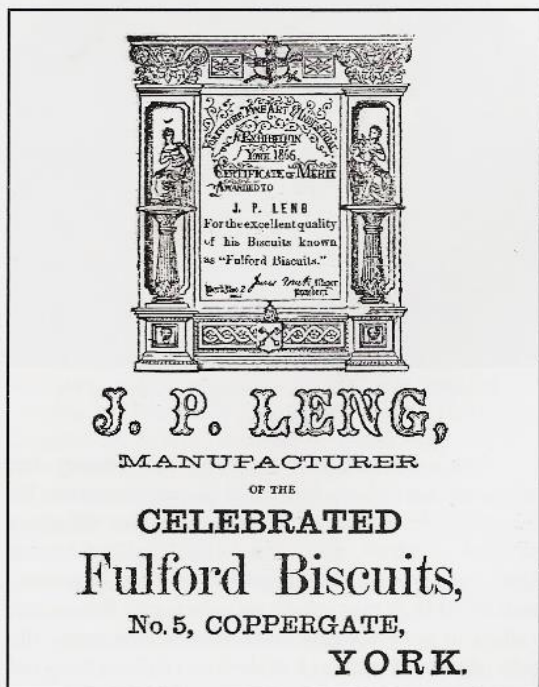


# THE FULFORD BISCUIT

## A FORGOTTEN DELICACY



The '**Fulford Biscuit**' was the creation of John Leng and his wife, Hannah Horsely, who lived in Wilberfoss, a village on the river Derwent near York, in the East Riding of Yorkshire, and it may well have been 'accidentally' created as the result of a family crisis!

John, and his brother William, were brought up by their Uncle Thomas after their father died and their mother, Elizabeth Horsley, remarried. In 1800 Uncle Thomas died and left William £300. John, who was a 28 year old baker, was left the farm.

John and Hannah had 7 children, and his brother William and Ellis Rowntree had 10. It was during this time that the biscuit, which became so popular, was created. Something seems to have interrupted the making or baking process and the result was a delicious biscuit. Biscuits were an easily portable food and they became increasingly popular at a time when travel by stage coach was becoming more common.



This biscuit was plain, yeast-raised, and saucer-sized, a development from the much plainer (and harder) ship's biscuit. It used the dying heat of the bread oven and was probably made by the women of the family because it did not need the physical strength of bread making, so in all likelihood, "invented" by Hannah.

In the early 1800's, in time for the youngest boy to be christened, John sold out to William and moved to Fulford in search of a better education for the boys and better marriage prospects for his girls. At this time there were many unemployed and often disabled soldiers from the Napoleonic Wars in the countryside, but probably, he was also looking for a wider market for the biscuit, now named the '**Fulford Biscuit**'.

Non-Freeman of the City were not allowed to open a shop in York, but could trade in Thursday market, where William sold his meat and where kin lived at 7 St. Sampson's Square.

In the 1730's artist Mary Ellen Best would pass the shop daily on her way to visit her sister in St. Saviourgate. Her picture *Still Life with Chinese Box* shows, what may well be Fulford Biscuits. The biscuits, either whole or broken, were very popular in the many public houses in the market, eaten like crisps or buttered and peppered as a relish.



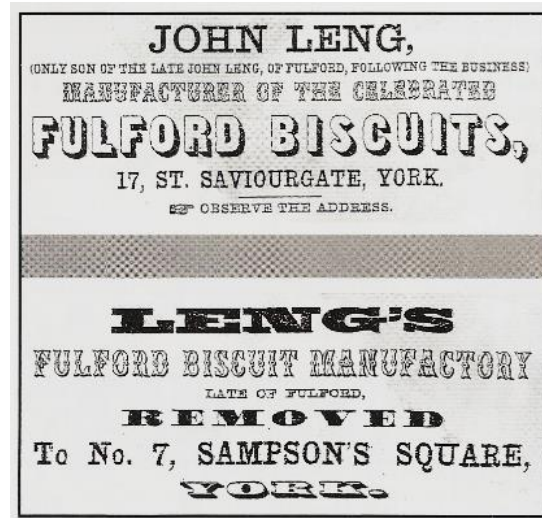


77 Main Street, Fulford, became John Leng's family home with the bakery built into the side of the house.

John set up his son 'Biscuit John' in St. Saviourgate, later moving to 2 Coppergate. His son Charles was in Lambeth, distributing the biscuits. Brother William's sons Robert and George, were apprentices when their father and two brothers died in 1831. Their mother, Ellis, moved to 69 Main Street, Fulford. Baker John died in 1849, and as Hannah was already dead, the Fulford Biscuit rights and recipe were left to daughters Mary and Maria Leng. Mary died in 1855 and Maria married.



Once qualified, Robert and George set up at 7 St Samson's Square as competitors to Biscuit John, as York was now an open market. Rival advertisements appeared in the same York directory but seem to have been resolved as John specialised more in corn and flour.



Later his only son John Philp, still at 2 Coppergate, sold the biscuits but later traded as a corn and flour merchant also buying many properties in York for his 10 children. Only George and his family continued making the biscuits at 77 Main Street. They were sold in Coppergate until 1902, when his widow, Jane Hunt, died.

The recipe and secret method was sold by her executors to the Challenger family, but by then the great biscuit making firms, Huntley and Palmer, Peak Frean and Carr's, had taken the market. A Challenger son-in-law kept the secret, hoping to make a commercial success with it, but he died without recording the secret method.

His wife threw out the recipe as useless. Marjorie Leng, a granddaughter of John Philip, inherited the recipe, but not the method.

She gave the book and other artefacts to Mary Malden Owen.

The original recipe has recently been used by Barbara King of Fishergate Fulford and Heslington Local History Society (FFH York), to create a modern version.



More information about the Leng family and the Fulford biscuit can be found in the YORK HISTORIAN 31.

Or from Mary Malden Owen.

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