

Brand Fact Sheet

The Liquorice Story

Introduction

When you sit and enjoy the unique taste of liquorice, it might be hard to imagine that the sweets have been enjoyed, in one form or another, for more than 2000 years. It had found favour with Assyrian kings; historians believe Cleopatra used it to preserve her beauty, while the ancient Chinese praised it for its healing qualities. In ancient Greece, physicians found the liquorice root provided relief from chest complaints. The Romans too, knew a good thing when they saw one. It is claimed that soldiers were issued with liquorice root to chew, as a means of quenching their thirst, on their many long marches. After the fall of the Roman Empire, the secrets of the liquorice were kept safe by monks, and it was they, when they came to settle in England at the time of the Crusades, who brought with them many of the plants which started the growing of liquorice in Great Britain.

The Liquorice Plant

The liquorice plant looks like a small acacia shrub, growing about four feet above the ground. However, it is the root which is all important, for it is from the root that the juice is extracted to form what we know as liquorice. The roots are soft, flexible and fibrous, and contain one unique component, glycyrrhizin, which is one of the sweetest elements known to man, and is 50 times sweeter than sugar. The roots take four years to grow fully, and by that time can be up to 30-foot in length.

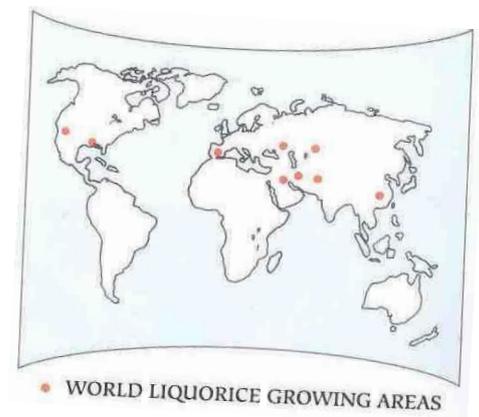


LIQUORICE PLANT

For many hundreds of years, Qurna – which is situated where the rivers Tigris and Euphrates meet in Iraq – was the world's centre for cultivating liquorice. Today, it is just one of many liquorice producing areas, which include the fertile banks of the river Elbo and Guadalquivir rivers in Spain; the sun-baked plains of Syria; the sub-tropical shores of the Black Sea...and in Pontefract in Yorkshire.

Harvesting & Production

Liquorice harvesting has changed little of the years. In the Autumn, the plants are lifted and the upper parts discarded. The roots are transported by lorry to baling stations for sorting, stacking and drying. After nine or ten months, when only ten percent of moisture remains, the roots are pressed into 300lb bales and taken to the factory for juice extraction. The root is crushed and pulped into boiling water. The extracted liquid is then dried into a golden brown powder, and it is this- and not the actual root – which is the raw material which can be made into delicious confectionary, such as liquorice allsorts – a sweet enjoyed by many millions around the world.



Liquorice Confectionary

By the end of the 18th Century, liquorice was no longer simply being used for medicines: a new industry grew around the plant – the liquorice confectionary business. That was when an enterprising young Chemist, George Dunhill, developed the liquorice lozenge to produce a



sweet meat, which he named Pomfret Cakes. These were also known as Yorkshire Pennies, because of their origin and shape. By 1885, there were ten companies producing licorice sweets in Pontefract.

Liquorice Allsorts

Confectioners soon found that licorice sweets could be made into many different shapes. A wide range of novelties were introduced, each with a distinctive name and shape: Catherine Wheels, Pipes, Pencils, Bootlaces and many, many more, each giving delight to successive generations of children.

It was at this time that one company in particular was establishing itself as one of the foremost confectioners in England. George Bassett was founded in Sheffield in 1842, and by the end of the century, its name was synonymous with quality licorice sweets. These included Licorice Novelties, products which were a combination of licorice and cream paste. These sweets were the forerunners of Licorice Allsorts, and it all began quite by accident!

In 1899, Bassett's salesman, Charlie Thompson, visited a wholesaler in Leicester with his samples case of licorice and cream paste specialities – Chips, Rocks, Buttons, Cubes, Nuggets. Plugs and Twists. Each item was offered to the wholesaler, and each in turn was refused. Perhaps in his disappointment in not obtaining a single order, Charlie clumsily gathered his sample boxes together, knocking them over and spilling the colourful sweets in the jumble of the counter. The wholesaler saw more attraction in the 'mixed up sweets' than in the individual products, and placed an order for a 'mixed' delivery. Bassett did just that, and asked Charlie Thompson to give the new assortment a name...

He called them licorice allsorts!