

Liquorice companies in Pontefract and Castleford

J .H. Addingley and Sons

The business was founded in 1860 by Mr Charles Tinker and Co, and taken over by J. H. Addingley and Sons in 1872. The company operated from Baghill Refinery, Pontefract.

The ground floor of the three storey building consisted of offices, a warehouse, packing room as well as mechanics' and joinery shops for repairing the plant, and an engine house. The first and second floors were occupied by plant machinery driven by a steam-engine and a 'Griffin' gas engine.

The company closed in 1937.

Geo. Bassett and Co Ltd

George Bassett a wholesale confectioner, lozenge maker and wine dealer founded his Sheffield based business in 1842. In 1851, George Bassett took on a twelve year old apprentice, Samuel Meggitt Johnson who later became his business partner and son-in-law.

The first factory opened in 1852 and operated from Portland Street. The premises were extended in 1876 and boasted state of the art equipment including boiling pans rotated by steam power. The factory employed around 150 workers.

In 1878 George Bassett had a stroke and died in 1886 aged 68. Samuel Johnson took over the running of the family business.

In 1900 a new factory built at Owlerton traded under the name of S. M. Johnson and Son, where candied peel, gums, and other goods were made. The company moved all operations to Owlerton in 1934.

The factory was enlarged during the inter-war period as new products such as Jelly Babies, Wine Gums and liquorice novelties were added to the range. In April 1939 buildings were damaged when a huge sugar fuelled fire blazed. The 'invention' of the famous Liquorice Allsorts was the result of a happy accident. In 1899 while on business in Leicester, sales representative Charlie Thompson dropped a tray of liquorice and cream paste samples of chips, rocks, buttons, cubes and twists. The resulting colourful mix impressed the shopkeeper who placed the first order for 'allsorts'.

The company's mascot Bertie Bassett, made from liquorice allsorts was created by John McEwan and launched in 1929.

Geo. Bassett and Co Ltd bought W. R. Wilkinson and Co Ltd of Pontefract in 1961, Barratt's in 1966, and Trebor before being bought themselves by Cadbury-Schweppes in 1989. Bassett continued as a brand of Cadbury owned by Mondelēz International.

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Joseph Bellamy and Sons

In 1870 Joseph Bellamy started manufacturing confectionery in Leeds, but in 1899 moved to Castleford. He converted the Mountain Nail Works in Queen Street into a liquorice refinery and confectionery factory.

In 1935 Joseph Bellamy and Sons Ltd became incorporated.

The company became known for their mint imperials, French almonds as well as chocolate covered liquorice allsorts.

The business re-located to Wheldale Mills and was run in turn by the Bellamy family until it was taken over by John Mackintosh Ltd in early 1964.

It was re-named Anglo Bellamy Ltd in 1976 when the marketing, selling and administrative operations of Anglo Confectionery Ltd and Bellamy and Sons Ltd merged into a single company.

In 1970 a new factory next to the original site was opened by the Duchess of Kent. Shortly afterwards the old works were demolished.

The Nestlé group acquired Rowntree Mackintosh in 1988.

Dunhills

By 1720 and probably earlier, the Dunhill family rented the land in Pontefract Castle for growing liquorice. They stored harvested liquorice roots in the castle cellars, which had previously been used for storing weapons, gunpowder and prisoners.

Dunhills' later packaging claims that they had been making liquorice confectionery since 1760. George Dunhill, who became a chemist, is reputed to have added sugar to the medicinal recipes to make the first liquorice sweet. He was only seven years old at the time.

By 1779 George Dunhill, the reputed inventor of Pontefract Cakes, owned a house, warehouse and garden in Broad Lane. He also had a liquorice garth (plot) behind this property, and at least one nearby called Roper Garth.

He carried on his liquorice business until his death in 1824 when it was taken over by his son Francis. Ann Dunhill, Francis' widow, ran the company after her husband died.

In 1872 the company played a part in national politics. In this year; Parliament passed the Secret Ballot Act and Pontefract had the first by-election held under the new system. Wax seals on surviving ballot boxes show that instead of the stamp of the borough, Dunhills' Pontefract cake stamp was used!

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The business was taken over in 1883 by Mr F Craven, although the Dunhills name was kept. Under Craven's direction the company traded in liquorice root distributed amongst wholesale and retail chemists across the UK.

The firm became a limited company in 1919. It moved to a former laundry on Front Street soon afterwards, and gradually expanded to take over one building after another, resulting in a modern factory on the site.

Dunhills Ltd bought out competitors Sampson and Gundill in the 1920s. The company expanded trade, exporting liquorice world-wide including to the United States, Canada, British Guiana, various African countries, the Persian Gulf States and Asia.

In 1964 Dunhills Ltd acquired another competitor, Robison and Wordsworth Ltd.

In 1972 the German company HARIBO acquired a major stake in Dunhills and in 1994 gained the remaining shares and started to promote the HARIBO brand in the UK.

Ewbanks

Thomas Firth set up Pontefract's second liquorice factory based in Elephant Yard, in 1810. The founder was eventually succeeded by Mr David Longstaffe, who later sold to Mr Robert Ewbank and Mr W. R. Horsfall. Between 1810 and 1885 the company was known as 'Firth Confectioners'. The partnership of Horsfall and Ewbank continued until September 1892 when Mr Ewbank became the sole owner.

Under Mr Ewbank's direction the company grew and expanded into the larger Eagle Liquorice Works, Friarwood in 1887. At that time the factory consisted of a large one storied building surrounded by extensive orchards. The company employed 60 workers and had a large home and export trade.

In 1913 the business was purchased by a group and formed as a private limited company trading as Ewbanks Ltd. Improvements and extensions continued between 1918 and 1933 and the orchards gradually disappeared.

On 8 August 1942 the factory was badly burned when hit by German incendiaries. The pan, gum and liquorice rooms were all damaged, and the factory was put out of action. During this time other Pontefract sweet manufacturers produced some Ewbanks sweets. Some Ewbanks workers made parachutes. A gum department was officially opened on February 6 1948.

In January 1961 the business merged with the toffee manufacturers Arthur Holland of Southport (which later merged into the larger group J. A. and P. Holland Limited).

The company closed July 30 1965.

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HARIBO

HARIBO is a family-owned German company founded in 1920 by Hans Riegel, who lived in Bonn. Hans trained as a confectioner and before establishing his own company worked for a number of German sweet makers.

The first HARIBO sweets were made in his small backyard laundry-kitchen. In 1921 Hans' wife Gertrud became the first member of staff.

The company took its name from the first two letters of Hans' first name, his surname and his hometown: HA-RI-BO.

The first liquorice products were introduced in 1925 including a stick, with the HARIBO logo stamped on it.

HARIBO grew rapidly after the Second World War acquiring confectionery companies across Germany and elsewhere including the Netherlands, France, Sweden and Austria.

The company came to the UK through the acquisition of Dunhills Ltd. In 1972 HARIBO acquired a stake in the business and in 1994 bought the remaining shares. After purchase the HARIBO brand was introduced to the UK. The company continued to make Pontefract cakes under the Dunhills name as well as a large variety of sweets.

By 2011 the brand had established 16 factories around the world and its sweets were available in more than 100 countries.

The company continued to lead the gums and jellies market and to develop new, innovative products. To celebrate the royal wedding of Prince William to Kate Middleton (a known HARIBO fan) in 2011 the company launched a Hearts and Rings range.

In 2012 HARIBO announced that their Pontefract site was operating to capacity and unveiled plans for a new a new multi-million pound factory in Castleford with the creation of almost 300 jobs.

Hillabys

Entrepreneur John Hillaby established the Lion Liquorice Works, Pontefract in 1850. The company grew their own liquorice and by 1893 were the biggest producer in the world. The liquorice works was a four storey brick building with steam powered machinery and extended as trade grew. John Hillaby oversaw all aspects of the business including commissioning new machinery. Their leading product was Hillabys' Improved Pontefract Cakes.

For the 1925 film Goldrush, Hillabys provided a liquorice boot eaten by Charlie Chaplin. In 1943 the company were taken over by rival producers Joseph Bellamy and Sons Ltd of nearby Castleford.

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In 1946 the factory on Back Street was destroyed by fire. The premises were rebuilt, but eventually closed as a liquorice factory in 1963 when Joseph Bellamy and Sons Ltd amalgamated into the Mackintosh Group.

Robinson and Wordsworth

In 1877, Robinson and Wordsworth set up a factory in Pontefract called Victoria Works refining their own juice.

Robinson and Wordsworth continued in same hands until 1886 when the death of Mr Robinson left Mr J. N. Wordsworth sole proprietor.

The company expanded with a new wing in 1890 which doubled the size of the works. By 1893 the works operated on three floors. The ground floor comprised of the boiling house, warehouse, store rooms and packing rooms. The first and second floors included the machine rooms and making rooms.

In the same year the curator of Kew Museum visited Robinson and Wordsworth to research the cultivation of liquorice and published an article in The Leisure Hour. The firm also had a display in the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew.

After the death of Mr J. N. Wordsworth the business was sold to W. H. Lorriman who set up a new factory off Ferrybridge Road. In 1925 it became a limited company.

During the Second World War the factory was diverted to aero-engine renovation. Liquorice rivals Dunhills Ltd acquired the company in 1964.

Sampson and Gundill

The company set up the Tower Liquorice Refinery on Northgate, Pontefract in 1889 as a wholesale only business.

The large two storey brick building included several departments. The machine room, rolling room, cutting and stamping rooms were located on the ground floor. The firm's offices were on the ground floor too. The upper floors included the warehouse and packing rooms. In 1893 the refinery employed a workforce of 60 and had a successful network selling to wholesale grocers, confectioners, and export merchants.

In the 1900s one of the Gundill brothers went to Belgium to set up a liquorice refining company, but withdrew during the First and Second World Wars.

Like many manufacturers the firm was part of a larger family business estate. The Gundill portfolio included firms of solicitors, builders, gasworks and Pontefract racecourse. Dunhills Ltd acquired the company in 1923.

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W. R. Wilkinson and Co

W. R. Wilkinson opened his Pontefract liquorice business in 1884. The original factory was based in a malt kiln in Southgate. When these premises became too small, a new three storey factory was built in Skinner Lane, and called Britannia Works. W.R. Wilkinson employed 50 workers and made 'Perfected Pomfret Cake'.

In 1894 Walter Marshall, originally from Somerset, and William Haddock, who later became Pontefract's town clerk, bought out W. R. Wilkinson. Marshall had begun his career in Wilkinson's as a junior clerk.

From 1901, under Walter Marshall's sole ownership the business continued to expand. In 1924 it became a private limited company.

The company moved again, to a former brush factory in Monkhill which was rebuilt in 1925 as a 'garden factory' with tennis courts, allotments and workers housing. The company also produced their own magazine.

The company carried on sweet-making at a low level throughout the Second World War, but the factory was also used to machine tank parts.

During the 1940s the company created a trade mark referred to as the 'company seal'. The five images represented Pontefract's rich liquorice heritage. The hooded figure signified the Cluniac monks who were sent from France in the 11th century to establish a new order in Pontefract. The image of a broken bridge is Pontefract's town symbol. The name of the town is said to derive from the Latin 'pons fractus' meaning broken bridge. The round tower symbolizes Pontefract Castle. The wise owl dates back to Charles I who visited Pontefract in 1623 and ennobled Lord Saville. The Lord became the first Mayor of Leeds, and the city adopted his owl symbol. On each side of the seal are images of Glycyrrhiza glabra, the liquorice plant.

In 1946 the company introduced mascot Willie Wilko. Customers who saved fifteen packets of tops received a Willie Wilko bendy toy.

In 1961 the company merged with the Sheffield based Bassett Group, their biggest rivals. Five years later the last commercial crop of liquorice was harvested.

In 1985 it became Anglo Bellamy Wilkinson. In 1990 Trebor Bassett became the sugar confectionery division of Cadbury Schweppes. In 1999 the York and Pontefract factories combined to form Monkhill Confectionery. They employed 400 workers and produced about 13 thousand tonnes of sweets each year, including dolly mixtures, coconut mushrooms and bubble gum as well as liquorice.

In 2007 Tangerine Confectionery acquired Monkhill Confectionery.