

Strutt's Mixed & Farthing Toffee

On the 31st January in 1871, twenty one year old, Alfred Strutt, of 9, Queen Street, Hoxton who was employed as a Box Maker married twenty year old Eliza Sleath, a Silk Weaver of 60, Hare Street, Bethnel Green at St James Church in Shoreditch.

Sometime between then and 1881, he changed jobs and became a Sugar Boiler, a term for an occupation that was often synonymous with confectioner. It seems likely that he got a job as a Sugar Boiler with the Clarnico factory that opened in Carpenters Road in 1879 and it was there that he learned sweet making skills.



Above: Left, the Clarnico factory in Carpenters Road.



Right: A modern sugar boiler pouring mint.

In 1881 he was living with his wife and three children under ten years old (Alfred, Emily and Henry) at 13, Railway Crescent (Chapman Road) in Hackney a short distance from the Clarnico factory.

A Home Sweet Home Business

Fast forward ten years to 1891 and Alfred and his expanded family (He now had seven children living at home) was living at 37, Markhouse Road, Walthamstow. He was now a manufacturing confectioner and his oldest daughter, Emily, was working for the business.

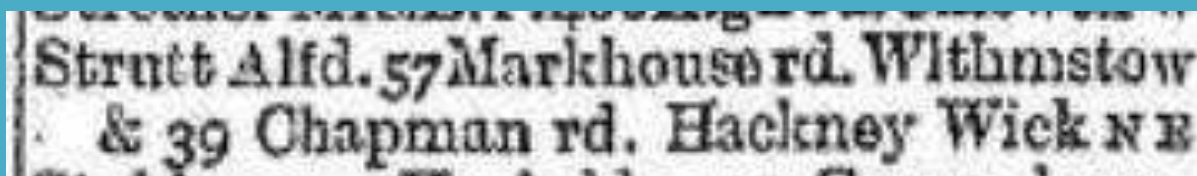
Below: Markhouse Road by Markhouse Road School c1910

By 1901, the family had moved from 37 to 57, Markhouse Road, an address that became familiar to very many Walthamstow residents. who bought sweets from 'The Old Toffy' shop. Presumably the move was to larger premises with a larger rear area where the sweet making would be easier to carry out. Eliza (The eldest daughter living at home) was working for the family business as a Shop Assistant and Thomas was a Shop Boy.



Chapman Road, Hackney

The following extract from Kelly's 1902 Trade Directory tells us that, in addition to the business premises in Markhouse Road, Alfred Strutt was also manufacturing confectionary at 59, Chapman Road, Hackney. This property was almost certainly the renamed Railway Crescent property where the family lived in 1881.



In 1911, both Alfred was still living and working from Markhouse Road and four of his daughters were living at home and working in the business. The family were making and selling sweets from their shop on the premises.

His son, Thomas, was married and living with his wife Harriet and I month old son Thomas in a Warner property in Fleeming Road, Walthamstow. Thomas was a Confectioner and Sugar Boiler working in the family business.

Home Made Sweets

Many readers will be familiar with the basic techniques used in making home-made sweets and there is little doubt that these always taste much nicer than commercially mass produced sweets. Essentially, the techniques used by professional sweet makers are the same as those used by home sweet makers but the quantities produced and the equipment used are on a much bigger scale.

Old Fashioned Sweet Shops.

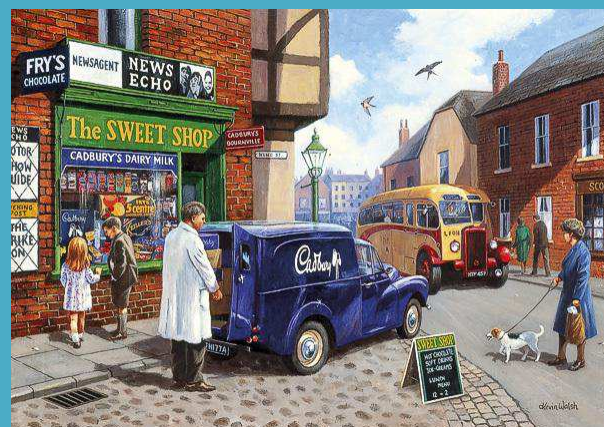


I remember the old fashioned sweet shops. Rows and rows of jars of brightly coloured sweets that were sold by the ounce. You picked your favourites and the shop-keeper got the jars down, opened them and poured the required amount onto the scales. These were then weighed and popped into a paper bag. The shopkeeper would hold the bags by

two corners and swirl it around to secure the sweets. Along the front of the counter was a display of a variety of sweets that you could buy individually for coppers and which you could pick and chose up to the value of the money you had to spend.

Some of the sweets that come to mind are: nougat, gob stoppers, aniseed and mint balls, pink and white coconut ice, cough candy twist, fudge, hard toffee, nutty toffee, peppermint rock, barley sugar sticks and stickjaw, clove,

peppermint rock, slabs of nut and raisin toffee, bulls eyes, humbugs, acid drops, rhubarb and custard, jelly babies, black jacks, liquorice skipping ropes etc. You

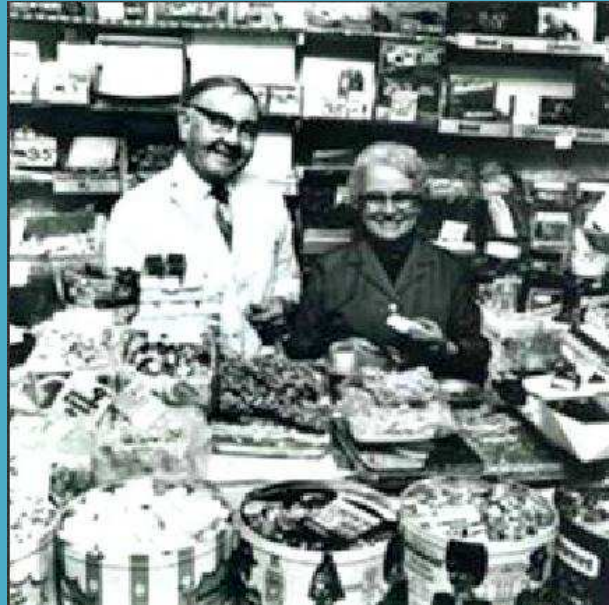


could also buy tubes of sherbert and sticks of Spanish Wood which were Liquorice roots that you chewed.

Toffee Sheets With A Farthing Inside

Left: Mr & Mrs Strutt in their 'Old Toffee' shop at 57, Markhouse Road.

The secret of the Strutt family success was that they were producing home made sweets on a small commercial scale that enabled them to keep the freshness, quality and taste of a home-made product. And they also had a gimmick. You could buy a sheet of their home made toffee for a halfpenny (Equivalent to a about today's 1p) and some sheets of toffee had a farthing (About $\frac{1}{2}$ p)



embedded inside the toffee. As you might expect this was a well nigh irresistible attraction for children. As the shop was virtually opposite Markhouse Road School there was a constant demand from the children for sweets from the shop.

Mrs Judd, who was born in 1908 remembers:

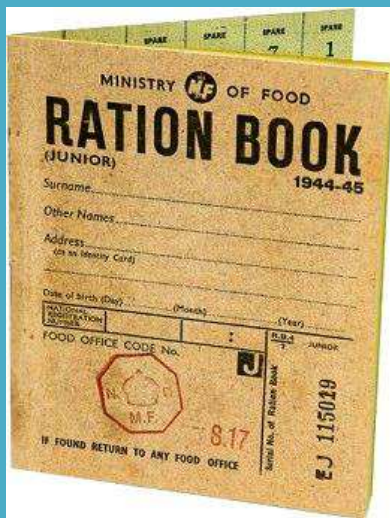
"I went to Markhouse Road School and there was Strutts who used to make all their own sweets and they used to make great big sheets of plain toffee. It was so thin you could see through it. But you used to get a big sheet for a halfpenny you know. So we thought we were doing well and every now and then you'd find a farthing in the corner, that was a winner. So you used to get your piece of toffee and a farthing."

The business at Markhouse Road continued to prosper and Alfred Strutt died in 1922. His effects were £2,278 14s that is equivalent at present day value of plus £930,000!

STRUTT Alfred Jordan of 57 Markhouse-road Walthamstow Essex died 28 February 1922 Probate **London** 4 April to Charles Wallace Thomas Phipps manager. Effects £2278 14s.

After Alfred's death, the business was then run by Alfred's widow, Eliza and her son Thomas. Eliza died, three years later in 1925 age seventy four years old.

WWII



though the confectionary side of the business would have been severely affected by sugar rationing that came into effect in 1940 during WWII and continued until 1953, the business continued to trade.

Sweets were rationed and the allowance was 3oz per week for each person that, as the war progressed dropped to 2oz a week. Many adults gave up their allowances to children and some gave their ration coupons to a local sweet shop to be given to children.

Unlike grocery products, you could use your sweet ration in any confectionary shop and the home sweet maker businesses enjoyed an advantage over those shops that were linked to wholesale manufacturers.

In addition to the sweet allowance there was a sugar allowance for each adult of 8oz per week and it wasn't unknown for people to trade some of this off to home-made sweet making businesses for sweets.

Jean Medley remembers: In the "Late 40's I remember taking in the shop a packet of sugar in exchange for some sweets just after the war. I was 8 in 1946"



Due to the difficulties of obtaining, sugar and butter, that are essential ingredients in the making of traditional sweets, most of the major sweet making companies stopped production during WWII. However, many of the smaller home making businesses carried on making sweets using artificial sugar substitutes and it is pretty obvious that the 'black market' would have provided a useful source for scarce ingredients.

Barrie Stevens (Now living in Chelmsford) tells us:

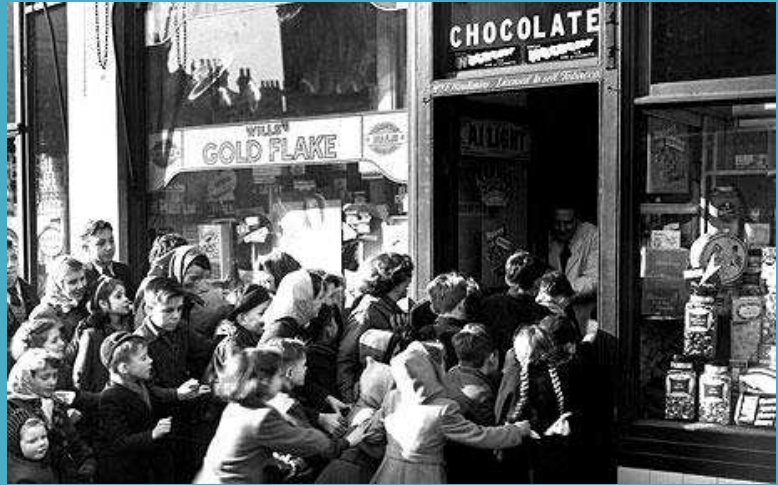
“...Proceeding along Mark House Road towards Low Hall Lane and on the left was the sweet shop of Peter Strutt, known as “Strutt’s”. This was an old fashioned sweet shop selling fudge, coconut ice, hard toffee, nutty toffee, peppermint rock, barley sugar sticks and the like. I suppose Strutt’s was really an old time sugar boiler. Long after we had left Walthamstow and lived in Chelmsford we would visit and come away with bags of “Strutt’s Mixed” as the confectionary was known - and known globally. Relatives from Canada even took bags of the stuff back home with them. Many people now living will recall “Strutt’s Mixed” from Walthamstow”



1953 - The End Of Sweet Rationing

Although the war ended in 1945, sweets were still on ration and it wasn't until 1953 that rationing finally ended.

Children all over Britain emptied out their piggy-banks and headed straight for the nearest sweet-shop as the first un-rationed sweets went on sale. Toffee apples were the biggest sellers, with sticks of nougat and liquorice strips also disappearing fast.



The James St & High Street Sweet Stalls

Sometime after the end of sweet rationing, in addition to the Markhouse Road shop, Strutts also traded from a stall in James Street that later moved to the bottom of the High Street.

The High Street stall is very fondly remembered by many Walthamstow residents and ex residents.

Clive Edmonston remembers:

"...Then there was Strutt's the sweet shop, where Mr Strutt the owner used to make his own sweets and sell them both in the shop and also from a stall in Walthamstow High Street. The smell from that shop was unbelievable as was the taste of his home made toffee apples, peanut brittle, cocoanut ice and many other sugary delights..."

Ron Parker writes: "...where nearby was Strutt's home-made sweets stall. Cough candy, candy twist, coconut ice, slabs of nut and raisin toffee, etc. All these made in their shop in Markhouse Road near to the school, and down to the bottom end with Burtons the Tailors with the snooker hall above, and Lidston's the Drapers and Woolworths on the opposite side..."

Su Manning tells us: "I went to Markhouse Rd School opposite, I would go in with friends and they use to give me a bag of bits of toffee etc when I never had any money. Such a Lovely couple, never forgotten them that would have been early to mid 60's"



Gone But Not Forgotten

The Strutts business seems to have closed around 1973/4. My dating for this is from when the premises at 57, Markhouse Road ceased to have a Post Office telephone number. This date would also make sense as this is around the time of the rapid increase in the growth of supermarkets and their keen prices.

It seems extremely likely that the upgrading in Public Health requirements for operating a small food preparation and manufacturing premises would have necessitated expensive alterations to the Markhouse Road premises. Without the shop as a manufacturing base and retail outlet there would have been the need to find alternative manufacturing premises or to buy stock from wholesalers. As the sales appeal of Strutts was in the home made taste of its sweets, the latter alternative would be self destructive.

Ironically, home-made 'retro' sweets have now become extremely fashionable and there are new shops that have been fitted out and have displays that are designed to evoke the past. I'm sure it would have made Alfred Strutt smile.

Bill Bayliss
May 2015

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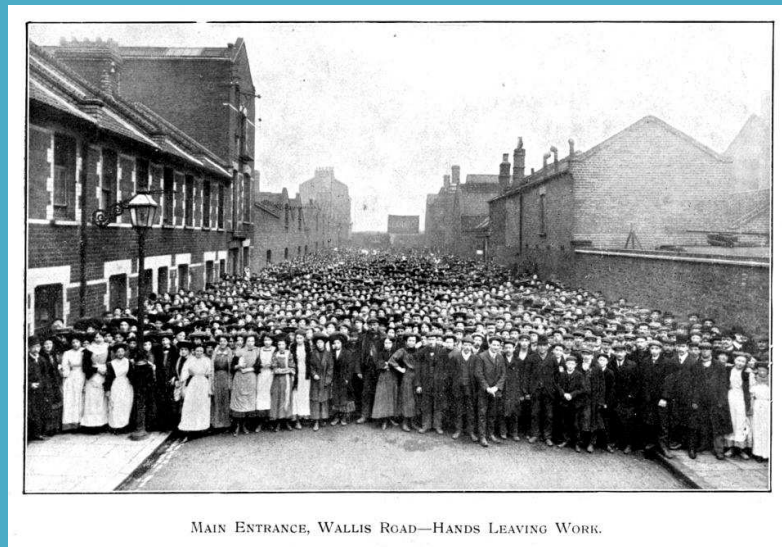
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Addendum

Clarnico

The confectioner Clarnico is synonymous with Hackney Wick. Just after the second world war, Clarnico was the largest confectioner in Britain. The company's name was formed from the names of the three



principals that came together to form the new company in 1879. These were: **Clarke**, **Nickolls**, **Coombs**.

In 1893, over 1,500 people worked for Clarnico, of whom 1,300 were women. It was a major corporation long before the Trebor founders started peddling their boilings round Forest Gate in 1907. In 1890, Clarnico cracked open 10,000 coconuts each day to get flavouring for sweets. This must have been the

noisiest part of the factory.

By 1903 Clarnico boasted a 100-strong choral society, a fire brigade and a 70-strong brass band which toured France and Italy. There was also a boys' bugle, drum and fife band, and an ambulance team. Those were the days when your work provided much of your social life. For all the hardship, there must have been a lot of fun.

Later the firm went into decline, not helped by being bombed out during the war and then building a new factory in 1951 that became obsolete soon after it was finished. Trebor bought the firm in 1969 for £900,000. Today Hackney Wick has become a fashionable enclave, an island of designers and artists and water-side apartments with rapidly rising rents.

The name lives on in Trebor and Bassett's Clarnico Mint.

Home Made Sweet Recipes

Coconut Ice

Ingredients

2 cups of white sugar
1/2 cup milk (or coconut milk)
3/4 cup desiccated (dried) shredded coconut
Few drops vanilla extract/essence

Method

Combine the milk, vanilla, and sugar in an enamel or heavy saucepan.
Bring the mixture to a boil and maintain it in that state for five minutes, making sure to stir constantly.

Add the coconut and boil the mixture for one more minute.
Beat the mixture while it cools until it "creams." (See the Tips for a description of the creaming process.)

Pour half of the mixture quickly onto a square or rectangular tray lined with baking paper. Color the other half with a drop or two of cochineal/red food coloring and gently pour the remaining mixture on top of the first, uncolored half.

Refrigerate everything until it is firm.

Cut it into rectangular bars or small squares, serve, and enjoy!

Boiled Sweets

Ingredients

2 cups sugar
2/3 cup light corn syrup
3/4 cup hot water
Food coloring

In a large saucepan, combine the sugar, corn syrup and water. Stir over medium heat until the sugar has dissolved, about 5 minutes. Without stirring, let the mixture come to a boil which should be about another 5 minutes,

Raise the temperature to *high* as it boils.

Right before the liquid reaches exactly 300°F/150°C, add the food coloring and flavoring to the mixture. Doing so will allow the boiling action to stir the color and sugar into the mixture.

Watch the thermometer until the temperature is at exactly 300°F/150°C. (If you do not have a sugar thermometer you can fill a glass with really cold water then take a drop of the candy liquid and if it solidifies in the shape of a ball and floats to the surface, then its ready for next step.) Remove the mixture immediately at 300°F/150°C, or it will burn!

After you remove the sugar from heat, the temperature will continue rising but that is not a problem provided that you took it off the heat at 300°F/150°C.

When it is still very hot, add a dab of flavoring oil and several drops of your choice of food coloring. Mix quickly.

Mix food coloring to make fun shades. Try adding the color after stirring in flavor and stir lightly for a swirled effect.

Mix flavors or pour over dried fruit for an added texture.

Pour the molten sugar onto a greased sheet. Allow it to cool. Spread the mixture around the sheet before it cools too much.

It is not advised to put the mixture inside the freezer as it makes it harden too fast.

Try pouring into sweet molds or mini muffin pans instead for a consistent shape.

After the sheet cools (30 minutes to an hour), break up the candy into several pieces.

Dust with powdered sugar. For a variation, do not dust the pieces—simply leave them as they are and they will look like stained glass.

The powdered sugar keeps the sweet pieces from sticking together and becoming a large, sharp lump. If you like the effect of the colors without the powdered sugar, make sure you store the pieces on pieces of wax paper and not touching one another.

Store if needed. The sweets are best stored in paper bags or metal tins for a fun snack or a quick sugar craving.

Fruit drops:

Ingredients

450g/1 lb sugar

100g/4 oz powdered glucose

5ml/1 teaspoon cream of tartar

A few drops of fruit extract (essence) or flavoring oil – try pear, strawberry, peach, apricot, orange, lemon, blackcurrant, mango, etc.
Icing sugar (confectioners sugar), for dusting

Lollipops

Ingredients

450g/1 lb sugar
15ml/1 tablespoon powdered glucose
3 or 4 flavorings and food colorings (orange oil, lemon oil, raspberry flavoring, peppermint oil, etc.)
150ml (1/4 pint) of water

Barley Sugar

Ingredients

250g, 9oz, 1 1/4 cups hulled barley
5 litres (1.3 US gal), 8 1/2 pints, 5 1/2 quarts water
1 kg, 2 1/4 lb, 4 cups sugar

Toffee

Prep Time 2 hours, 10 minutes

Cook Time 25 minutes

Total Time 2 hours, 35 minutes

Yield 6 servings

Ingredients

1 cup raw almonds
1 cup unsalted butter, cubed
1 cup sugar
1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract
1/4 teaspoon salt
1 1/2 cups semi-sweet chocolate chips
1/3 cup pecans, chopped

Method

Preheat oven to 350 degrees F. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper or a silicone baking mat.

