

The history of liquorice in Pontefract

From the sweeties.net wiki

Pontefract, in West Yorkshire, has been linked with liquorice for centuries. The town grew the plant, turned its root into medicine, and then into the black liquorice sweets that carry its name: see [Pontefract cakes](#)

How liquorice arrived

Nobody knows for certain how liquorice came to Pontefract. Wakefield Museums, which cares for the district's history, says it was probably brought either by medieval knights returning to the castle from the Crusades, or by the town's Dominican monks. Liquorice growing in England is on record by the 16th century, possibly in monastery gardens and as a garden crop for the gentry, and Camden's Britannia of 1607 noted it at Pontefract.

Liquorice in the garths

In Pontefract, liquorice was grown on plots of land behind people's houses, known as garths. A map of the siege of Pontefract in 1648 shows liquorice growing either side of Micklegate, the street between the market place and the castle. In the 17th century liquorice was recorded growing on alluvial soil over magnesian limestone in Surrey, Lincolnshire, Nottinghamshire and Yorkshire, and by 1780 English liquorice growing was concentrated almost entirely in Pontefract and around Godalming in Surrey: see [is liquorice a root?](#)

From medicine to sweets

In the 18th century liquorice was a medicine, for people and for horses, and the first Pontefract cakes were small black lozenges used to make liquorice water. A stamp of Pontefract Castle marked their quality, and one with the initials GS was in use by 1612. In 1760 the apothecary George Dunhill added sugar to the medicinal liquorice, and in 1810 Firth Confectioners, later known as Ewbanks, joined Dunhill in making sweet liquorice. Only in the 19th century did liquorice become mainly a sweet.

Too popular for the town

As Pontefract cakes grew popular, demand outstripped what the town's growers could supply. By the late 19th century, the 12 firms making liquorice sweets relied mainly on liquorice extract imported largely from Turkey. Wakefield Museums says liquorice fields survived at Stump Cross until the middle of the 20th century, but the plant is no longer grown in the town as a crop: see [how is liquorice made?](#)

Liquorice town today

Pontefract still makes liquorice. The town has two liquorice factories, owned by Haribo and Valeo Confectionery. Haribo entered the British market in 1972 by buying Dunhill's, the Pontefract firm founded in

the 18th century, and it still makes Pontefract cakes: see [how are Pontefract cakes made?](#) Pontefract holds a liquorice festival every year, the poet laureate John Betjeman wrote a poem about the liquorice fields at Pontefract, and in 2012 a local farmer, Robert Copley, announced he would bring a liquorice crop back to the town.

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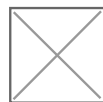
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