they will continue to attend fires within the district as heretofore'.

At that time the Insurance Companies' fire brigade was the only official one. They were centered on Melbourne, and though they charged in their premiums for extinguishing fires in uninsured premises they were mainly interested in ensuring that fires did not spread to insured premises. The Kitchens' fire seems to have stirred the local council and people to at least look at how best they could deal with the problem

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of fires and fire prevention in the local area without excessive costs.

Production was resumed very soon after the fire. From the available evidence it seems certain that this was the time when they moved to part of the present site in Ingles Street. The new Sandridge Municipal Council established only in July 1860, brought out its first municipal roll (for 1861) listing the situation at 19 November 1860. This gave the address of the Kitchens as 'North-West of the Melbourne and Hobson's Bay Railway'. The 1863 role shows them west of the railway as owners and occupiers of three cottages (one new) with a soap and candle manufactory. It seems likely that the factory building and two cottages were available and they were able to move there after the fire rather than rebuild on the old site. West of the railway was still undeveloped crown land, not officially included in the Sandridge municipality until 1863. The Kitchens originally leased a very small area, their lease being gradually extended as their requirements grew. On 23 May 1882 the whole area bounded by Ingles, Boundary and Woodruff Streets was officially transferred from the Crown to J. Kitchen and Sons.

The 1862 roll shows John senior also renting from Joseph Priestly a three-room brick house in Bay Street. Here the first grandson, John Hambleton was born. Late in 1860 John Ambrose opened an office in Little Collin Street, later moving around the corner to 3 Queen Street.

On 19 November 1860 John and his three sons signed a legal partnership deed which restricted each of them to drawing not more than £2 10s a week. Any purchase or contract over £5 had to be approved by all partners, and no employee could be dismissed unless all partners agreed. The following month, on 11 December 1860, John Ambrose aged not quite 26 married Catherine (Kate), the 22-year-old daughter of Thomas Sandeman a local Emerald Hill merchant. Just over a year later, on Christmas Eve 24 December 1861, their first child John Hambleton was born. In the next two years Theophilus married Lucy Reeve and Philip married a widow Sarah Cousin (nee Beale). Then on 1 October 1864 John at the age of 6 married Mary Hogan, a 46-year-old widow, and soon went to live with her in her house in Waterloo Street, St Kilda. According to a family story he was missing one morning and when he returned to join the family at lunch someone asked 'Where have you been, Father?' He replied, 'I'll show you where I've been' and opened his bag and produced the marriage certificate. The register shows that the marriage was performed in the house of the bride, Mary Hogan, 'According to the Principles of Primitive Christianity'

This seems to be in line with Christadelphian beliefs, though he does not seem to have known of the Christadelphians until later. The marriage celebrant's name was



'Where have you been, Father?' He replied, 'I'll show you where I've been,' and opened his bag and produced the wedding certificate. then it was back to his office in Queen Street (Kitchen family Album, La Trobe Collection, State Library of Victoria).

Robert Service, perhaps a relation of the James Service who had spoken tip for John on the Emerald Hill council.

Although John's father-in-law Ambrose Freeman was a Methodist minister and his children were baptised in the Wesleyan church, he was too much of an individualist to remain a Wesleyan and his later interests were with less conventional sects. Religion obviously played a very important part in his life, and to a lesser extent in the lives of his sons. They did not accept his extreme ideas, but all were very involved with religious affairs of some kind throughout their lives. At one time in Australia, and possibly earlier in England, they were all members of the Plymouth Brethren, but John Ambrose left this group about 1870, marching out ostentatiously in the middle of a meeting, followed by his wife and children. For the rest of his life he was a staunch supporter of the Church of England. The others also left the Brethren, John joining the Christadelphians and the others joining more conventional churches. Philip established the Bible and Tract Society to distribute religious literature, and was for many years treasurer of the Melbourne Committee of the China Inland Mission. Theo was also a member of this committee as well as of the committee of the Melbourne City Mission, and was vice-president of the Evangelization Society of Australia which was founded about 1874 in his home.

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The Christadelphian sect, founded in America in 1848, claims to return to the beliefs and practices of the early Christians. The members treat the bible as inspired, and interpret prophetic sections in terms of current and future events. John became involved with them about 1870 and in the next few years seems to have gradually dropped out of direct activity in the firm's affairs. In the 1 December 1873 issue of *The Christadelphian*, an English journal, there was a report from Melbourne that,

'Brother J. Kitchen (who is in the 75th year of his age) had decided to establish a depot of Christadelphian works in Melbourne, and to advertise the same in the newspapers ... He says it is now two or three years since he first saw an article in *The Rainbow* opposing Christadelphian views which led him to make further enquiries about them. Since then he had obtained some of their writings, lent them about, reprinted some in tract form and circulated them. One result of his efforts has been that the Christadelphians are a people everywhere spoken against in Melbourne, and their writings condemned: while the mover in this matter is subject to the finger of scorn being pointed at him; but none of these things move him, as he (Bro. Kitchen) has a heartfelt consciousness that the cause is of God and cannot be overthrown by man's devices.'

The opposition did, however, move his sons. There is a family story that he placed boxes for his tracts at Flinders St. station and other places, and two of his sons used to follow him around and collect the tracts as soon as he had placed them. Evidently the sons were aware of the problems he had created for his business in Reading and were keen to avert a repetition.

Several editions of *The Christadelphian* contain references to John, not all of them complimentary. In 1878 there is a reference to his recovery from a serious illness. In the same year is a reference to the formation of an ecclesia at Temperance Hall, Emerald Hill 'independent of Bro. Kitchen'. In 1880 is recorded the 'immersion' (in baptism) of Anne Cozens of Wandiligong. 'Through Bro. Kitchen and Sr. Stillard we had the use of the Baptist chapel at Kew, a few miles out of Melbourne.'

John died on 6 August 1890 aged 91, and was buried in the Baptist section of Boroondara cemetery. His wife Mary died on 18 August of the following year and was buried with him. Their white marble tombstone has under John's name the words 'Jesus said, I am the resurrection and the Life. He that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.' And under his wife Mary's name, 'Waiting for the coming of Our Lord Jesus Christ'.

The Christadelphian made two references to his death. In the November 1890

issue the letter from Melbourne included the following:

‘It may be of interest to you to mention that John Kitchen, of Melbourne who, a few years ago, had a deal of correspondence with you, and did a lot of real hard work in this place on behalf of the truth, and distributed leaflets and other works among the people in a whole-sale and liberal way, has at last fallen a victim to death, aged 92 years; but, sad to relate, in his last days, lie wholly renounced the faith, declaring the scriptures false because, said lie, ‘All the prophesies had run out’.’

A second reference was made the following January, 1891, when his death notice from the Melbourne Age of 7 August 1890 was quoted in full.

There is little information available about working conditions in the factory, though the family seem to have continued working with the employees for some time. They seem to have had a reputation as ‘good’ employers who were interested in the affairs of their workers, and certainly their employees appear to have remained with them for long periods, many spending their whole working lives with them. A story in the April 1926 issue of the house journal ‘Advance’ contains some interesting reminiscences of a man named William Stocker who had recently retired as foreman of the candle department after a record 56½ years’ service. He recalled that he started in 1869 as a boy of about 12 or 13 on 8 shillings per week, but soon was given more responsibilities and a wage of 10 shillings. This was later increased to 15 shillings when his father wanted to apprentice him to the coopering trade, and ‘Mr Theo’ wanted to keep him as he considered him a good boy. He worked part time in the factory, and part time in the Melbourne office assisting the clerk. He said that among other duties he used to draw the wages from the Union Bank in Melbourne on Saturday mornings, take the money to the factory and assist in paying the employees on Saturday afternoons. Hours were 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. with an ‘early’ finish at 5 p.m. on Saturdays. One of his early duties was to ‘attend to the little black pony that Mr. John Kitchen Senr. drove in his wicker phaeton to business every morning’.

In 1883 John Ambrose reported to a Royal Commission on Tariffs that the firm employed between 200 and 300 people of whom about five per cent were females, taken on because of the scarcity of men. Young lads were scarce, and consequently their starting wage was increased to around 12 shillings to 15 shillings. Men were paid about 36 shillings. At that time men in the industry worked a sixty-hour week in twelve-hour shifts. Hours were 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. for five days or nights with 1 V2 hours for lunch breaks, and 2 p.m. finish on Saturdays. The manager of another candle company gave a similar report, and these hours were common throughout the

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industry which at that time included about thirty-four factories in Victoria, sixteen of them being around Melbourne. In 1887 when Theo Kitchen was appointed Manufacturing Director his salary was £750 a year. The head traveller was paid £700 a year.

About 1868 John Ambrose, now located in the Melbourne office, left his Sandridge cottage and moved to a house called Roseneath in Little Pakington Street, Kew. By 1876, with a growing family, he was able to move to a large white house called Elsinore in Wellington Street, now part of Trinity Grammar School. Philip and Theo also moved to the Kew area where their father later joined them, moving first to a house in Normanby Road and later to Charles Street just south of Cotham Road.

In November 1877 a Melbourne business man, Edward Keep, wrote from London to John Ambrose and Theo saying he had sent them a case containing a silver tea and coffee service for each of them 'as a pleasant memento of our long and large business and friendly connection'. The gift is said to have been prompted by the return of a substantial loan made several years previously, perhaps to assist in the move to the new factory in Ingles St.

One way in which the firm developed was by the acquisition of rival firms of which there were a great number, many being small businesses operating mainly in country towns. The first important takeover seems to have been that of Gossage Bros of Footscray, taken over in 1870. The firm of William Gossage and Sons of Widnes, Cheshire, was a major soap maker in England, founded in 1855 by William Gossage (1799-1877). His eldest son William Henry migrated to Australia about 1856 because of rheumatism, after having smelted copper at Willington and made soap for a short time at Ouseburn, both in northern England. His brother Alfred was founder of Gossage Bros. In about 1873 William founded the Apollo Stearine Candle Co. By 1884 this company was an important candle manufacturer with a city office, a factory in Footscray and branches in Queensland. Its manufacturing manager was George Payne Clarke, an English chemist and a recognized authority on the manufacture of soap, candies and associated products. The Kitchens were at that time looking for a manufacturing chemist such as Clarke and were also aware of the possibility that Apollo might join with another local firm, creating stronger opposition. In February 1885 the two companies amalgamated with the title of J. Kitchen and Sons and Apollo Company Limited, although this brought in outside directors and meant the end of what had been in effect a family proprietary company. The name Apollo was dropped from the awkward title about sixteen years later, in 1901.

Each colony had its own customs tariff, and all imported candles were taxed

because of cheap imports from overseas. To expand markets it was necessary to have branch factories in other capital cities. The Kitchens had a factory in Wellington, New Zealand from 1876 to 1894, and there was an Apollo factory in Brisbane from 1877. Following the merger with Apollo, much equipment became surplus and a company was formed in N.S.W. in conjunction with the Sydney Soap Co. which had a small factory in Newcastle. This factory was extended and surplus Apollo equipment was installed. G. P. Clarke was appointed manufacturing manager of the new company, called the Sydney Soap Co. He was also to be available to the Melbourne company where in fact he seems to have spent most of his time. A factory in Sydney was established soon afterwards at Alexandria. After a successful start the company had some financial troubles but by 1908 with John Hambleton Kitchen as managing director it was again showing a good profit. The Sydney company name was changed in 1912 to 'Kitchen and Sons (with no 'J', to distinguish it from the Melbourne firm). By about 1880 the company was making glycerine, washing blue, washing soda and baking powder as well as soaps and candies. They had taken over a company at Sandhurst (now Bendigo) in 1878 and in 1887 they bought similar businesses at Wangaratta and Echuca supplying local needs from local production.

John senior had dropped out of active participation in the running of the business in the early 1870s, and Philip resigned from the board in 1886, soon after the amalgamation with Apollo. The reason given was his state of health, but he seems also to have disagreed with his fellow directors over the use of borrowed money. John Ambrose, whose business acumen and aggressive style had been largely responsible for the firm's success, became heavily involved in the boom period of the 1880s, as did others of the family to a lesser extent. When in 1891-92 the banks called in their loans, the firm was in some danger because of its heavy debt. John Ambrose lost heavily and had to relinquish his large house Elsinore in Kew. In July 1892 John Ambrose, his son John Hambleton and brother Theo all resigned temporarily from the board because of their personal financial problems. They returned to the board in November, and over the next few years the firm gradually recovered.

The three brothers produced large families except for Philip, the eldest. He married an older woman, a widow, and fathered two sons, the elder of whom died at about thirteen. John Ambrose had three sons (of whom one died as a baby) and five daughters by his first wife, who died after the last daughter was born. The following year he married Gertrude Walker, a young woman who had been employed in the house as governess. She produced two more sons, of whom the younger, Frederick William, later became head of the firm. Theo had a family of eleven children born to his wife Lucy, though four of these died within their first year.

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In the late 'seventies John Ambrose and Theo built holiday homes on neighbouring hills in the Toomuc Valley to the north of Beaconsfield. They owned a large area of land in the valley and on adjoining slopes, and at one time had a very large dairy farm and butter factory. John Ambrose also owned in the valley an extensive apple orchard with its own cool stores and an important export business shipping apples to England.

Philip died in 1898 and Theo in 1909. Theo's son William John (Willie) had been involved in the manufacturing side for many years, and succeeded his father as manufacturing director. John Ambrose was now the only surviving founder of the company and his eldest son John Hambleton (known as Jack) was managing director of the Sydney firm. As John Ambrose became older (his 80th birthday was in February 1915) he gradually handed over much of the business management to his youngest son Frederick William who had been a director from January 1914, but he continued to take an active interest, being driven daily to his office in Queen Street almost until the time of his death in May 1922.

In 1914 the Kitchens were market leaders in Victoria, Queensland and Tasmania, and had a large share of the trade in South Australia and New South Wales, but G. P. Clarke had just died, leaving the need for a chemist to replace him. Lever Brothers, a major firm based in England, had a small factory at Balmain in New South Wales but their sales were mainly confined to that state. They were keen to expand in Australia but realized it would be difficult in competition with the well-established Kitchens and the South Australian firm of Burfords. Relations between Kitchens and Levers had always been very friendly and Kitchens were aware that Levers had a new patented process for hydrogenating (and so hardening) oils and were very keen to have the rights. Early in 1914 Sir William Lever (afterwards Lord Leverhulme) visited Melbourne in the course of a world tour of Lever's interests and made an offer to amalgamate the two firms. After long consideration and discussions it was agreed that Levers should buy three-quarters of the shares of J. Kitchen and Sons in return for cumulative preferred ordinary shares in Levers, which could be redeemed for cash over a period of five years. A similar agreement was made for the Sydney firm. The Kitchen firms were to continue for the time as a separate entity with the family members and the Australian board remaining virtually in full control. Levers later bought all the remaining shares, and by about 1923-24 fully owned both companies. They were eventually amalgamated with the other Australian interests of the Lever company, now known as Unilever. The Kitchen name has not been entirely lost as the soap products are still sold through a subsidiary named 'Lever and Kitchen Pty. Ltd.'

NOTES

This article has been compiled using family records and stories, rate books, census and genealogical records. Material on Reading was obtained from the Reading Library, notably directories from IS42 to 1854. Personal communications concerning W. H. Gossage were received from Mr Ray Vickers of the Halton Chemical Industry Museum, Gossage Building, Widnes, Cheshire, U.K.

Published material included Charles Daley, *The History of South Melbourne* (Melbourne 1940), Nancy U'Ren and Noel Turnbull, *A History of Port Melbourne* (Oxford University Press, Melbourne 1983), D. K. Fieldhouse, *Unilever Overseas: The Anatomy of a Multinational* (Croon Helm, London 1978). Also consulted were Alexander Sutherland, *Victoria and its Metropolis* (Melbourne 1888), and evidence to the Royal Commission on Tariffs (Victorian Parliamentary Papers 1883).

Histories of the firm include the typescripts by Arnold Riches, '*History of J. Kitchen and Sons*' (1945) which is valuable but has errors of fact, and Reg A. Smith., '*The House of Kitchen*'. Printed histories include Ronald McKie, '*The House of Kitchen*' (5 pages) which is based on Riches, and '*The Story of John Ambrose Kitchen 1835-1922*' which appeared in the *Unilever Australia Reporter*, September 1956.

The La Trobe Library in the State Library of Victoria holds a number of family photographs collected by Theo Kitchen, but unfortunately few of them are named. There is also an album of unlabelled scenic photographs taken by him on a visit to England and Europe with his family, probably in 1875-76.

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