

BLACK MAGIC 1955-1968

Film ID: 3998 **Year:** 1957-1962

This is one of a large collection of films made by Rowntree's of York (now Nestlé). Most of the films came via the Borthwick Institute of Historical Research, based at the University of York. Other films have come from different sources, such as Ken Clough, a former engineering designer for Rowntree who filmed many of their manufacturing processes. The vast bulk of the films are adverts for their confectionary products: including Rolo, Black Magic, Toffee Crisp, Smarties, Milky Bar, KitKat, Dairy box and many other brands made between 1929 and 1990. The earliest one of the adverts is *Mr York of York, Yorks*, the first animated advertisement to be made, in 1929, with synchronised sound - also online. For an overview of Rowntree's, chocolate and advertising see the Contexts for [Mr York of York, Yorks](#) and [Tokens](#) (1962-63). For an overview of the Rowntree's business see [After Eight Adverts](#) (1962).

Black Magic was launched in January 1933 as a, less costly, rival to Cadbury's King George Assortment, the best-selling box of the day – it certainly had a snazzier name. Black Magic was described as 'the first chocolate assortment ever to be made to order to a mass market.' The basis of this claim being that the 12 chocolates chosen were the result of interviewing 2,500 shopkeepers and 7,000 consumers. The research was carried out by the National Institute for Industrial Psychology. Later in 1936 they launched Dairy Box with the early slogan: "She'll love it if you bring her chocolates, She'll love you if they're Dairy Box".

As well as later being advertised on television Rowntree's products were early on advertised on radio. Although the BBC didn't have advertising there were two rival commercial stations. The French based Radio Normandie was established in 1929, and could be heard across Southern England and beyond. It was advertising that financed their lively programmes, which by the late 1930's featured, among others, Roy Plomley, later of Desert Island Discs fame. Some of the commercials were voiced by one Gracie Fields. On Sundays, when the BBC was concentrating on religious output, Radio Normandie was said to command 80% of the British radio audience (Mike Smith, References). In 1933 Radio Luxembourg arrived and by 1938 had 45% of the Sunday listening audience against the BBC's 35%.

Chocolate consumption in the UK had more than doubled between 1925 and 1939. Rowntree's factory had three miles of railway track, and two platforms which could take three locomotives and thirty six wagons. Many of today's well-known brands were started in this period, including Cadbury's Crunchie and Rowntree's Smarties. The fierce rivalry between the different manufacturers led to £1.7m per annum being spent on advertisements in the late 1930s. Yet despite the competition, in 1936 Cadbury's, Rowntree's, Fry's and Terry's made an agreement on prices and conditions of sale (revised in 1940 and again in 1950). With war breaking out in 1939 came rationing (chocolate was rationed in 1942 to 3 ounces per person per week), blockades on raw materials and a ban on the use of milk; many chocolates were either stopped altogether, as in the case with Black Magic in 1941 (until 1947), or greatly altered, as was the case of KitKat.

From the very beginning the advertising campaigns for Black Magic aimed to present them as the epitome of a romantic gift – early radio advertisements included dramatisations of romantic rendezvous. As their own website puts it: "The adverts showed beautifully dressed women reading or writing letters telling of their romantic encounters over a box of BLACK MAGIC. The 'letters' campaign lasted well into the 1950s and established BLACK MAGIC as a brand known for its luxury and indulgence." This appeal to courtship is captured in a trade catalogue from 1939: "Caught me under the mistletoe! I was just about to give the wretch a piece of my mind when he whipped out a box of Black Magic. So what could I do? Those chocs would soften the hardest heart." (Crystal, p 195) Early market research found that 60% of chocolate boxes were bought by men for women – the old idea of chocolate as an aphrodisiac may well have helped.

Many of the advertisements clearly evoke a rich and luxurious lifestyle – just like the later After Eight Mints: "Luxury ... pure unashamed luxury ... After Eight wafer-thin mints." And perhaps taking advantage of the darkness, secretiveness and selfishness associated with the idea of black magic. The ads of the 1960s are reminiscent of those of Cadbury's Milk Tray, with the mysterious man – echoes of James Bond – leaving chocolates for an elegant woman in an exotic location, which became a classic in the history of advertising. They also famously used the song *That Old Black Magic*, with lyrics by Johnny Mercer: "That old black magic has me in its spell/ that old black magic that you weave so well/those icy fingers up and down my spine/That same old witchcraft when your eyes meet mine."

This advert of the painter at an idyllic fishing village fits in with those ads that went outside the confines of the home to suggest associations with romantic locations; others are set in Paris and Rome. Among the famous film directors who worked on advertisements Ken Russell made an ad for Black Magic in 1966 – see Context for *Tokens* (1962). The BFI describe it thus: "A young woman is in a castle at night; she is holding a leopard on a chain and waiting for her man to bring her Black Magic chocolates. After receiving a box of chocolates, she is shown in daylight, running carefree and picking flowers." It sounds like a typical Ken Russell film, merging the romantic and pastoral with the gothic.

Despite undergoing twelve market researches, the distinctive black box, with a few modifications, lasted until 2007, when it was shelved, only to be brought back in 2009 by popular demand.

References

Paul Crystal and Joe Dickinson, *A History of Chocolate in York*, Remember When (Pen & Sword Books), 2012.

[Nestlé, Black Magic](#)

[Discoverblackmagic](#)

[Mike Smith, UK Radio History](#)