

# The Somerdale factory promise

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Somerdale was a chocolate factory at Keynsham, near Bristol. For almost 90 years it made Fry's chocolate. Its closure in 2011, after a promise that it might be saved, became the story people remember most about the sale of Cadbury.

## A Quaker factory in a garden

Somerdale was built by J. S. Fry and Sons, the Bristol chocolate makers, after they merged with Cadbury in 1919. In the 1920s Fry's began moving production out of its many small Bristol factories to a greenfield site at Keynsham, which it named Somerdale after a national competition. The move took years and was finished in 1935. Like Cadbury's Bournville, it was built with Quaker ideals in mind, with playing fields and sports grounds that the town still uses. At its height more than 5,000 people worked there.

Over the years Somerdale made Fry's Chocolate Cream, Double Deckers, Dairy Milk, Chocolate Buttons, Creme Eggs and Mini Eggs, Crunchie, Chomp, Cadbury's Fudge and Curly Wurly. Staff said the Crunchie line alone made more than a million bars a day. During the Second World War, with chocolate rationed, spare space was used by Rolls Royce to make Merlin aircraft engines.

## Cadbury decides to close it

On 3 October 2007, Cadbury itself announced that Somerdale would close by 2010, with the loss of around 500 jobs, and that production would move to new factories in Poland. The local MP called it a hard and heavy blow for Keynsham. Campaigners fought to save the site.

## Kraft's promise

When Kraft made its bid for Cadbury in September 2009, its chairman and chief executive said Kraft believed it would be in a position to continue to operate the Somerdale facility, and that the UK would be a net winner in jobs. Kraft repeated the statement on 9 November, on 4 December and again on 19 January 2010, the day Cadbury's board recommended the offer.

On the night of 18 and 19 January, in a first meeting with Cadbury's management, Kraft was told that the closure was well advanced, that money had been spent and that equipment and people were already moving out.

## A week after winning

Kraft's offer went unconditional on 2 February 2010. On 9 February, Kraft announced that it had reluctantly accepted that Cadbury's plans were too far advanced to reverse. Cadbury had already put more than £100m

into new factories in Poland. Around 400 jobs would go. Staff said they felt betrayed, as if they had been sacked twice.

## The verdict

In April 2010, MPs on the Business, Innovation and Skills Committee said Kraft had acted irresponsibly and unwisely in making its original statement. Kraft apologised for the U turn.

On 26 May 2010 the Takeover Panel, which polices company takeovers, published a statement of public criticism. It accepted that Kraft honestly believed it could keep Somerdale open. But it ruled that the belief had no reasonable basis, because Kraft did not know the details of Cadbury's closure plans when it made the statements, and did not ask for more information when it had the chance. It also said that Kraft's lead adviser, Lazard, should have questioned Kraft more closely, though it stopped short of publicly criticising the bank.

## The end of Somerdale

Somerdale closed on 31 March 2011, and its machinery was shipped to Poland. The land was sold to Taylor Wimpey for around 700 homes, a school and shops. Some of the old factory buildings are now a retirement village run by the St Monica Trust, called The Chocolate Quarter, and the Fry Club lives on in a new pavilion. One odd survivor: the remains of a small Roman villa, found when the factory was being built in 1922, still sit in the grounds.

For the takeover as a whole, see [how Cadbury was sold to Kraft](#), and for the family who built the factory, [Joseph Fry and the first chocolate bar](#).

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