

Joseph Fry and the first chocolate bar

From the sweeties.net wiki

Long before Cadbury became a household name, the biggest chocolate maker in Britain was Fry's of Bristol. The Fry family were Quakers, like the Cadburys and the Rowntrees, and their firm gave Britain two things we now take for granted: chocolate made in a factory, and chocolate in a bar you could eat.

Joseph Fry

Joseph Fry was born in 1728 into a Quaker family. He was a busy man of business, making chocolate and soap and running a type foundry, which made the metal letters used by printers. He started making chocolate around 1759. In 1761 he and a partner, John Vaughan, bought a small shop from a Bristol apothecary, Walter Churchman, and with it the patent for a process for refining chocolate. The firm traded as Fry, Vaughan & Co, and in 1777 its chocolate works moved from Newgate Street to Union Street in Bristol. At the time, chocolate in Britain was a drink. Eating chocolate did not appear in British shops until the 1840s.

Steam comes to chocolate

Joseph Fry died in 1787, and the business was renamed Anna Fry & Son, after his widow. In 1795 their son, Joseph Storrs Fry, took control. He patented a method of grinding cocoa beans using a Watt steam engine, and with it factory methods came to the cocoa trade. In 1822 he took his sons Joseph, Francis and Richard into partnership, and the firm became J. S. Fry & Sons, the largest commercial producer of chocolate in Britain. Joseph Storrs Fry died in 1835 and was buried behind the Quaker meeting house at Frenchay, near Bristol.

The first chocolate bar

It was his sons who made history. Cadbury was already selling a French eating chocolate by 1842, but in 1847 the Fry's factory moulded a bar of eating chocolate called Chocolat Délicieux à Manger, delicious chocolate to eat, probably inspired by French chocolates. It is often considered the first chocolate bar of its kind. Because it was sold for eating rather than drinking, it may also have been the first chocolate made with extra cocoa butter added.

More firsts followed. In 1853 came Cream Sticks, the first filled chocolate sweet. In 1866 came Fry's Chocolate Cream, probably the first mass produced chocolate bar and still on sale today: see [Fry's Chocolate Cream](#). The firm made the first British chocolate Easter egg in 1873, and launched Fry's Turkish Delight in 1914. Its output of eating chocolate grew from about 10 tonnes in 1852 to more than 1,100 tonnes in 1880.

The five boys

One Fry's advertising design became famous. It showed five pictures of the same small boy, his face moving from Desperation through Pacification, Expectation and Acclamation to the final realisation: it's Fry's. Years later, on a visit to the Bristol factory in his eighties, the boy in the pictures, Lindsay Poulton, recalled that for the first photograph his father had made him cry by wrapping a cloth soaked in ammonia around his neck. In 2020 an original enamel sign with the design was valued on the BBC's Antiques Roadshow at £1,000 to £1,500.

The last Fry in charge

The founder's grandson, Joseph Storrs Fry II, became chairman in 1878 and grew the business from 56 workers to a factory employing 3,000 people in Union Street. He never married. When he died in 1913 his fortune went mostly to his 37 nephews and nieces, with £42,000 shared among employees who had worked for the firm for more than five years. Control of the firm passed to a group of relatives, some of whom were not on speaking terms.

Into Cadbury

In 1919 Fry's merged with Cadbury, and the Fry family held about 45 per cent of the ordinary shares of the combined company. From 1923 production moved to a new factory at Somerdale, in Keynsham, just outside Bristol. The Frys' share of the business shrank over the years, and after 1981 the Fry's name was no longer used at Somerdale, though the factory went on making Cadbury chocolate.

Then came the Kraft takeover of Cadbury in 2010. Kraft had said during the takeover battle that it believed it could keep Somerdale open, but soon after winning it confirmed the factory would close: see [the Somerdale factory promise](#). Since August 2010, the Fry's Chocolate Cream and Fry's Turkish Delight sold in Britain and Ireland have been made in Poland.

The business records of J. S. Fry & Sons, and of the family, are kept at Bristol Archives.

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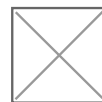
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