

THE SWEETSHOP

This sweetshop is a replica of the building that still stands at 48 Birmingham Street, Oldbury which was built in the 1840's with the shop front being added in the 1870's.



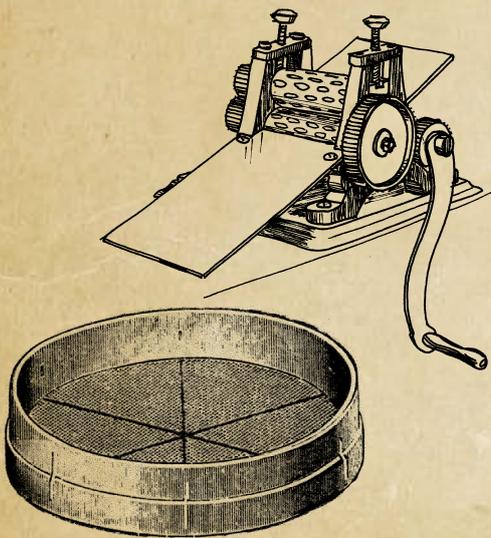
The shop, with its back-room workshop, has been named after Thomas Cook who ran a small confectionery business at 21 Bond Street, Dudley, between the years 1871 and 1901.

In 1871 the Cook family was composed of Thomas Cook; confectioner, his son Thomas; assistant confectioner, his son's wife, Martha and their two children. The business was a typical family set-up where everyone had to help with the preparation of the sweets. The shop was probably run by Martha while the two men made enough sweets to stock the shop and supply to other retailers. Their workshop would have been very similar to the one at the Museum. When Thomas Cook the elder died, his son took over the business.



All the equipment on display in the sweetshop belonged to George Hatchings who used it to make home-made sweets at the back of his sweetshop in Stirchley, Birmingham, from 1943 to 1988.

All the sweets were made by hand; a mixture of sugar and glucose was boiled up in large, round bottomed copper pans on a confectioner's furnace. It was cooked for about an hour at 160° F and looked and felt like dough. The mixture was then poured onto a plate for the addition of colours and flavouring whilst it was kneaded, which had to be done quickly (less than 7 minutes) before it became rock hard. Sweet colouring often came from poisonous materials like coal tar, lead, copper mercury (for red), arsenic (for green) and chrome (for yellow)! For flavouring either fruit essences or essential oils such as lemon, peppermint, cloves or aniseed were used.



After kneading, the toffee would have been ready to pass through the drop machines. These machines, as shown hanging on the wall in the picture were like small mangles with changeable rollers that rolled out the toffee strips into different shapes. When the rolled strips were cool they were separated/broken up and smoothed off by being tossed in a big sieve called a riddle (shown left). They were then ready to put into the glass jars as shown below left. These shapes could have been very simple; such as squares or ovals or more elaborate such as bees or fish.

Some confectioners would make sweets in their spare time as well as having another job, because sweet making alone would not make enough money to keep a family. The husband would make the sweets in the evenings and his wife would manage the shop during the day. To the right you can see some sugar mice.

Here in the Museum the skill of sugar boiling is being revived, along with the tastes, smells and shapes of the Black Country 'suck' - the local term for boiled sweets. They were much appreciated because they were cheap and lasted a long time.

