Making a Mark

Michael Marks Timeline

1863  Michael Marks is born in the small town of Slonim, in Russian Poland, the youngest of five children. His mother dies shortly after his birth.

1881  Tsar Alexander II is assassinated, which provokes a rise in anti-Semitism across Russia.


1884  Michael meets Isaac Dewhirst, owner of a textile wholesale business at 32 Kirkgate, who lends him money to buy stock. Michael sets up his first stall in the Kirkgate open market, using the slogan ‘Don’t ask the price, it’s a penny’.

1886  Michael marries Hannah Cohen, also a refugee from Russia, in the Belgrave Street synagogue.

1888  The family moves to a terraced house in Trafalgar Street in Leeds.

1888  The Marks’ first child, Simon, is born followed by Rebecca (1890), Miriam (1892), Elaine (1902) and Mathilda (1895).

1889  Michael takes up a stall inside the covered market that opened on Kirkgate in 1857.

1891  Michael and his family move to Great George Street in Wigan – within a short train journey to places such as Warrington, Birkenhead and Bolton where he could expand.

1894  Michael meets Tom Spencer, Dewhirst’s book-keeper, and the partnership of ‘Marks and Spencer’ is formally registered.

1894  The Marks family moves to Manchester, living above the ‘Marks and Spencer Penny Bazaar’ at 20 Cheetham Hill Road.

1897  Michael applies for, and is granted, British Citizenship.

1899  The first Marks and Spencer store opens in Southwark.

1899  Marks and Spencer lease a site on Derby Street, near Michael’s home on Cheetham Hill Road, for a new central office and warehouse.

1900  There are now twenty-four Penny Bazaars in market-halls and another twelve in shops.

1901  The Marks family moves to ‘Knoll House’ on the more affluent Bury New Road in Manchester.

1903  The partnership of Marks and Spencer is transformed into a limited company. Thomas Spencer semi-retires in the same year.

1907  Following a Christmas Eve lunch at Manchester’s Victoria Hotel with his son Simon and Tom Spencer Jnr, Michael Marks collapses and dies shortly after on New Year’s Eve. His funeral at the Jewish cemetery is one of the largest ever held.