



James Atkinson founded the firm at 44 Gerrard Street, Soho in 1799, marketing a rose scented hair oil containing bear's grease. Collectors can find old ceramic pot lids transfer-printed with "James Atkinsons Bears Grease" and a picture of a chained bear. However, from these early days Atkinson also imported eau de cologne, before soon formulating his own. This key product, which won a Gold Medal at the Paris Exhibition of 1878, was originally for men, but which was still being sold prior to World War 2 as a refreshing scent for women.

VOGUE



It's good to see you, Jim! I've had a marvellous run, but I'm terribly tired and dusty... Where's my bag? This is the Eau-de-Cologne you sent me... delicious... most refreshing thing in the world... Is it really your favourite perfume? Wise man! Clever of you to get Atkinsons, too—that's what I should have chosen myself.

\*You will be interested in the offer below.



*Atkinsons Gold Medal Eau-de-Cologne can be obtained from any good chemist, hair-dresser or store at prices ranging from 1/6, 2/6, 4/6, 7/6 and upwards to 40/-.*

**ATKINSONS**  
GOLD MEDAL  
EAU-DE-COLOGNE



\*It's difficult to choose between two fragrances so individual as Atkinsons Eau-de-Cologne and Lavender Water. Most women like to have both, and to use the one which best suits the occasion and their mood. If you write to Atkinsons (Dept. 295), 24 Old Bond Street, W.1, enclosing 3d. in stamps for postage and packing, a sample of each perfume will be sent to you by return.

REG. 26148-122      J. & F. ATKINSON LIMITED

Vogue 1 Oct. 1934

Early cosmetic advertisements found by internet searches indicate that by 1813 James Atkinson also had premises at 9 High Street, Bloomsbury and was selling “Curling Fluid” for women and “Atkinsons Vegetable Dye, for changing red or grey Hair to an auburn or black”. James had been joined in the business by his brother Edward, who in 1831 became a partner. The company had become very successful, obtaining a Royal Warrant in 1826. In 1829 they moved to the prestigious address of New Bond Street and then in 1832 to premises at 24 Old Bond Street. In addition to Eau de Cologne, Atkinsons produced a rose scent and in 1837 an “English Lavender” cologne for men, which continued in its traditional formulation until probably 1910, when it was re-launched.

With the passing of the Regency era, Atkinsons directed more products to women, including tooth paste and face creams as well as scent. An article on perfume in *The New York Times* 1<sup>st</sup> Oct. 1871 refers to the great popularity of Atkinsons’ “White Rose” scent, mentioning also “Wood Violet”, “Wild Hyacinthe” and “Stephanotis”. This reference not only shows the Victorian taste for floral scents, but also the company’s market expansion, which had been brought about after James Atkinson’s death in 1853. The business passed to a younger generation of James and Edward, who were astute enough to employ in 1869 a dynamic young manager, Eugene Barrett. He established an agency in Paris and other continental cities, achieving considerable success in Italy. Further expansion took the business into South American markets, where Argentina became increasingly important in the success of the company. After this second generation of Atkinson brothers, the firm ceased to be a partnership and became a limited company in 1896, with Eugene Barrett’s son Horace also entering the business. The company celebrated its 1899 centenary with the introduction of a special perfume presentation, “Centennial Bouquet”. It is never easy to trace where the products were manufactured, but it is thought that at this time there was factory at St. Katherine’s Dock and in Floral Street, Covent Garden, although most manufacturing still took place at 24 Old Bond Street.

The early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century saw a growing number of perfume introductions, including in 1902 “Eonia\* Californian Poppy”, which became the company’s biggest seller, eventually being sold simply as “Californian Poppy” until at least the 1960s, having gone down-market to be found on the counters of Woolworths. However, to avoid damaging Atkinson’s brand image, “Californian Poppy” came to be marketed by a separate organization, Proprietary Perfumes Ltd.

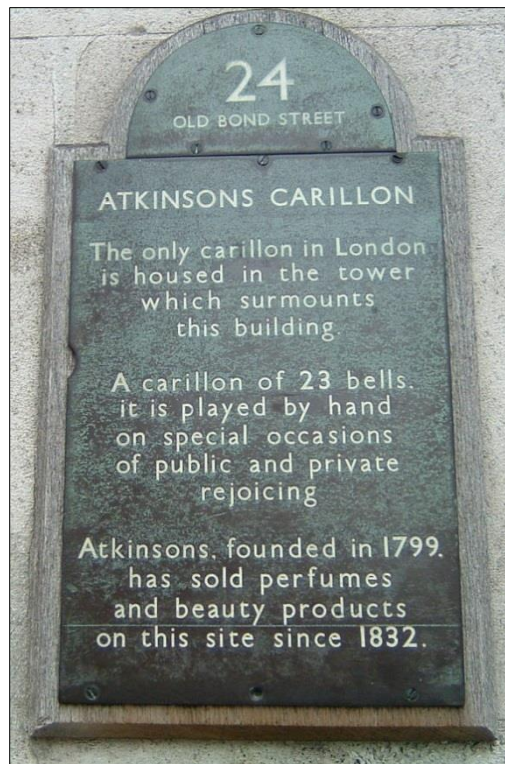
1910 was an important year for Atkinsons as manufacturing moved to new premises known as the Eonia Works in Southwark Park Road, SW16. Although the company had begun to use synthetics, it retained its traditional floral style rather than taking the route towards heavier oriental scents with exotic, far Eastern names. In the years prior to the First World War this Bermondsey factory produced various new scents, even a special Christmas scent in 1911 called “Poinsettia”. Atkinsons’ advertising campaign for “Poinsettia” included celebrity endorsement from “four famous actresses” one of whom, Olive May, later became Countess of Drogheda. The fascination with celebrities is nothing new!

After the Great War and throughout the 1920s, the company came under pressure from a revitalized French perfume industry and the strength of the pound against depreciated European currencies. The highly successful business in Argentina suffered from raised import duties, leading to a decision to manufacture in Argentina followed by factories in Uruguay, Chile and Brazil. This expansion had been made possible by the issue of shares, the majority of which were purchased by the soap and perfume company Joseph Crosfield & Sons, itself a subsidiary of Lord Leverhulme’s Lever Group. Around this time, Atkinsons opened a branch in Paris at 2 rue de la Paix while the shop in Bond Street was well enough known to be used by the author Virginia Woolf for a scene in her novel *Mrs. Dalloway*.

*...Yet rumours were at once in circulation from the middle of Bond Street to Oxford Street on one side, to Atkinson’s scent shop on the other...*

This book was begun in 1922, but what Virginia Woolf knew at that time was not the delightful building which we can still see, although now largely occupied by the Italian shoe company Salvatore Ferragamo. Disaster struck in 1923 as 24 Old Bond Street was destroyed by fire. Yet, commissioning a new building was a special moment in the company’s history. Completed in 1927 and with its highly decorated façade, it stands out from the bland uniformity of so many commercial projects. The design was by English architect Emanuel

Vincent Harris, (1876-1971) who was responsible for a number of imposing civic buildings, but 24 Old Bond Street is playful and charming. A special feature of the building is a steeple with a carillon of 23 bells, which are still played. More information about this can be found on <http://www.carillons.org/>



The interior incorporated beauty treatment rooms and was decorated with marble floors and extensive use of mirror glass on walls and pillars. However, of greater significance to the future survival of Atkinsons was the amalgamation in 1929 of Lever Bros, with the Dutch group of Jurgens and Van den Bergh, becoming Unilever. The Bermondsey factory eventually came to be known as the Unilever Central Perfumery, employing around 200 workers.

The period from the late 1920s and early 1930s is of special interest to compact collectors with the introduction of scented face powder and compacts with solid powder godets that match the perfume presentations. Although the Eonia Works almost certainly made powder for these compacts, at the present time we cannot confirm whether the compact cases were made on this site.

*A selection of Atkinsons' compacts for scented, compressed powder and a "Royal Briar" rouge compact. Lid designs correspond to the perfume of the powder.*



*Believed to "Nosegay"*



*"California Poppy"*



*"White Rose"*



*"California Poppy"*



*"Au Revoir"*



*"Black Tulip"*



*"Royal Briar" introduced 1941*



*"No. 24"*



*Au Revoir*



*Black Tulip*

The scents “Au Revoir” and “Black Tulip” are believed to have been introduced in 1929, so these compacts designed to hold a godet of perfumed solid powder would have been produced from that time. “Au Revoir” is a 50mm/2 in. gold-tone compact with the design on a foiled, hard plasticized cover and “Atkinsons” printed in a frame on the herringbone patterned base.



*No. 24*



*No. 24 base*

The beautiful art deco style woman’s head is delicately printed under a similar hard cover. This is a silver-tone compact and the company’s name is engraved in script on the base surrounded by a wavy zig-zag pattern. The only known identification is “No. 24” on a corresponding powder box – of course, No. 24 being Atkinsons’ Bond Street address. Advertisements dated 1937 have been seen on eBay for a corresponding powder box, but its date of introduction cannot be confirmed at present.

A pretty compact with the tied bunch of flowers on pink enamel is also likely to date from this period and may correspond to the scent “A nosegay”, thought to have been introduced in 1925. At present, we cannot confirm dates for the “Californian Poppy” compacts or for the compact with the white roses and trellis design for powder scented with “White Rose”.

Throughout the 1930s Atkinsons continued to market their “Gold Medal” Eau de Cologne and Lavender Toilet Water. It is believed that new floral scents were created at this time, including “Mignonette” and “Jasmin” in 1933 and another “Rose” scent in 1939. The outbreak of war brought an end to production of perfumes in the Southwark Park Road factory, as a large part of it was taken over by the Ministry of Aircraft Production. Atkinsons decided to concentrate on cosmetics in what was left of the factory for them. All this part of London, known as Bermondsey, suffered terribly in the Blitz and in 1941 the whole front of the factory was severely damaged. Despite this, Atkinsons introduced a face cream “Skin Deep” in 1943, which developed into a range of products after the war.

With the end of war in 1945 Joseph Crosfield & Sons, still operating as a subsidiary of Unilever, sold its share holding in Atkinsons to Unilever\*\* and Mr. Horace Barrett retired. Considerable efforts were made to rebuild markets and increase turnover and an illustration in a trade journal dated 1949, when the company celebrated its 150th anniversary, shows its traditional Eau de Cologne, as well as Lavender water in a wicker covered bottle

and the scents “Royal Briar” and “Mirage”. A metal compact with a ridged circular pattern and matching lipstick are also shown.

Created for the  
new 'natural' beauty

Here's beauty news for you!  
New cosmetics from Atkinsons to bring  
you the latest thing in make-up.  
Extra-light creams that smooth on so  
easily—simple and lovely to use. Shades  
created specially for your skin and  
colouring—to give you the fashionable  
new natural beauty.

**ATKINSONS**  
SALON-TESTED COSMETICS

**ATKINSONS BEAUTY SERVICE**  
If you have any kind of  
beauty problem, write to  
Miss Betty Taylor at 24  
Old Bond Street, London,  
W.1. She will be only  
too pleased to help you.

**CLEANSING CREAM**—  
Extra light for deep  
cleansing. It keeps your  
skin clear—smooth—  
young . . . . . 5/6

**FACE POWDER**—  
Perfect  
shade—a perfect smooth  
texture that stays matt. . . . .  
Last, at  
last! No more spilt powder with  
the new compact filler . . . 6/6

**TINTED FOUNDATION  
CREAM**—  
Smooths on  
lightly or a touch. Will  
not dry your skin or  
clag the pores. Three  
flattering shades . . . 6/6

**LIPSTICK**—  
Lasts longer—remains  
on your lips. The simplest way  
to a joy to hold—and it's made to  
fit your fingers . . . . . 5/6

**ROUGE**—  
In three shades  
to blend perfectly with  
your natural skin tone 5/3

AC 9-001 J. & E. ATKINSON LTD., 24 OLD BOND STREET, LONDON, W.1

from *Everywoman* 1950

Despite the optimism of this time - the introduction of new perfumes and cosmetics, advertising lipstick with couturier Norman Hartnell - as with so many British businesses, the aftermath of the 2nd World War proved to be difficult.

Atkinsons also suffered a fire in a storeroom at the Bermondsey factory in 1950 and in 1953 the “Yorkshire Post” reported that the entire London production was transferring to the Whitehall soap factory of Joseph Watson, Leeds, another associated company of Unilever. By the 1960s, the influence of youth culture in fashion caused problems for companies maintaining a more traditional image and loss of business in the UK is

the most likely reason for closure of its famous salon at 24 Old Bond Street. Searches in London Post Office Directories show that in 1963 Atkinsons was no longer listed at that address.

However, it was at this time that Atkinsons' expansion into European markets began to pay dividends, as Italy became increasingly important, especially for its men's colognes. Although in the 1960s new women's scents were launched, its men's ranges were more successful, gaining ground in the 1970s. By the early 1980s, Milan had become Atkinsons' headquarters for both development and manufacturing and the 1990s saw the introduction of the extensive men's range "I Coloniali", which is sold today. The company was still owned by Unilever in the Lever Faberge group, but by the late 1990s was suffering from under-investment and in August 2002 was sold to Wella's Cosmopolitan Cosmetics for €44 million. Proctor and Gamble acquired Wella in 2005 and a company called the Bracco group then manufactured the perfumes. Atkinsons was regarded as an Anglo-Italian perfumery, so it was probably not a surprise that it was sold by Proctor and Gamble to an Italian fragrance house Morris Profumi for €20 million on 30<sup>th</sup> November, 2007. The company became a subsidiary of Morris Profumi based in Weybridge. Giovanni Borri, Morris's CEO, said that Atkinsons, to be known as "Atkinsons of London Ltd." would enable them to strengthen their position on the market.

Morris Profumi changed its name to Perfume Holding and in 2013 launched a range of perfumes with the aim of tapping into the interest in heritage and exclusivity, recreating Atkinsons' original sense of luxury. The new range launched was branded ATKINSONS LONDON 1799. One of the original company's most successful scents was its Gold Medal eau-de-cologne. The re-launch was looking to create a new signature scent, using the name *24 Old Bond Street*, the site of the perfumery's London shop. This scent was available as an eau-de-cologne (priced £60 for 50ml and £80 for 100ml), a shower gel, body lotion and soap. Other scents were available as eau-de-toilette and were more expensive at £95 for 100ml. I smelt these in Harrods and *24 Old Bond Street* was a classic eau-de-cologne, but with a slightly smoky note to it. There was a re-creation of an earlier scent called *Fashion Decree* together with a perfume that claimed to be a contemporary interpretation of Queen Victoria's bridal bouquet, *The Nuptial Bouquet*. From the scent of this, Queen Victoria must have liked lilies-of-the valley. There were two products for men, *The British Bouquet* and *The Odd Fellow*, the latter with its blend of spice and leather claiming to hark back to the presence of Lawrence of Arabia lounging in his gentleman's club! The Atkinsons name persists and is testimony to its strength as a brand started all those years ago when a young man arrived in London with pots of scented animal fat for the hair of Georgian men-about-town. The decorative façade of 24 Old Bond Street, which can still be enjoyed by shoppers and passers-by, is a reminder that Atkinsons promised that little luxury and self-indulgence afforded by make-up, powder and perfume.

**Text by Jenny Duncan and compacts and old adverts. etc. from Paula, Juliette and Jenny's collections.**

\*This anglicized Greek word "Eonia" is a puzzle. I have learned that in ancient Greek it means "on the shore", but the word "eon" or "aeon" means eternity. You can see that the meanings may be related with the idea of eternity being beyond the horizon, so to speak. Atkinsons may have wished to suggest its staying power as a scent, as well as invoking an ideal of classical beauty.

Acknowledgments. \*\* reference Irene MacGregor's publication, now sadly discontinued, "Common Scents" Special Edition "Erasmic" 2005, p. 15. Paula for her help with her knowledge of Atkinsons and her beautiful compacts and presentation sets. Also, for supplying a trade article from the early 1980s about the Anglo/Italian developments post war. The company's history has been compiled mainly by reference to secondary sources without access to Atkinsons' archives. Southwark local history library provided source material about the Eonia Works and an article from a trade journal "Progress", Spring 1949 with a history of Atkinsons.

Dates for some of the scents from [www.perfumeintelligence.co.uk](http://www.perfumeintelligence.co.uk)

Other info. from internet searching.

First published in *Face Facts* Issue 42 January 2009 with information about the Atkinsons' re-launch from *Face Facts* Issue 61 November 2013. Additional pictures added for website, including a photo of compacts from Paula's collection.