

Charlie and the Chocolate Factory and real sweet factories

From the sweeties.net wiki

Roald Dahl's *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, first published in 1964, is about a boy who wins a Golden Ticket to tour Willy Wonka's secret factory. Its roots lie in Dahl's own childhood, and in the real rivalry of Britain's chocolate makers.

The tasting boxes at Repton

From 1929, Dahl was a pupil at Repton School in Derbyshire. The Cadbury company would sometimes send boxes of new chocolates to the school for the boys to test and give their opinions. Dahl dreamed of inventing a new chocolate bar that would win the praise of Mr Cadbury himself, and the memory inspired *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, and the chocolate that turns up in his other children's books: see [the Cadbury family and the Quakers](#)

Real industrial spies

In the book, rival chocolate makers send spies to steal Wonka's recipes, so he closes his factory and hides away. That part was not invented. Around the 1920s, Cadbury and Rowntree's were England's two biggest chocolate makers, and each often tried to steal the other's trade secrets by sending spies, posing as employees, into the rival factory. That rivalry inspired Wonka's recipe thieves: see [Joseph Rowntree, the Quaker chocolate maker](#)

A mouse in the gobstoppers

Sweet shops shaped Dahl too. At the age of eight, in 1924, he and four friends were caned after putting a dead mouse in a jar of gobstoppers at a sweet shop in Llandaff, owned by a woman called Mrs Pratchett. The boys called it the Great Mouse Plot: see [gobstoppers](#)

How Wonka became real

The first film, *Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory*, released in 1971, had an unusual backer. Its producer, David L. Wolper, was already talking to the Quaker Oats Company about launching a new sweet, and he persuaded Quaker, which had never made a film, to buy the rights to the book and finance the picture to promote a real Wonka Bar. In the scene where thousands of Wonka bars are unwrapped in the hunt for a Golden Ticket, the bars were made of wood.

The first real Wonka Bars never reached the shops, because of production problems. Later Wonka sweets did far better, including the Everlasting Gobstopper in 1976 and Nerds in 1983. The brand passed to

Rowntree Mackintosh in 1986, and so to Nestlé, which bought Rowntree in 1988. In 2018 Nestlé sold the branding and production rights to the Ferrero Group.

Fake Wonka bars

Wonka's fame has also attracted fakes. In 2022, raids on sweet shops in London's Oxford Street seized counterfeit Wonka bars, which NBC News reported contained enough hazelnut to trigger a serious allergic reaction without proper labelling: see [how sweets from abroad came to Britain](#)

The book's controversies

The book has had its critics. In the first edition, the Oompa Loompas were described as African pygmies. When a film was announced, the American civil rights group the NAACP raised concerns, and Dahl published a revised edition. In 2023 the publisher Puffin made more than eighty further changes, such as removing the word fat. For what really goes on in a sweet factory, see [what happens inside a sweet factory?](#)

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