

Joseph Rowntree, the Quaker chocolate maker

From the sweeties.net wiki

Joseph Rowntree was born on 24 May 1836 on Pavement, in York, where his father kept a grocer's shop. The family were Quakers, and that shaped everything he did.

A grocer's apprentice

Joseph went to Bootham School in York. At fourteen he went with his father to Ireland and saw the effects of the Great Famine, an experience that stayed with him for the rest of his life. He then worked as an apprentice in his father's shop, alongside two other young Quakers who would also make their names in chocolate: Lewis Fry and George Cadbury.

The cocoa works

The chocolate business was started by his younger brother. In June 1862, Henry Isaac Rowntree bought the chocolate, cocoa and chicory side of the Tuke family's business in York, with about a dozen staff. In 1864 he moved it into an old iron foundry at Tanner's Moat. But Henry was distracted by his other passion, a newspaper he wrote and printed himself, and the business suffered. In 1869 Joseph joined as a full partner, and the firm became H. I. Rowntree and Co. When Henry died in 1883, Joseph became the owner.

Fruit Pastilles and a new factory

The first big hit was not chocolate at all. In 1881 Rowntree's launched Fruit Pastilles to compete with French imports, and by 1887 they made up about a quarter of what the firm produced. Fruit Gums followed in 1893. As sales more than quadrupled in the 1890s, the company bought a 20 acre site at Haxby Road on the edge of York, following the example of Cadbury's Bournville.

Not always first

Rowntree's was not the most inventive firm of its day. The historian Robert Fitzgerald argues that under Joseph it mostly copied its rivals' successes, such as Cadbury's Cocoa Essence and French fruit pastilles, rather than inventing its own. Joseph even called the growing taste for milk chocolate a fad, and Rowntree's spent years failing to match Cadbury's Dairy Milk. It was only after his time that the company's great run began: the KitKat and the Aero in 1935, Smarties in 1937, and later After Eight and Jelly Tots.

A good employer

Where Joseph Rowntree led was in how he treated his staff. The company grew from about 30 workers to more than 4,000 by the end of the nineteenth century, and Joseph gave them a library, free education, a works magazine, a social welfare officer, a doctor, a dentist and a pension fund, one of the first company

pension schemes in the country.

In 1904 he set up three trusts. One built and ran the garden village of New Earswick for working families; the others funded research and social reform. He expected only the village trust to last, but all of them still exist. His son Seebohm Rowntree became known for his studies of poverty in York.

His legacy

Joseph Rowntree died on 24 February 1925 and is buried in the Quaker cemetery at The Retreat in York. His company merged with Mackintosh's of Halifax in 1969 and was bought by Nestlé in 1988: see [when Nestlé bought Rowntree](#). The name lives on in Rowntree's Fruit Pastilles and Fruit Gums, and in the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. For the other great Quaker chocolate family, read [the Cadbury family and the Quakers](#).

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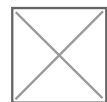
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