

Toffee Hammers

Toffee first gained popularity around 1825. It was flavoured with all kinds of ingredients such as lemon, walnuts, almonds and even peppermint. One novelty was 'pulled toffee' whereby mixture was pulled over a candy-hook attached to the wall and cut up into bite-sized pieces. Sugar tended to be rather expensive in the nineteenth century, so sweets made with molasses, such as treacle toffee, bulls-eyes and squibs were more widely enjoyed than those made from sugar. Today, treacle toffee is associated with Bonfire Night and Halloween! Toffee mixture was rolled out on a marble slab, left to cool and then smashed up with a toffee hammer.

A Little Toffee Recipe

from the Eden Valley Museum Archives

1 Ib Golden Syrup or black treacle, 1 Ib Demerara Sugar and ½ Ib Butter

Simmer til all the sugar has melted stirring all the time, then boil briskly still stirring till the toffee hardens, when a little is dropped into cold water. Grated cocoanut or chopped nuts may be added if desired.

McDougall's Cookery Book, c1950



Ellen Withers tin money box advertising Sharp's Super-Kreem Toffee c1920

Did you know that toffee hammers played a part in the Women's Suffrage Movement? They were used by militant suffragettes for their window-smashing campaigns after peaceful protest proved to be ineffectual.



Ellen Wither's toffee hammers. Manufactured by Blue Bird Toffee and Edward Sharp and Sons Ltd c1920/1950
Images: EVMT Archives



Ellen Withers with her daughter, Lucy and her baby, 1943
EVMT Archives

However, the toffee hammers shown here had a much quieter life. They are much smaller and belonged to Mrs Ellen Withers who lived with her husband Harry and children, Lucy and Willie at Somerden Green Cottages in Chiddingstone. In 1930, Harry's niece Poppy went to live with them permanently following the tragic death of her mother Gertrude. The toffee hammers, along with many other of Ellen's household possessions held great sentimental value for Poppy and were treasured throughout her life. Ellen's toffee hammers were novelty items, produced by Blue Bird Toffee and Edward Sharp and Sons Limited.

About Sharp's Toffee

In 1876, Edward Sharp opened a grocery store in Maidstone and began to sell home-made sweets. The venture proved so successful that in 1911, he converted the local ice-skating rink into a factory which he named Kreemy Works. The company produced 600 wrapped sweets a minute and Super-Kreem Toffee was a best seller. It was cleverly marketed using a cartoon character called Sir Kreemy Knutt which was inspired by a music hall song popular in 1914 by Arthur Wimperis, *I'm Gilbert the Filbert, the knut with a K, the pride of Piccadilly, a blasé roué*. Kreemy Works was eventually taken over by Trebor which remained in Maidstone until 1991.

and Blue Bird Toffee

Blue Bird Toffee was named after a play by the Belgian playwright, Maurice Maeterlinck. The company was founded in 1898 by Harry Vincent Ltd of Birmingham. In 1927, he opened a factory and model village in Hunnington. He aimed to provide good working conditions for his staff, like the chocolate-maker George Cadbury who owned Bourneville nearby. Both Blue Bird and Sharp's were highly successful companies and sold toffee all over the world.