

The M&S Story

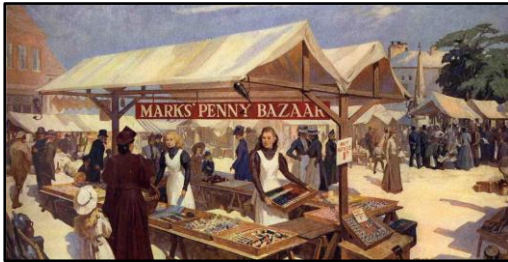
The remarkable story of Marks and Spencer – from Penny Bazaars to pants, and chocolate puddings to Plan A.



Michael Marks

1884

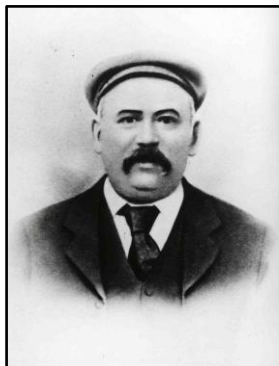
Jewish immigrant Michael Marks arrived in England from Belarus (then Russian Poland) and began working as a pedlar, after he received a loan from Isaac Dewhirst to help with initial start-up costs.



Artist Impression of Kirkgate Market, Leeds by Van Jones

1884

Michael opened his first Penny Bazaar stall at Kirkgate Market in Leeds, and added the slogan 'Don't ask the price, it's a penny' once it became clear that the products priced at a penny were his bestsellers.



Tom Spencer

1894

Michael decided to look for a partner to help manage his growing business. He initially approached Isaac Dewhirst who recommended Tom Spencer – Isaac's senior cashier. Tom agreed, and on 28th September 1894 Marks & Spencer was born.



Sheffield, The Moor market stall, 1897

1894

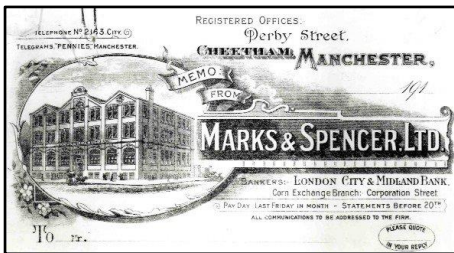
Tom matched Michael's own investment of £300 and together they continued to expand the business with stalls and stores, naming them Penny Bazaars keeping the penny price slogan and adding the words 'Admission Free'. This was a successful marketing strategy, encouraging customers to browse without any obligation to buy.



Manchester Oldham Street store, 1898

1900

By 1900 Marks & Spencer had expanded to include 12 Penny Bazaar stores and 24 market stalls.



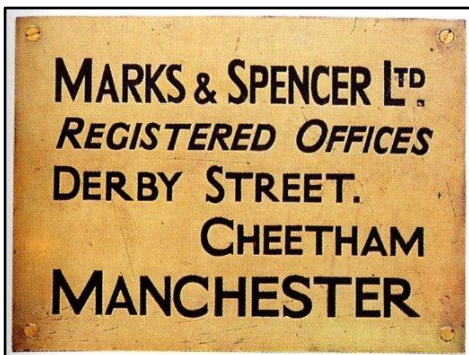
Derby St letterhead, c1910

1901

We built a warehouse at Derby Street, Manchester. It was the first property built to our specifications and became the Company's first registered address and headquarters.

1903

Marks & Spencer Ltd was registered as a firm with a capital of 30,000 £1 shares. These were split equally between the two founders.



Registered Offices signage



The London Penny Bazaar, Co,
Watford

1914

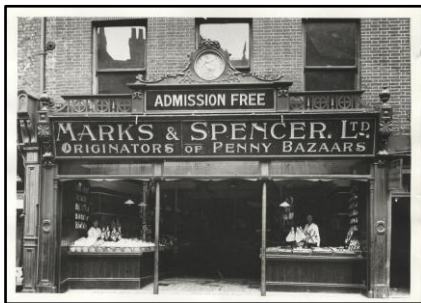
Marks & Spencer bought the London Penny Bazaar Company.



Simon Marks

1916

Following the deaths of Tom Spencer in 1905 and Michael Marks in 1907 a lengthy legal battle between Simon Marks and William Chapman began, ending with Simon becoming Chairman in 1916 at the age of 28. Simon was to lead the company for 56 years.



York store, 1907-1918

1918

The penny pricing continued until the First World War, when goods became expensive and hard to get. Customers really needed the buttons, needles and threads we sold to update their old clothes, so we worked hard to provide the products in demand.



Art Deco design tea cup &
saucer, 1920s

1920s

This period saw our products start to reflect customers' changing lifestyles. Demand for affordable household goods grew, so we sold items like decorative tea sets alongside practical products like light bulbs, irons and batteries.



Baker Street Head Office, 1930s

1924

The Company's Head Office and registered address moved from Manchester to London.



Cotton & rayon bra, 1920s

1926

We responded to people's needs in difficult times, selling more of life's essentials, including our first clothing ranges. Since then, the bra has become our most iconic product, with one in three women now wearing one bought from M&S.



St Michael trademark, 1928

1928

The St Michael trademark was introduced in 1928 as a guarantee of quality and value. Initially used only for a small range of textiles made to Marks & Spencer specifications, the St Michael range was extended over the years to cover all goods sold in M&S.

Several other Marks & Spencer brands also existed at this point, including 'Marspen', a range of household goods and children's books – and 'Welbeck', a food range including biscuits and other baked goods.

1931

A food department was introduced selling produce and canned goods. This range was greatly expanded in 1934, and by the outbreak of the Second World War, we were one of the biggest food suppliers in the country.



Fruit display, 1930s



Dymchurch holiday camp 1930s

1933

Simon Marks commissioned Flora Solomon to set up an employee welfare service that provided pensions, subsidised employee canteens, health and dental services, hairdressing, rest rooms and camping holidays.



Technology Laboratory 1930s

1934

A Scientific Research Laboratory was established, headed by Dr Eric Kann. This was the first research lab of any British retailer to pre-test garments and research innovative new fabrics. Between 1935 and 1939 the lab carried out over 9000 tests on the wearability, washability and durability of textiles.



Café Bar, 1940s

1935

Café Bars were introduced, with the first one in Leeds opening in 1935. They provided cheap, hygienic and nutritious mass catering. By 1942 there were 82 Café Bars.



Store damage at Lewisham store, 1944

1939

At the outbreak of the Second World War, Marks & Spencer had 234 stores. By 1945, over 100 of these had been damaged by bombs, and 16 had been completely destroyed.



CC41 garment labels

1941

The advent of clothing rationing and the Utility Clothing Scheme in wartime meant that there were strict specifications on the use of materials and trimmings for all clothing until 1952. One of our scientists helped develop the government scheme to produce a range of quality garments all bearing the 'CC41' logo on the label.



Food section, late 1940s

1948

The Food Technology department was established to collaborate with suppliers, producers of raw materials, leading food manufacturers, farmers, Government bodies and research institutes in order to upgrade quality.



Self service leaflet, 1948

1947

Our first food self-service trial was held at our store in Wood Green, London. Prior to this customers were served from behind counters, but they could now shop in the aisles and browse before selecting their purchases.



St Michael News, 1953

1953

We launched our first petite range 'For the Shorter Woman', following research which showed that the majority of women were shorter than the accepted average of 5'5".

Also, this year our exchange and refund policy (which was in place since 1932) was updated to guarantee no quibble instant refunds.



Marspun dresses, Kingston store , 1956

1955

We took a wartime spun rayon fabric and made it into a line of dresses influenced by Parisian designers. This fabric, known as Utility Schedule 1005, was renamed Marspun. Our range of Marspun dresses grew to 340 designs in 2000 colourways!



St Michael chocolate packaging, 1950s

1956

By 1956 all goods were sold under the St Michael label, including the first St Michael chocolate bars, introduced this year.



Store interior, 1959

1959

We became the first retailer to introduce No Smoking rules in our stores.



Fresh refrigerated chickens, 1960s

1960

The cold-chain process was invented - chickens were chilled straight after slaughter, carried in refrigerated trucks, kept in refrigerated storage, and sold from refrigerated counters giving customers the option of buying a fresh chicken for the first time.



Tights packaging, 1960s

1963

Tights were introduced to our stores for the first time.



Simon Marks

1964

Simon Marks died after 56 years of service to M&S. Israel Sieff became Chairman.



St Michael News, Jan 1955

1966

By 1966 sales of clothes made from synthetic fabrics overtook sales of natural fibres for the first time. This included our range of new 'wonder fabrics' including the synthetic fabric Terylene. A type of polyester, it was very popular because it was so practical and hardwearing.



Israel Sieff

1967

Israel Sieff retired from the role of Chairman; however he remained on the Board in the role of President and had an active involvement in business affairs. J Edward Sieff, Israel's younger brother, became Chairman.



Frozen foods, 1972

1971

Frozen foods including lasagne and pizza were trialed for the first time with home freezers becoming cheaper and more easily available.



Marcus Sieff

1972

Marcus Sieff, son of Israel Sieff, became Chairman.



Sell by dates leaflet, 1973

1973

We were the first major retailer to introduce sell-by dates to food as a guarantee of freshness.



Chinese style chicken & cashews, 1985

1974

Chinese and Indian dishes were introduced; meals included Sweet and Sour Pork, Chicken Korma and Lamb Rogan Josh.



M&S store in Paris, 1975

1975

We took our first step into wholly owned stores in Europe, opening an M&S store on Boulevard Haussman in Paris.



Fitting rooms at Dumfries store, c1980

c1977

We started to roll out fitting rooms in our stores.



M&S Dublin store, Mary Street, c1980

1979

The first Marks & Spencer store opened in the Republic of Ireland in Mary Street, Dublin.



Chicken Kiev packaging, 1990

1979

We launched the Chicken Kiev, which has since become a national favourite.



Derek Rayner

1985

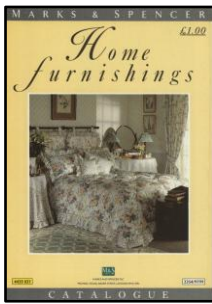
Marcus Sieff retired from the role of Chairman, becoming President of the Company and Lord Derek Rayner took over as Chairman.



M&S Metro Centre store, 1990s

1986

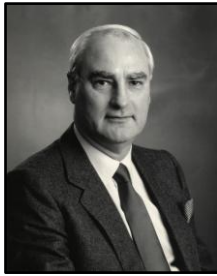
Our first edge of town store opened at the Metro Centre in Gateshead.



Home furnishings catalogue, 1988

1986

Our first range of furniture was introduced. This was supported by the launch of the Home Furnishings catalogue.



Richard Greenbury

1988

Richard Greenbury became Chief Executive, with Lord Rayner continuing as Chairman.



St Michael News, Mar 1991

1991

Our first reusable food carrier bag was introduced.



Percy Pig packaging, 1992

1992

Percy Pigs were launched. By 2014 over one billion Percy Pigs had been sold.



M&S website, 1999

1999

We launched online shopping on our website for the first time.



Peter Salsbury

1999

Peter Salsbury became Chief Executive.



Luc Vandeveld

2000

Luc Vandeveld became Chairman.



Autograph marketing, 2001

2000

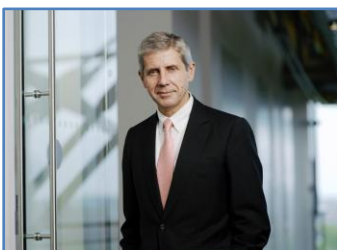
The Autograph range of clothing for women was introduced and we began to phase out the St Michael brand.



Per Una, 2001

2001

Per Una range of clothing for women was launched.



Stuart Rose

2004

Stuart Rose was appointed Chief Executive on 31st May.



M&S Chocolate Melt in the Middle Pudding, 2004

2004

The M&S Chocolate Melt in the Middle Pudding is launched. The idea, from our food developer Elaine Kessler, was based on chocolate fondant, a classic French dessert and took 18 months to create.

It was also part of our iconic 'This is not just food, this is M&S food' advertising campaign. This campaign focused on the products combining slow-motion visuals with a smooth voiceover and cult-classic soundtrack.



Eat Well logo

2005

The Eat Well sunflower was introduced to make it easier for customers to choose healthy options.



Fairtrade coffee, 2006

2005

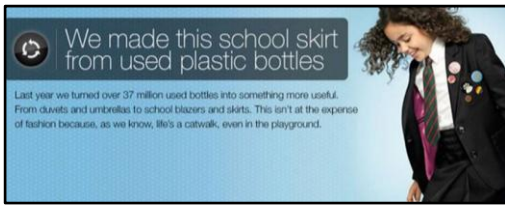
M&S Café Revive became the first UK coffee chain to offer Fairtrade tea and coffee as standard.



Plan A, 2007

2007

We launched Plan A - our 100-point eco plan to address challenges in the key areas of climate change, waste, sustainable raw materials, fair partner and health.



M&S schoolwear, 2007

2007

We became the first retailer to launch schoolwear made from recycled plastic bottles.



Groundwork marketing, 2008

2008

We were the first retailer to announce a charge of 5p for food carrier bags. Funds raised from the sale of the bags were donated to charity, the first being Groundwork.



Shwopped coat, 2012

2008

We launched the M&S and Oxfam Clothes Exchange, which was later replaced by Shwopping. In 2021/22 401,720 items of clothing were Shwopped with us - generating an estimated £227,000 for Oxfam.



Marc Bolland

2010

Marc Bolland was appointed Chief Executive.



Robert Swannell

2011

Robert Swannell became Chairman.



M&S Archive, Leeds, 2012

2012

The M&S Archive opened at the Michael Marks Building in Leeds, bringing together over 72,000 items relating to the history of the business into one place.



M&S logo, 2015

2015

We're proud of our heritage and acknowledged the rich history of M&S with the addition of 'EST. 1884' to the M&S brand.



Steve Rowe

2016

Steve Rowe was appointed Chief Executive.



Archive by Alexa, 2016

2016

The Archive by Alexa collection was a 31-piece womenswear collection curated by Alexa Chung and the M&S design team, re-imagining archive pieces using Alexa's unique approach to style.



Archie Norman

2017

Archie Norman was appointed Chairman.



Plan A, 2020

2020

Plan A 2020 was launched with 100 new, revised and existing commitments, helping us to achieve our goal of becoming the world's most sustainable retailer.



Ocado delivery vans, 2020

2020

Our joint venture with Ocado launched. This included a new Food to Order offer, allowing the full availability of our food ranges to be delivered straight to your door.



Scan & Shop

2021

We brought all our digital payment solutions under one brand banner – Scan & Shop with Sparks.



Rosie for Autograph, 2021

2021

We celebrated 95 years of lingerie. Designers visited the archive to look at embroidery in the collection which inspired a new collection of embroidered lingerie.



M&S The Originals, 2021

2021

In menswear, designers re-worked archive garments for the Originals range including knitwear, leather jackets and footwear.



Stuart Machin, c2025

2022

Stuart Machin was appointed Chief Executive. Responsible for all aspects of M&S, he is leading the transformation of the business, focusing on digital growth, supply chain modernisation, and store renewals.



YouGov Best Brand, 2025

2024-2025

We were voted Britain's Best Brand in YouGov's 2024 survey, based on more than 1 million customer responses. We then retained the top spot in the 2025 poll.



M&S Facebook, 2025

2025-2026

2025 saw some of our most-loved food lines, including Percy Pigs, go on sale at Target in the USA and Coles in Australia.

We also launched fashion partnerships with David Jones in Australia (2025) and Nordstrom in the USA (2026) and partnered with Zalando to scale our online business in Europe.

These exclusive wholesale partnerships are part of our transformation into a global omnichannel business.