**Janet Keiller (my great great great great great grandmother)**

In November, I was interested to hear the phrase ‘marmalade dropper' being used to describe David Cameron’s return to the Cabinet. Why marmalade and not jam? Is it that marmalade, along with the morning paper, became part of the British breakfast ritual?

My mind turned to ‘James Keiller and Son’ Dundee marmalade. James Keiller was my great great great great grandfather, after whom the marmalade brand was named, but this story is about his mother, Janet Keiller. She was instrumental in starting the business but, times being what they were, in the early 1800s, her name did not feature on the label.

The story goes something like this. In the 1790s, a ship from Seville was forced into Dundee harbour by a storm; the ship was carrying a cargo of bitter Seville oranges. Upon seeing a bargain, Janet Keiller’s husband, John, bought the spoiling fruit (at a discount) and took them to the Keiller’s confectionery shop. Janet then made a marmalade out of the oranges, deciding to leave the rind in. This ‘chip marmalade’ developed something of a cult following locally, in the late 1700s, due to its superior taste and the belief that it aided digestion.

My father has collected a number of Keiller marmalade jars and enjoys telling the story of Janet Keiller and how she ‘invented marmalade’. We can surmise, simply from the word ‘marmalade’ that Janet Keiller cannot have made the invention; it has its etymology in the Galician / Portuguese ‘marmelada’ and came into the English language in the 1400s via the French ‘marmelade’. It is easy enough to imagine the Portuguese making a jam out of quince and oranges in the 1300 and 1400s.

I’d argue that Janet Keiller went on to achieve something more significant. She standardised a recipe and method for Dundee marmalade - rind (chip) in - that became popular enough to form the basis of a successful brand and a 19th Century business. By 1888, the company’s headquarters and factory had moved to London, via Guernsey (sugar-tax-avoidance), to produce vast quantities of marmalade for export to the British Empire.

Despite her name not being on the label, Janet Keiller was clearly a driving force behind the early success. In context, in 1797 she was sixty years old and had run a confectioner’s shop for over thirty years. She had eight children. In the space of a year, in 1797, she set up a factory in Dundee to increase production of the marmalade. After the death of her husband and until her own death, in 1813, she continued in partnership with her son, James. I’m sure she chivvied him along. The marmalade sold well in 19th Century Dundee, particularly, which was a relatively wealthy place known for its jute and journalism business. Jute, jam and journalism, as the adage now goes.

Less known is that Janet Keiller also made the first Dundee Cake. These were a favourite of Winston Churchill so, who knows, without her perhaps we would not have won the war.