

Grenades from Grimsby – The Story of Tickler’s Jam



Thomas George Tickler
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Thomas George Tickler was born in Withern, near Alford, in 1852, the son of a miller. At the age of 18 he was articled to an engineering firm in Hull, but metal-working was evidently not to his liking and he established a small grocery shop in Grimsby. Thomas proved to have an excellent head for business and he expanded into jam making as a side-line. Jam manufacture soon became the most lucrative part of his business and Tickler's factory quickly grew to become one of Grimsby's largest employers. Most of the firm's employees were young women and they were known locally as Tickler's Angels.

By the 1890s, Tickler's was one of the biggest jam manufacturers in Britain and the firm was awarded an important order to supply preserves to the army during the Boer War of 1899-1901. The firm evidently fulfilled this contract satisfactorily, as in 1914 the company was chosen to supply the army with plum and apple jam; a contract that lasted for the duration of the war and was worth £1m. In order meet demand, Tickler's factory on Pasture Street in Grimsby and the firm's branch factory at Southall in London had to operate around the clock.

Although Tickler's was not the only firm to supply jam to the army, the company's name came to occupy a prominent place in Tommy slang. As the empty jam tins were often used by the troops to produce home-made hand grenades during the early months of the war, these weapons were often called "Tickler's Artillery". Tickler's jam was also the subject of a number of frontline poems and songs, including the one reproduced below, which was evidently written during the Gallipoli Campaign of 1915:

"Tickler's Jam, Tickler's Jam
How I love old Tickler's Jam
Plum and Apple in one pound pots
Sent from England in ten ton lots
Every night when I'm asleep
I'm dreaming that I am
Forcing my way through the Dardenelles
With Tommy Tickler's Jam"



Reproduction home-made hand grenades. Note that some of the tins bear the Tickler's label.

The Tickler Memorial Window

The Rev. R. P. Norwood,
Withern Rectory,
Alford,
Lincs.

My dear Mr. Norwood,

I duly received the design for window for Withern Church, and I think this will be very nice and suitable for the purpose.

I shall be glad, therefore, if you will proceed at once to get a faculty for the same to be fixed when ready, and I should like the same ordering at once. I enclose a written order for the same which you can use if you think proper.

Thanking you for the trouble you have taken in this matter, and with kind regards,

Believe me,

Yours sincerely,

R. G. Tickler

Five of Thomas Tickler's sons served during the First World War and all of them survived. In 1923 Thomas commissioned a memorial window to be erected in Withern Church in thanksgiving for the safe return of his sons. The window was made by John Hardman & Company, the well-known Birmingham manufacturer of stained-glass and church fittings.

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