

The golliwog and British sweets

From the sweeties.net wiki

For much of the 20th century, a doll like character called the golliwog was a familiar sight in British shops, including on sweets and jam. Its disappearance is part of the story of how Britain's attitudes changed.

Where the golliwog came from

The golliwog was created by the cartoonist and author Florence Kate Upton, who was born in New York in 1873 to English parents. Her 1895 children's book introduced a character called the Golliwogg, first described in harsh terms but soon shown as friendly and kind faced. The rag doll character became hugely popular, and golliwog dolls were common children's toys.

The image, though, came out of the blackface minstrel tradition, with jet black skin, exaggerated red lips and wild hair, and it is now widely considered a racist caricature of Black people.

On the sweet wrapper

The aniseed flavoured chew called the Black Jack was marketed in Britain from the 1920s with a golliwog's face on the wrapper. The chew is still sold today, under the Barratt name, but the golliwog has long since gone from the packet. See [Black Jacks](#).

Robertson's Golly

In Britain, a golliwog was used to sell jam as well as sweets. The jam and marmalade maker James Robertson and Sons used a golliwog called Golly as its mascot from 1910, after John Robertson reportedly saw children playing with golliwog dolls in the United States. From the 1920s, Robertson's gave away Golly badges in exchange for tokens from its products, and by the 1950s its advertising slogan was Golly! They're Good. Many people collected the badges and figures.

The backlash

As Britain changed, so did views of the image. In 1983 Robertson's products were boycotted by the Greater London Council, led by Ken Livingstone, because of the character's offensiveness. In 1988 Golly stopped appearing in Robertson's television adverts. The badge scheme was withdrawn in 2001, and the same year Golly was removed from the jars. A brand director told a Scottish newspaper at the time that research had found children were not familiar with the character, although it still appealed to older generations.

Still divisive

The golliwog still stirs strong feelings. Some people see it as a harmless toy tied up with childhood memories, and a few have campaigned to defend it. But it is widely considered a racist caricature, and the Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia in the United States lists it among the major anti Black caricatures. Brands have almost all dropped it.

Changing names and images

The golliwog is one example of sweets changing to reflect changing attitudes. More recently, in 2022, several retailers renamed Midget Gems as Mini Gems after a campaign by a disability campaigner: see [Midget Gems](#) and [sweets that changed their names](#).

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