

COUNTERSPY

compiled by Arthur Townley

Cigarette that didn't satisfy

I was sorry to learn that Wallasey magistrates have frowned upon a new method of packaging tobacco devised for Messrs S Reece & Sons, the dairymen and confectioners.

A customer at their Hoylake Road shop in Moreton was less than satisfied, it seems, by a fine Virginia cigarette tastily baked inside a cheese and tomato flan.

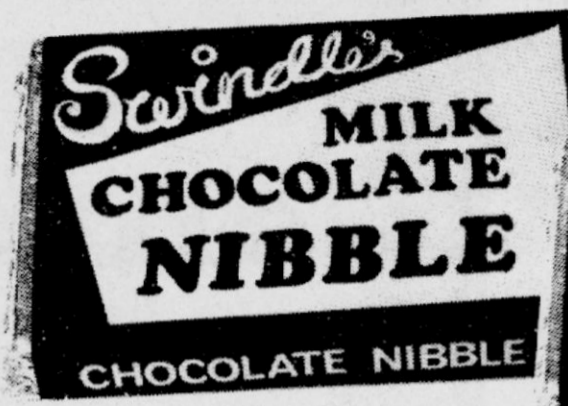
Meanwhile Reece's American counterparts are thinking along more adventurous lines. A baker over there, so a friend assures me, is seriously planning to market Cannabis Cookies (should the essential ingredient ever be legalised).

...and thirteen unlucky Swiss rolls

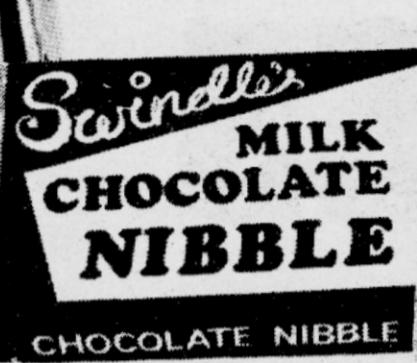
January was a bad month for Reeces. At Birkenhead they were fined £50 after pleading guilty to selling a Swiss roll "not of the quality demanded." In other words it was both mouldy and stale. And so were twelve other rolls found on the shelves awaiting customers.

Reeces said in their defence that the manufacturers would in future mark the wrappers "with a simple shelf-life code which manageresses at shops could follow."

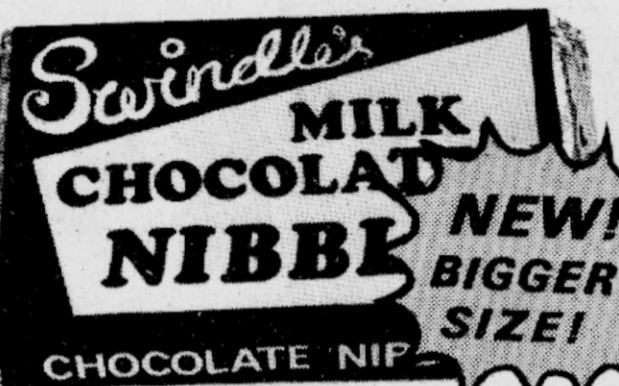
Counterspy hopes that the code will be simple enough for customers to follow as well. Puzzled Swiss roll eaters should send us the wrapper and details of where and when it was bought - and we'll get our code breakers onto it.



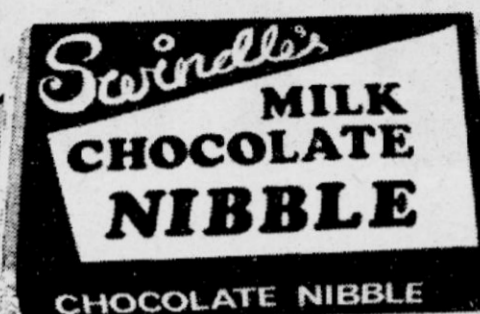
PICTURE 1:
Original size - 4p.



PICTURE 2:
Reduced size - still 4p.



PICTURE 3:
Old size - now 5p.



PICTURE 4:
Size reduced again - 5p.

[Pictures: John Bossons]

Life-story of a chocolate bar

The series of pictures above shows how increases in the price of chocolate are concealed. Picture 1 shows the original size. In Picture 2 the bar is reduced in size, and though the selling price stays the same, the price per ounce is increased, usually without being noticed. When the time comes to raise the selling price, the bar goes back to its original size (Picture 3) and the manufacturer advertises the "New

Bigger Size" to divert attention from the new higher price. A further price rise is concealed in Picture 4 when the size of the bar is again quietly reduced.

In each picture the real price goes up, but even if the customer realises what is happening he can't prove it because the weight of chocolate under 4 ounces does not have to be marked on the wrapper.

How to deceive customers without really lying...

Although the Trade Descriptions Act has stopped unscrupulous traders using outright lies, there are still plenty of legal ways of deceiving customers. Here are three worth looking out for:

Not a trader?

1 One crafty way to avoid trouble is to claim you're not a trader, since the Act only applies to people "In the course of trade or business." You may see an advert like this: "Wife's car for sale. Immaculate condition, good runner, clean body, low mileage - only £45." And if the claims aren't true there's nothing you can do about it unless you can prove that the advertiser is really a professional car dealer. Because this is difficult to prove, a good many con-men make a nice living from selling useless goods through adverts like this.

What's it worth?

2 "Was £30. Now only £10." "Worth £30. Our price £10." "Today's value £30. Our price £10." Three remarkably similar claims, you might think - but only the first one is covered by the Trade Descriptions Act. The first one has to be true or the shopkeeper is in trouble. Although words like 'worth' and 'value' may suggest to a customer prices he might pay elsewhere for the same product, they do not mean this in the eyes of the law. This type of claim is often used by furniture, electrical and do-it-yourself dealers.

Normal price?

3 "2p off recommended price." That's something you often see on detergent packets, and you don't always get the bargain you think

you're getting. In the mind of the customer "recommended price" means the price you would normally pay. But in fact it doesn't. A lot of recommended prices in the grocery trade are now fixed several pence higher than normal selling prices. This means shops can make what appear to be price cuts without cutting their own profits.

AJAX? IT'S SAND!

David Foster, American president and chief executive of Colgate Palmolive wonders why people still buy Ajax pan scouring powder (one of his best-selling products).

"I have always found it rather surprising," he told a Free Press informer in London, "that housewives continue to clean their pots and pans with what is basically sand."

Safe under the blanket?

If you're buying an electric blanket (or already have one) look for the letters "BS 3456" on the label. It means that the blanket conforms to the latest safety standards - and as from this year it's an offence to sell a blanket which doesn't.

There are about 12 million elec-

tric blankets in Britain, and about half of them conform to no safety standard at all, or to BS 2612, which is no longer considered good enough.

If you have a blanket more than two or three years old a check-up costing £1 to £2 could save you from being toasted in bed.

'Pledge' on rents

Liverpool Borough Labour Party is now on record that if the party takes control of the City Council in May, it will refuse to implement the Government's Unfair Rents Bill.

To explain its case, the party is distributing 100,000 copies of Labour Weekly to householders.

How far is this pledge likely to be honoured? Will Labour councillors risk all the penalties - going to gaol or being made to pay deficits out of their own pockets?

Once before when in power the party split over the question of raising council house rents. It could happen again.

Perhaps the best thing would be for Labour voters in May to demand a written pledge from their candidates on this point - a pledge they can't go back on.

Councillors prepared to go to prison would have no fear of not having tenants with them. The question is: have the tenants got the Labour party with them?

Effluents

Out of 156 industrial outlets into the Mersey effluents from 86 are unsatisfactory or bad, and a further 38 are borderline.

Those are the statistics published recently by the Mersey and Weaver River Authority.

And the authority criticises the competence of the staff put in charge of industrial effluent treatment plants.

The river authority say that staff "can only very rarely claim any special expertise in effluent purification."

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