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Thorntons

The History of a Family Firm

BUSINESS ARCHIVES COUNCIL



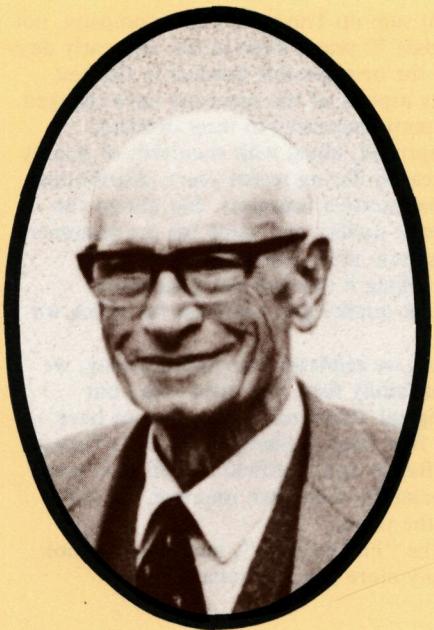
Quality and value. Those are the words that sum up Thornton's as a company, not only today, but at almost any time during the past 70 years. Even in the very early days of the business, the aim was always to produce the best possible product in the best possible way, and sell it at the right price. Many aspects of the company have changed down the years of course. Production has constantly increased to meet demand; manufacturing and marketing methods have improved, along with standards of quality control and hygiene; new shops have opened steadily during recent years; distribution has become more efficient and reliable with more modern transport. But always the company's aim has remained the same—to provide quality and value for the customer. And we at Thornton's have endeavoured to maintain those standards by not only making high quality confectionery, but also by selling it through our own shops, allowing us to maintain constant control over that quality and freshness for which we are renowned.

One other thing has remained constant too. As we celebrate our 70th birthday, we can truthfully say that we are an old-established family firm. For even today our business is still owned and controlled by the original Thornton family. But we have come a long way from the opening of our very first shop in Sheffield in 1911. Today we employ around 1,500 people at factories in Belper and Sheffield as well as in our 150 shops nationwide, all of them helping to maintain, and often improve, the high standard of quality and service achieved down the years.

After 70 years, we are all of us members of the "Family Firm", and all of us look forward to serving you and your family for many more years to come.

A. H. THORNTON

Chairman,
J. W. Thornton Ltd.



Mr Norman Thornton

Joseph William Thornton was a commercial traveller for the Don Confectionery Company based in Sheffield in the early years of this century. The day he opened a small sweet shop of his own, in the centre of Sheffield he could hardly have dreamed that one day the business that was to bear his name would employ close on 1,500 people making and selling around six thousand tons of sweets a year with 150 shops as it does today.

That very first shop opened at 159 Norfolk Street, Sheffield in October 1911 and was run by his 14 year old son Norman. It was intended to be the nicest sweet shop in all Sheffield. And so it was, with its cream-coloured walls and mirrors from floor to ceiling. There were shelves in front of the mirrors packed with "knob-stoppered" jars full of the delights of a forgotten age. Kunzle chocolates, toffee deluxe, other chocolates made by one of J.W.T.'s friends in Norwich, who made a few hand-made chocolates and served in special trays, hard-boiled sweets at a penny a quarter, and hand-wrapped caramels in their own special jars with loose lids...

Perhaps it was the two smart lady assistants described as "of a very superior

type"; perhaps it was the unflagging efforts of young Norman Thornton; or perhaps it was a combination of both, that made the shop a success from the start. For though he continued as a commercial traveller the Norfolk Street shop took the princely sum of £20 a week, a great deal of money in the halcyon days before the first Great War...

In 1913, another shop was opened nearby, on The Moor, and for two or three years the whole family lived "over the shop" there. Most of the confectionery being sold in those days was bought in, but a little was "home" made. Simple hard-boiled sweets such as fish mixtures and mint rock were made in the cellar of the premises on The Moor. Boiling was carried out in a copper pan over a gas fire, and the fish mixtures made with hand rollers.

On the ground floor, the Company's own make of chocolates were produced by hand. Of course there was no machinery in those days. A fondant mixture, flavoured with Otto of Violets was made in the cellar, cut into oblongs and taken upstairs where it was dipped by hand into chocolate, placed on waxed paper and sugared, violet petals put on the top. They were known as violet creams. And those



were the only chocolates made by the company for a very long time...

About 1917 Joseph William Thornton became seriously ill and was admitted to hospital where he eventually died in 1919. After the First World War, Norman Thornton opened two more sweet shops in Sheffield and also bought a fruit business nearby... business was definitely booming...

1913 . . . and the very first shop in Norfolk Street, Sheffield.

TELEPHONE No. 43491

Registered Office,

1, London Road,

Sheffield, Friday morning 1921

J. W. THORNTON, LTD.,

"CHOCOLATE KABIN"

[Registered.]

Chocolate and Sweet Manufacturers.

ALL LEADING MAKERS GOODS STOCKED.

In 1921, Mr. Norman Thornton was joined in the business by his brother Stanley, and together they set up a limited liability company, J. W. Thornton Ltd. Stanley had just left school armed with a scholarship to Sheffield University. But scholarships in those days were not enough to live on and Stanley decided to work in the business during the day and study food technology, and in particular confectionery making, at night. The work

was hard and the study harder. But it was to have rich rewards. For it enabled him to develop a special kind of toffee. The aim was simple. To make the best possible toffee using the best possible ingredients, blended of course in the best possible way. Gradually, Special Toffee as it quite naturally became known, caught on. But it was not cheap—selling for 6d (2½p) a quarter! From its introduction in 1925 it soon came to account for more than a

third of all sales, and did so for many years. Even today, Special Toffee plays a very important part in production with between 35 and 40 tons being made on average every working week...

By the mid-1920's Stanley was looking after most of the manufacturing with Norman concentrating on the running of the shops. At that time, the sweet shops stayed open until 9.30 pm during the week and until 10.30 pm on Saturdays. At the

Moor shop in Sheffield it was not uncommon to take more money after 6 pm than before because the area was so thronged with people and traffic.

It was about this time too that the first shop was opened outside Sheffield, at nearby Rotherham. Later shops were opened at Oxford Street in Manchester and Boar Lane, Leeds.

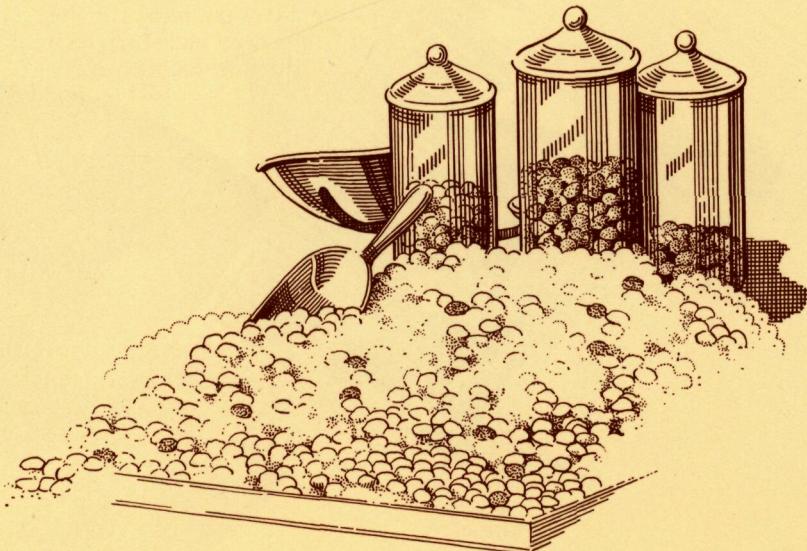
The later 1920's seem to have been an active period for the ever expanding company. Though it is a sign of the times that in 1927 when the company had eight sweet shops they were only taking as much money as four shops in 1922. Times were definitely hard.

On the manufacturing side, all boiled sweets were now being made in the shop on The Moor and all chocolates in the nearby London Road premises. And despite the trading difficulties of the late twenties, by 1927 the business was bursting at the seams, and the manufacturing was transferred to a small factory in Penistone Road in the Hillsborough area of Sheffield.

Though only small, the new factory was another step on the road to bigger and better things for the company acquired their first chocolate enrobing machine to boost chocolate sales even further. But

small it definitely was and by 1931 the company was on the move again, this time taking over part of a bigger plant in Stalker Lees Road in Sheffield. Not only was it much bigger than Penistone Road it was less cluttered allowing more kinds of caramels and other goods to be manufactured. However, within four years even this new factory was proving too

small as business continued to boom and the decision was made to have a factory specially built for the company on land at nearby Archer Road... a factory that itself was to prove too small within less than two years. By December 1937 it was being extended and doubled in size to cope with a 100 per cent increase in trade.



The *Sheffield Telegraph* of Friday, 17 December, 1937 devoted a whole page to the new extensions and described the plant as being "on the right road". A reporter who went to look round recorded:



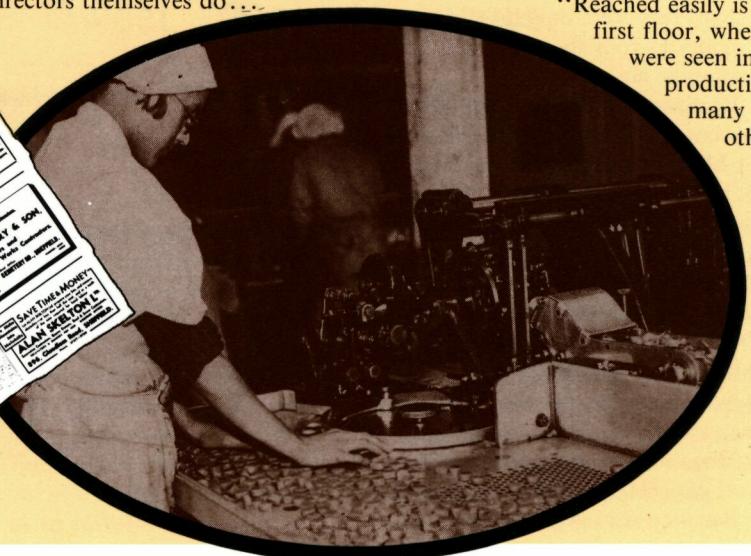
"Brisk operations were going forward, but in a congenial atmosphere. The workers bore on their countenances the marks of contentment. It appears to be the case that the best (and the most) work is performed in an establishment so organised that interference or 'driving' are not necessary..."

"The firm could not secure perfection in ingredient measuring, compounding, mixing, boiling, conditioning, making up and packing, unless the employees put into their work their heart and mind, as the directors themselves do..."

Of the building itself, the reporter noted: "The whole has been designed and is appropriate for the purpose of a sweets factory, offices, stock-holding and distribution centre. It is pleasantly situated, commanding a view of the beautifully timbered slopes of Ecclesall..."

And inside the building: "Also seen in operation was an automatic sweet wrapping machine. It is a marvellous unit, and so rapid were its revolutions that they could not be followed by the eye.

"Reached easily is the first floor, where were seen in production many other





Archer Road factory in the mid-1930s.



of the firm's delectable lines. Thornton's manufacture sweetmeats in a considerable range of varieties. Some of those seen included Thornton's Special Toffee, old fashioned treacle toffee, grapefruit caramels as a seasonal line, chocolates, truffle chocolate desserts, assorted toffee, mintoes, rum and butters, butterscotch drops, assorted milk chocolates, Kabin assorted chocolates, marzipan. But this is not intended as a full description. Mention may be made however of chocolate camels, dogs, lions, lambs, cows, goats, turkeys, geese, babies, donkeys, and so on..."

And finally: "Their chief aim has been to maintain the high quality and purity of their sweets, so that the demand for them would be not only maintained but increased as time went on. This has been with them an ideal; and in their efforts they have steadily persisted.

All along they have been out for progress. Some evidence of the extent to which they have succeeded is exemplified in their 23 shops..."

Such increases in production of course had only been made possible by increased sales. And by the time the Archer Road factory was being doubled in size in 1937, the company was operating seven shops in Sheffield, five in Manchester, four in Leeds, three in Nottingham, two in Leicester and one in Rotherham and Derby. By 1939 the figure had risen to 35 shops in 18 towns and cities all over the North and Midlands. But as with so many other things, the Second World War was to put a stop to any further expansion for many years to come...

During the Second World War shops were damaged by bombing on more than 30 occasions; many simply had their windows smashed or their frontages damaged. Some however were not so lucky and about eight shops were demolished altogether. There was the blackout to contend with which made travelling difficult; raw materials, labour and prices were strictly controlled; key staff were called-up for active service; and of

course there was rationing of all sweets and sugar. The one building the company confidently expected to be bombed was the Archer Road plant, and as a safeguard bought a small alternative plant in Bury. In the event the Sheffield factory remained untouched by bombs but was out of action for several weeks when gas and electricity supplies were cut as a result of bombing elsewhere in Sheffield in December 1940 and Special Toffee

production was carried out in Bury.

Wartime was a period of improvisation, frustration and sheer survival for most companies and Thornton's was no exception. But by 1947 things began to return to normal albeit very very slowly and the company sought permission to again extend their Sheffield factory.

However this was refused on the grounds of shortage of building materials for all but essential purposes. Undaunted the company looked around to find an existing factory that might be suitable... and came across an old mill in a small town near Derby called Belper...

The "Family Firm"—A meeting of Company Directors (left to right): Mr. Michael Thornton, Mr. John Thornton, Mr. Peter Thornton, Mr. Stanley Thornton and Mr. Tony Thornton.

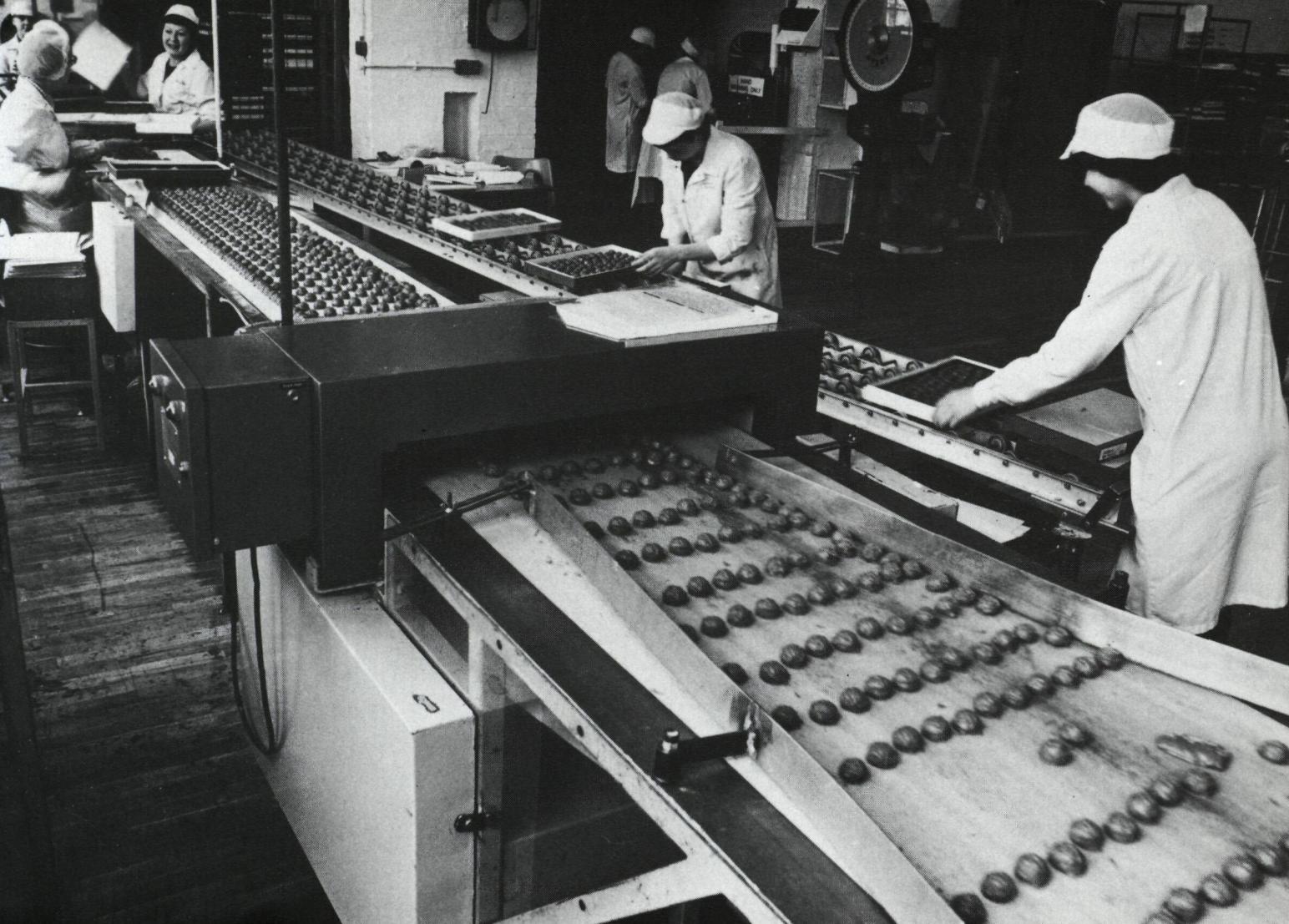


Castle Factory, Belper.

By coincidence, Castle Factory Belper, was built in 1911, the very year that the original J. W. Thornton opened that very first shop in Sheffield. Within a year it was being used as a music hall and hosted such star names as Gracie Fields,

Lupino Lane, Will Hay and the legendary Wee Georgie Wood. It flickered into life briefly as a picture palace and was then taken over by a hosiery company. By the start of the Second World War it was being used by Rolls Royce for the storage of aircraft engines.

The first Thornton's products to be made there were boiled sweets in 1947. The company made just a few hundredweights a week and employed four girls—and one of those was "borrowed" from Sheffield.



Today around 500 people are employed at Belper and Sheffield and more than 100 tons of confectionery of all kinds is made and despatched every working week. And not just hard-boiled sweets of course, but virtually the whole range of company products—Special Toffee of all kinds, Continental Chocolates, other assortments of chocolates, more than a million Easter eggs every year and much much more. And all of it is made using modern and sophisticated equipment under strict conditions of hygiene and quality control. A careful watch is kept on all stages of manufacture to ensure the very highest in quality and value. Packaging and promotion has an important role to play too. And Belper also houses the administrative and management services needed to run a company with close on 1,500 employees. There is specialist accounting, computer services, personnel management, a highly efficient and technical transport fleet, a team of highly skilled engineers and so on.

But of course the Castle Factory at Belper could only grow as quickly and efficiently as shop sales would allow...

Certainly when the plant was first opened in 1947 things were still moving very slowly on all fronts... Expansion

returned with the lifting of sweet rationing in 1952 and the whole fifties saw the dawn of a new age for the company.

In 1950 Mr. Norman Thornton's eldest son Tony joined the business to be followed by his brother Peter in 1954, Mr. Stanley Thornton's son Michael in 1956

and the youngest of Norman's sons John a few years later. The family firm was indeed expanding...

Another "newcomer" in those days was young Walter Willen from Switzerland who joined the company in 1954 to make and perfect Swiss style chocolates that



Rebuilding . . . the 1950s.





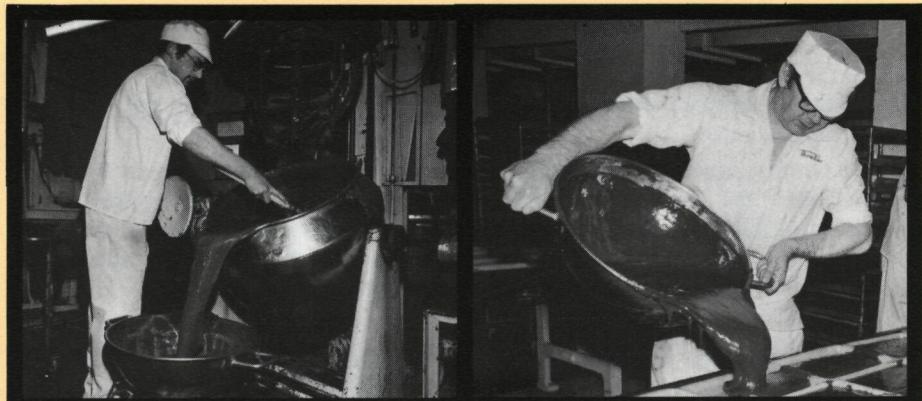
were eventually to become the superb Continental assortment of today...

New shops were being opened and the company took its first tentative steps into television advertising. There were still difficulties of course... with such things as town centre redevelopments, old leases and the like... but slowly but surely the company was moving forward again...

During the 1960's great strides were made on re-organising the retail side of the business and by 1969 the company were able to boast exactly 100 shops... a far cry indeed from the day in 1911 when the very first shop opened in Sheffield...

Putting the finishing touches to high quality chocolate at Belper.

The 1970's proved to be a period of further consolidation and expansion with even more shop openings in such places as Edinburgh and Glasgow north of the border. Today there are more than 150 shops nationwide from Newcastle to Nottingham, Liverpool to London, Cambridge to Cardiff... But one thing has remained the same down all the years... the company's aim to produce confectionery of the highest quality and sell it as fresh as possible in their own shops at a reasonable price... The parallel development of making and selling has enabled the company to maintain quality, freshness and value for which they are renowned throughout the land...



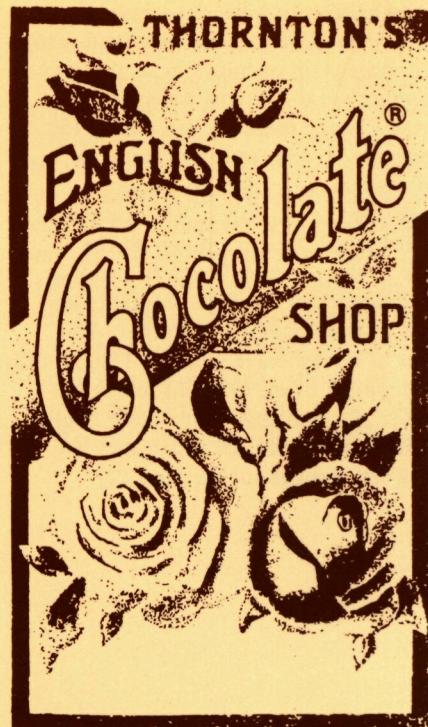
Special Toffee in production (top) and (bottom) part of the modern transport fleet.

. . . The 1980's have seen even further and greater expansion, with Thornton's taking their first steps into the great North American market, opening up shops in Chicago, and on the eastern seaboard of the United States . . . whilst back at home beginning the building of a brand new multi-million pound factory on a greenfield site in Derbyshire . . .

The US business began in 1982 with the opening of two shops in Chicago, at Water Tower Place in the downtown area of the city, and the suburban shopping mall at Woodfield. About a year later, another was opened in the Oakbrook area of the city. Success here was followed by further openings in Boston and Washington, with plans for further openings in other cities as the US operation expands . . .

Thornton Park was the appropriate name chosen for the company's new factory, at Swanwick, Derbyshire, just nine miles from the present Belper plant. Building began in 1983 on the first phase, costing £4 million. Completion is planned to take many years, but the first chocolate was expected off the production line by the end of 1984, with the transfer of all other production, distribution, administrative and executive functions to follow . . . and the eventual closure of the Archer Road factory in Sheffield as all production switched to Swanwick . . .

All this coupled with further shop openings in Britain, particularly in the south, has meant exciting times . . . a far cry indeed from that very first shop in Norfolk Street, Sheffield, that first opened its doors for business as long ago as October 1911 . . .



Thorntons shops nationwide

Aberdeen 114 Union Street	Brighton 57 North Street	East Kilbride 22 The Plaza	Leeds 54 Boar Lane, Bond Street 47 Commercial Street 33 Arndale Centre Merrion Way 23 Queens Arcade	Newcastle 14 Blackett Street 3 Grainger Street 68 Northumberland Street 1 Whitecross Way	Shrewsbury 40 Pride Hill
Abergavenny 5 High Street	Bristol 108 Horsefair	Edinburgh 103/105 St. James Centre	Leicester 46 Market Place	Newport 75 Commercial Street	Solihull 10 Mill Lane, Mill Square
Ashton-under-Lyne 34 Market Street	Burnley 13 Chancery Walk	Erdington 95 High Street	Lincoln 25 Guildhall Street	Northampton 10 Wood Street	Southampton 7 Above Bar
Aylesbury 34 Friar Square	Burton-on-Trent 21 High Street	Falkirk 151/153 High Street	Liverpool Central Station Shopping Parade (Ranelagh Street) 49 North John Street 6 Whitechapel	Norwich 1 Oxford Place	Southport 6 Chapel Street
Ayr 53 High Street	Cambridge 2 Market Street	Glasgow Byres Road Gordon Street Sauchiehall Street	London 2 The Market, Covent Garden 92 Marylebone High Street 353 Oxford Street	Nottingham 22 Broadmarsh Centre 39 Clumber Street 4 King Street 217 Victoria Centre	Stockport 1 Adlington Walk 63 Princes Street
Banbury 81 High Street	Cardiff 14 Duke Street The Hayes	Gloucester 18 Northgate Street	Luton 14 Arndale Centre	Oldham 16 Hilton Arcade	Stockton 66 High Street 26 Castleway
Barnsley 5 Eldon Street 5 May Day Green	Carlisle 16 St. Albans Row	Grimsby 38 Victoria Street	Macclesfield 11 Mill Street	Oxford 21 Oxford Street	Stratford 15 Bridge Street
Bath 12A The Corridor	Chester 11 Bridge Street	Halifax 32 Crown Street	Manchester Unit 19, Arndale Centre Unit 132, Arndale Centre 18 Cross Street 12 Mosely Street 55A Piccadilly	Paisley 1 Moss Street	Sunderland 22A Blandford Street
Beeston 27 The Square	Chesterfield Packers Row	Hanley Tontine Street	Mansfield 2 Market Place	Perth 168 High Street	Sutton Coldfield 101 The Parade
Belper King Street	Clydebank 51 Clydebank Centre	Harrogate 6 Beulah Street	Middlesbrough 5 Cleveland Square, Cleveland Centre	Pontefract Market Place	Swansea 9 Quadrant Centre
Beverley 9 Tollgavel	Coventry Bull Yard Hales Street	Hartlepool 15 The Shopping Centre Middleton Grange	Portsmouth 193 Commercial Road	Wakefield 8 Little Westgate	
Birkenhead 1 Borough Pavement, Grange Precinct	Darlington 7 Blackwellgate	Hereford 15 Eign Gate	Preston Fishergate Walk St. Georges Shopping Centre	Wallasey 1 Townfield Way	
Birmingham 2 High Street Subway 9 North Western Arcade 9 Stephenson Street 6 Union Street	Derby 12 Market Place 23 Theatre Walk, Eagle Centre	Huddersfield 4 Market Avenue	Rochdale 12 The Walk	Walsall 9 Park Street The Saddler Centre	
Blackburn 1 Spring Hill	Doncaster 9 North Mall, Arndale Centre Market Place	Hull 6 Chapel Street 47 King Edward Street	Rothesham 3 All Saints Square	Watford 112 High Street	
Blackpool 35 Birley Street 22 Bank Hey Street	Dudley 3 Churchill Precinct	Keighley Queensway	Rugby The Rugby Centre	West Bromwich 3 The Sandwell Centre	
Bolton 43 Newport Street	Dumfries 70 High Street	Kilmarnock 8 Burns Precinct	Sheffield 31 Arundel Gate Castle Square Subway	Wilmslow 8A Grove Street	
Boston 59 Market Street	Dunfermline 11 High Street	Kirkaldy 178 High Street	Morecambe 21 Royalty Mall	Windsor 7 Peascod Street	
Bradford 43 Kirkgate 61 Market Street	Durham 2 Framwellgate Bridge	Lancaster 8 Market Street	Motherwell 29 Brandon Parade South	Wolverhampton 41 Wulfrun Way	
			Newcastle-under-Lyne 12A Lancaster Buildings	Worcester 24 Lychgate Arcade	
				York 7 Jubbegate	

THORNTONS

FAMILY CONFECTIONERS



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