

Warmafaam Baby Bottle Holder

In the 1970s, polystyrene ceiling tiles were the hip alternative to a tired-looking ceiling. They were put up in no time with a blob of glue and without a thought spared for the next generation who prefer to scrape them off! One place where polystyrene ceiling tiles could be bought was the Warmafaam factory in Edenbridge. Two varieties of tile were available, 'normal' and 'self-extinguishing', the latter of which was more expensive.

The headquarters of Ross Warmafaam Limited was based at the Formby power station building in Liverpool. A subsidiary company of Metal Closures Rosslite Limited from 1962, Warmafaam made expanded polystyrene packs for aircraft windshields and insulation products for the building, road and oil industries. The factory in Edenbridge was located near the St John's Ambulance building in Lingfield Road. It was managed by John Whitmore until the plant closed in around the 1970s. Apart from polystyrene ceiling tiles, which was the main product line, the factory produced packing for Scalextrics sets and Lesney cars. By the mid-1960s, Lesney's Matchbox Series was the largest brand of die-cast models in the world.

The polystyrene baby bottle holder shown here was made at the Warmafaam factory in Edenbridge by Julie Evans' father. It had a great deal of use at the time. Julie's sister recalls that their father also made a delightful polystyrene elephant with a removeable head for storing sweets. Jenny Pearson (nee Slade) who worked on the shop floor, remembers a consignment of polystyrene packing for elephant-shaped perfume bottles, possibly for Avon which produced a variety of elephant-shaped bottles for toiletries during the 1970s. When the factory closed, Jenny worked for a short time at Warmafaam in Tangmere, Sussex. Brenda Drummond (nee Johnson) worked in the accounts department at the Edenbridge factory until 1966. Both she and Jenny recall that Warmafaam employees also worked night shifts. Ian Bridle, who worked at the Edenbridge factory from the age of eighteen, recounts that during the floods of the 1960s, great blocks of polystyrene foam swept out of the building on a tide of water and sailed off to Tonbridge.



Warmafaam baby bottle holder
c1970s

During the mid-1960s, the Edenbridge factory made polystyrene foam trays for the components of the first Philips Electronic Engineers kits. The first of their kind, the kits included everything that a young hobbyist might need to build a basic radio, a Morse code sounder and other exciting projects.



Philips Electronic Engineers kit
with Shell Styrocell foam tray, c1964
Eden Valley Museum Archive

Before polystyrene foam was invented, items might be packed with corrugated cardboard, straw or tissue paper. Polystyrene foam was lighter and so reduced the cost of transportation. Moulded trays provided greater protection for more delicate items. Foam polystyrene can be extruded or moulded and is made almost entirely of air. The process involves heating small round polystyrene beads with steam until they soften and leaving them to cool. The mass is then re-softened and expanded within a mould or extruded as sheets. Styrene, the raw component of polystyrene is an oily resin derived from the Sweetgum Tree and was discovered in 1839 by German pharmacist, Edward Simon. Polystyrene foam was discovered a century later by a scientist at the Dow Chemical Company which trademarked it as Styrofoam in 1941.

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