

The Cadbury family and the Quakers

From the sweeties.net wiki

For much of the 19th and 20th centuries, three companies dominated British chocolate: Cadbury of Birmingham, Fry of Bristol and Rowntree of York. All three were founded by Quakers.

Why Quakers went into business

Quakers, members of the Religious Society of Friends, faced real restrictions in the early 19th century. As John Cadbury's story shows, it was the custom for Quakers not to go to university or pursue a military career, so many put their energy into business instead. Quaker families traded with each other, trained each other's children and married into each other's families. George Cadbury, for example, was apprenticed as a teenager to Joseph Rowntree in York, and Joseph Rowntree himself had trained in his father's grocery shop alongside two other young Quakers, Lewis Fry and George Cadbury.

Chocolate against the gin shop

Many Quakers were active in the temperance movement, which campaigned against alcohol and the damage it did to working families. John Cadbury was a teetotaler for fifty years and saw drinking chocolate as an alternative to alcoholic drinks. Cocoa was warming, nourishing and respectable, a drink a working man could have instead of beer. For Quaker grocers, selling it fitted their beliefs.

Looking after workers

Quaker beliefs also shaped how these firms treated their staff. Joseph Rowntree gave his workers a library, free education, a doctor, a dentist and one of the first company pension schemes. The Cadbury brothers built canteens and sports grounds and moved their factory to the countryside. Both families went further and built model villages: Bournville, begun by the Cadburys around their new factory from 1879, and New Earswick, built by a trust Joseph Rowntree set up in 1904. Bournville has never had a pub. See [George Cadbury and Bournville](#) and [Joseph Rowntree](#).

Rivals and partners

The three firms competed fiercely, but they were also connected. Cadbury and Fry merged at the end of the First World War, and Rowntree was invited to join them but declined. Rowntree later merged with Mackintosh's of Halifax in 1969.

Not only the Quakers

Other chocolate and toffee makers shared some of these ideals. Harry Vincent, who founded Blue Bird Toffee near Birmingham in 1898, had similar ideas to the Cadburys and Frys about making the workplace a pleasant place to be. See [Blue Bird toffee](#).

What became of them

None of the three is family owned today. Rowntree's was bought by Nestlé in 1988, and Cadbury, which had absorbed Fry's, was bought by Kraft in 2010. But their legacy lives on in Bournville, New Earswick and the charitable trusts both families founded.

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