

The history of chocolate in Britain

From the sweeties.net wiki

Chocolate in Britain began as a drink for those who could afford it and became an everyday treat. Its British story is bound up with a small group of Quaker families, and with a trade whose costs were not always paid by the people who ate it.

A drink in the coffee houses

Chocolate arrived in England from France around 1657, at about the same time as tea and coffee, and at first some worried about its effects on health. Cocoa came from plantations in Jamaica, which the British had taken from Spain in 1655. English chocolate was a commercial product, made more simply than the perfumed chocolate of Italy, and it was served in coffee houses to anyone who could pay. By the end of the 17th century it was a required part of British Navy rations.

Machines and mills

In 1729 a British apothecary, Walter Churchman, patented a water engine for milling cocoa, which Joseph Storrs Fry II of J. S. Fry and Sons bought in 1789. In 1828 the Dutch chemist Coenraad van Houten patented a press that removed cocoa butter and made cocoa powder, which later opened the way to cheap chocolate for everyone: see [how is chocolate made?](#)

The Quaker makers

During the Industrial Revolution, Quakers set up three of Britain's great chocolate firms: J. S. Fry and Sons in Bristol, Cadbury in Birmingham and Rowntree's in York. Quakers did not drink alcohol, and they saw chocolate as a good alternative. Their firms built model villages, such as Bournville, to improve their workers' living conditions: see [the Cadbury family and the Quakers](#)

In 1847, Fry's is credited with introducing eating chocolate in Britain, and rivalry between Cadbury and Fry's went on to create the chocolate box and the chocolate Easter egg. Cadbury and Fry's merged in 1919: see [Joseph Fry and the first chocolate bar](#) and [John Cadbury and the first Cadbury shop](#)

Chocolate for everyone

Prices fell sharply in the 1890s and 1900s as cocoa growing moved from the Americas to Africa and Asia. Between 1880 and 1902, chocolate consumption in England quadrupled, and in the early 1900s eating chocolate overtook drinking chocolate. Milk chocolate, first made in Switzerland in 1875, reached a wide public after 1900: see [Henri Nestlé, Daniel Peter and the first milk chocolate](#)

The darker side

Some of the cocoa was grown in cruel conditions. After pressure from journalists and campaigners, Cadbury looked into labour on Portuguese cocoa plantations in Africa, and a 1908 report by its agent Joseph Burt described the system there as de facto slavery. In 1909 Fry's, Cadbury and Rowntree's boycotted the plantations, which generally improved conditions, but forced and child labour in cocoa growing is still an issue today: see [child labour and the cocoa trade](#)

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