

The history of penny sweets

From the sweeties.net wiki

Penny sweets are small sweets bought a few at a time, and the name is a leftover from old money. In Britain, a penny or even half of one could once buy a sweet treat.

Old money

Before 1971, the pound was divided into 20 shillings of 12 pence each, 240 pence in all. The penny was written d, after the Roman denarius, and there were smaller coins still: the halfpenny, and the farthing, a quarter of a penny, which stopped being legal tender in 1961.

With coins that small, sweets could be very cheap. In 1851 the journalist Henry Mayhew counted about 200 street sellers of sweet stuff in London, selling rock, candies and hardbake by the halfpenny worth: see [the history of the sweet shop](#)

What a penny bought

- **1909.** When the first British Woolworths opened in Liverpool, its sweets cost tuppence a quarter pound: see [Woolworths pick and mix, the story](#)
- **1920s.** Trebor introduced the Black Jack, an aniseed flavoured chew. The nostalgia site Do You Remember? recalls Black Jacks at four for a penny: see [Black Jacks](#)
- **1930s.** Swizzels sold Rainbow Drops loose, scooped into bags for a penny: see [Rainbow Drops](#)

America had its own penny candy. The first sold there was the Tootsie Roll, in 1907: see [do Americans have pick and mix?](#)

Decimal Day

Decimalisation was announced in 1966, and on 15 February 1971 the pound was divided into 100 new pence. Each new penny was worth 2.4 old pence. The old penny was withdrawn from circulation on 31 August 1971, and a new halfpenny, worth 1.2 old pence, kept small prices possible.

The change brought complaints. Some people felt that traders had used it to raise their prices, although, according to Wikipedia's account, overall price adjustments slightly favoured the shopper.

The penny today

Inflation wore the small coins down. The decimal halfpenny was dropped in 1984, once inflation had greatly reduced its value, and since around 2002 the penny has had the lowest value in real terms of any coin in the history of the United Kingdom, going back at least to 1707. Since 1992, pennies have been made of copper

plated steel, because copper became too expensive.

The name has outlived the price. For how loose sweets are priced today, see [why is pick and mix sold by weight?](#)

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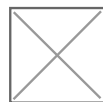
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