

SWEET RATIONING IN WORLD WAR 2

Compiled by David Royle

While researching information for our VE DAY event on 8 May 2020, and looking for information on sweet rationing in particular (we had in mind to have jar at the event and/or to have a guess-the-number-of-sweets competition), I came across this wonderfully informative site, <http://www.woolworthsmuseum.co.uk/pnmrationing.html>, which is this

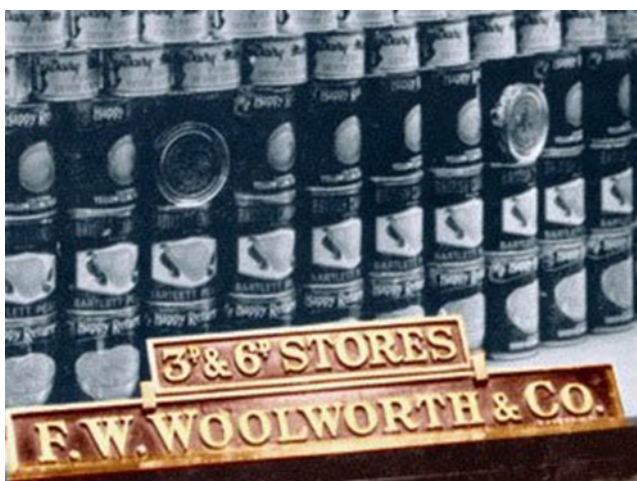


source for the following (adapted) article.

'Choc(k)s away

By the late 1930s the UK had a huge confectionery industry making all manner of confections from simple boiled sweets to fancy chocolate specialities. Woolworth had become the country's dominant outlet for the ranges, and had held prices down by playing one supplier off against another. In 1939 the stores continued to offer a half pound slab of chocolate (227g) for sixpence, just as they had when the doors first opened thirty years earlier. But everything was about to change.

It was little wonder that most of the factories supplying the stores were close to the docks, principally in the East End of London, the Mersey estuary and the outskirts of Bristol. All converted raw materials from abroad like sugar and cocoa into finished products for the shops. The outbreak of War not only interrupted the supply lines, but saw pressures to use the mass production capabilities for munitions and, before long, saw the dockside locations facing enemy bombardment from the skies.



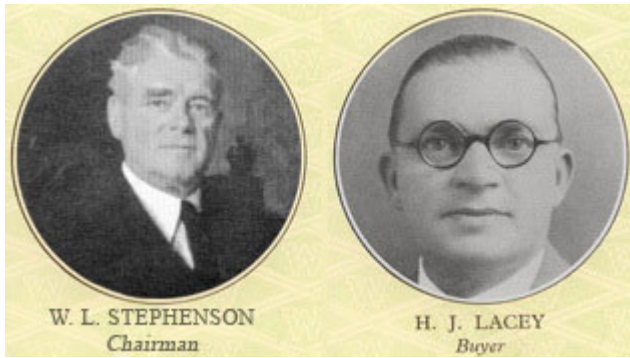
Sweets, rationing and World War II

By the late 1930s the F. W. Woolworth Threepenny and Sixpenny Stores enjoyed a dominant confectionery market share. They seemed unassailable. 1939 saw the opening of the 750th shop. The firm still had a postbag full of recommendations for new towns. Rival retailers found the prices hard to beat, especially as the firm had steadily built its ranges of confectionery to stimulate impulse purchases as customers called to buy from the staple ranges of homewares, toiletries and gardening.

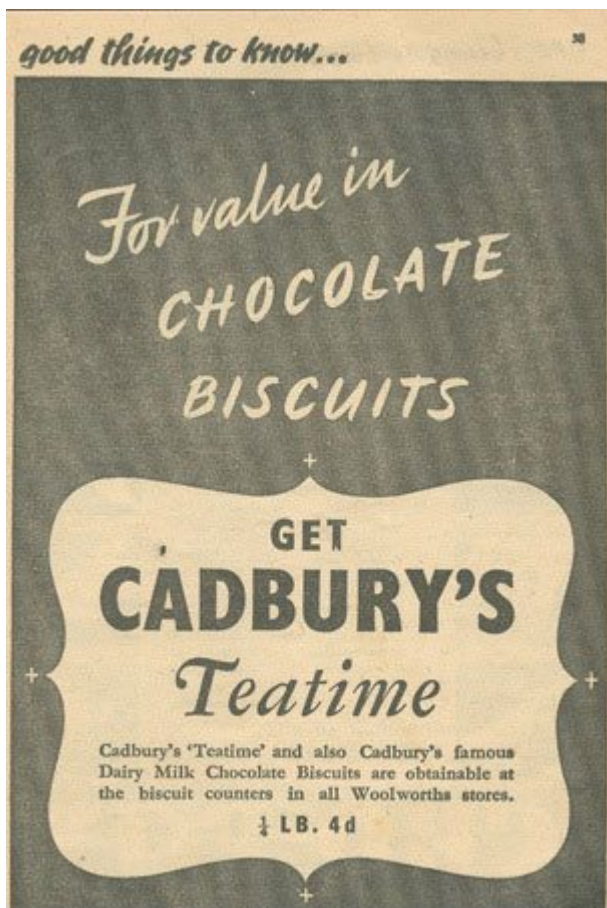


By Christmas 1939 stocks were low, as many factories were requisitioned for war work. The automation required to wrap and pack sweets proved useful for munitions and military suppliers. But, despite the shortages, initially only three food groups, sugar, bacon and ham, were rationed.

Within days of the outbreak of War, the Woolworth Chairman, William Stephenson, was called to serve the nation in an unusual way. Ministers called on the supremo to head Aircraft Production for the Air Ministry, bringing his expertise in mass production to the task of making components and assembling enough Spitfires to repel an expected attack from Nazi Germany. The role gave him a hotline to the heart of Government.



Stephenson and his Food Buyer Bill Lacey used the new access to persuade the powers-that-be not to ration ice-cream, biscuits and chocolate. In exchange stocks would be reserved for the stores in the towns and cities facing the worst bombardment. It was hoped that the initiative, and a similar venture for patriotic comics and jigsaw puzzles, would be good for morale on the Home Front.



Despite the decision to ration the sales of sugar in January 1940, that summer Cadbury's advertised teatime biscuit assortments, noting they were available in 'all Woolworth stores'. Sweet rationing was introduced in 1942. The new rules gave an allowance of seven ounces (200 grams) to everyone over five years old.



Several customers and employees of the era have told us of the unofficial redistribution of rations in-store. Many adults, particularly old age pensioners, handed in their coupons "for the little ones" so that children would never be turned away from the sweet counters.

The 200g ration was enough to allow the children just a couple of sweets each day, but only if they could find them. Coupons were no guarantee of product availability. By Christmas 1942, the District Managers' Christmas Messages in the Staff Magazine note that sweets were in short supply in all areas of the country, and that any delivery was eagerly anticipated. When goods arrived word soon spread around the town, prompting a long queue of youngsters at the pic'n'mix counter.



These shortages were reflected in Cadbury's advertising. Three years after boasting that biscuits were available in all Woolworth stores, Cadbury placed advertisements in the popular *Picture Post* magazine, asking people to save the chocolate for children, who needed its nutrition the most, when limited stock became available again.

Woolworth's role in sharing out the ration, and finding a little extra for children, served to grow the sense of community. It served to enhance the strong emotional bond between shoppers and the brand that endured throughout the chain's time in the High Street.

In Jersey and Guernsey invading German soldiers were surprised to find chocolate on sale at Woolworth's, months after supplies had run out in their shops at home. Colleagues remember that the soldiers respectfully joined the back of the queue and waited their turn, paying in pennies and saying a polite thank you.



By 1942 coupons had become part of the British way of life and a key part of the store routine. Scissors and little scraps of paper - and the secret stack of spares for children and deserving causes under the counter - became a feature at more than 20,000 cash registers in 767 stores!

Everyone expected that Victory would bring an end to rationing. But rations were cut and supplies remained limited well into the 1950s, as an export drive sought to drive down the national debt. The restrictions finally came to an end in 1953, when it seemed the whole nation joined the queue at the Woolworth's pic'n'mix!

Another website https://www.cocoaandheart.co.uk/blog/read_167823/list-of-wartime-sweets.html provides a list of wartime sweets, some of which are still available in Bishop's Stortford from the Olde Sweet Shoppe: <https://mrsimmsoldesweetshoppe.co.uk/>.

'Sweet and chocolate rationing started on 26 July 1942, only finishing on 5 February 1953, nearly eight years later. The amount of sugar and therefore sweets which you were allowed fluctuated during the war, ranging from 16oz a month down to 8oz (227g) a month.

Despite the decision to ration the sales of sugar in January 1940, as late as the summer Cadbury's were still able to advertise that their teatime biscuits were available in 'all Woolworth stores'. As raw materials were in short supply, chocolate manufacturers were forced to substitute products and improvise ingredients. For instance, Cadbury Dairy Milk as withdrawn in 1941 when the government banned manufacturers from using fresh milk. Symingtons Table Cremes (Blancmanges using artificial sweeteners) were rushed to the shelves and sold for sixpence under a 'just add water' banner, a forerunner of the instant drinks we have today.

Amongst the popular sweets you could get in your local sweet shop were lemon sherbets, barley sugar twists, liquorice, pear drops and cola cubes. So here's brief run through to remind ourselves of coupon confectionary.

List of wartime sweets

Ration Chocolate, made with dried skimmed milk powder. It seems it was issued in semi-transparent grease-proof wrappers, and was described as about as appetizing as eating cardboard.

Dolly Mixture, multi-coloured fondant shapes, such as cubes and cylinders. The mixture consists of small soft sweets and sugar-coated jellies

Barley Sugar Twists: often yellow or orange in colour with sometimes an extract of barley added as flavouring. It is similar to hard caramel candy in its texture and taste.

Black Jacks, a type of aniseed flavour chew.

Sherbet Dabs - which was dipped into by a dried liquorice root stick and liquorice itself. Liquorice (referred to as Spanish in the West Yorkshire Riding of Yorkshire, where liquorice is traditionally produced in the UK) was available on ration as were other products such as "liquorice allsorts".

Lemon Sherbets - a yellow boiled, lemon flavour tablet with a surprise of sherbet in the middle.

Pear Drops - a combination of half pink and half yellow in a pear-shaped drop.

And finally, an American GI might have given his British sweetheart a "**D ration bar**", was a blend of chocolate, sugar, cocoa butter, skim milk powder and oat flour, made by Hershey. It was an essential part of the emergency rations issued to US troops as part of the D day invasion of the beaches of Normandy. It weighed four ounces (112 grams) with 600 calories, was designed to be high in energy for mobile field operations and was manufactured to withstand high temperatures. Not surprisingly, it was reported to not taste very good. Perhaps there were other ways to win her heart? The American's also issued a **Hershey's Tropical Bar** designed to withstand the high heat of the Tropics for soldiers fighting in the Far East.

As you can see the list of wartime sweets is actually quite short. Judging by today's standards, not having that many sweets was probably a good thing. But in the times when even the day to day living was difficult and very stressful, it must have been hard to have sugar treats rationed, especially for the children.'