

## The Curious Case *of the* Gurkha Knife

### The kukri

In 1915, Marcus and Henry Themans were tobacconists who wanted their company to show support for the war effort.

They acquired a set of Gurkha knives (a kukri and a small blade for sharpening it) to display in the window of their shop and wrote a card to display alongside them:

Genuine war trophies  
Poisoned throwing knife and Kukri  
as now being used by the Indian  
Gurkhas with great success  
against the Germans



## A serious error

The information on the card was wrong: the 'poisoned throwing knife' was a tool to sharpen the kukri – Gurkhas do not use poisoned weapons.

There were several complaints and Marcus and Henry were prosecuted under the Defence of the Realm Act.

The magistrate found that they had defamed the armed forces by claiming they used poison in warfare. Marcus and Henry were each fined £25 (about £2,500 today).

Ironically, by September 1915 poison was being widely used by British as well as by German forces.



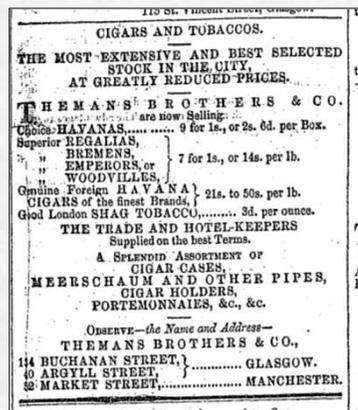
## The Themans family

Saloman Themans, Marcus and Henry's father, had moved to Scotland from the Netherlands in the mid-19th century.

He set up a thriving tobacconist business, with shops in Manchester as well as Glasgow.

The family moved to Manchester in the 1860s and lived in Cheetham Hill.

Saloman was active in Manchester's Jewish business community and became well established in the city.



## A successful business



By the 1890s, sons Marcus and Henry were running the business. They had several shops in Manchester.

They sold own-brand pipes and used events such as a Jubilee smoking concert on behalf of Owens College (the forerunner of the University of Manchester) to promote their 'leading lines'.

**OWENS COLLEGE JUBILEE SMOKING CONCERT.**  
THEMANS & CO. (in order to advertise their leading lines) offer to supply, at half the usual price, upon production (once only) of ticket of admission to above concert, all their leading Specialities, including the following: — Partner's Mixture (absolutely cool smoking), mild, medium, or full, in 2oz. and 4oz. tins; Sunspot Straight-cut Virginia Cigarettes, Virginia Giant Cigarettes, large size, amber tipped; Twin Screw Straight-cut Cigarettes. Tickets to be presented at Themans and Co.'s establishment, 15, Oxford-street, St. Peter's only.

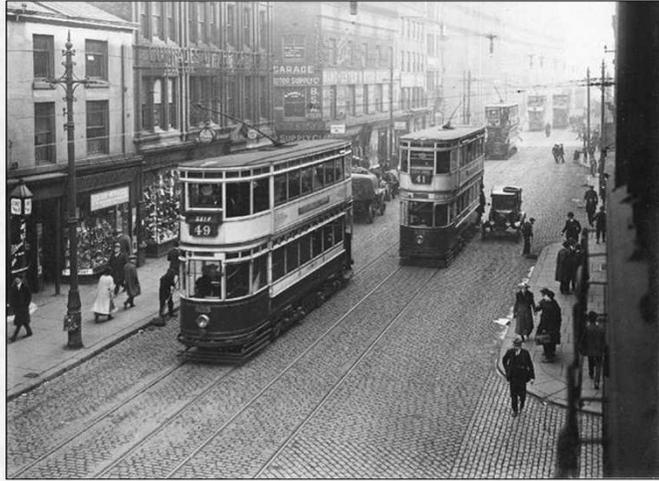
## After the case

The court case may have affected Henry deeply: just four months afterwards, he changed his name.

The Themans' business seems not to have suffered and they continued to show support for the army by issuing cigarette cards celebrating war heroes.

Marcus died in 1926 and left the business to his son, Laurence. Henry died in 1949.





Themans & Co (*far left*)  
Oxford Street, Manchester, 1921

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The Curious Incident of the Gurkha Knife was funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund  
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