

Tom Smith's Bon Bons

A Tale of English Magic

A SINGLE JOYOUS experience, an event or encounter which stimulates and uplifts the heart, mind and spirit can sometimes open a kind of magical portal. Usually this happens in a flash. With the mystique and brilliance of a lightning strike those fortunate enough to be blessed in this way experience an immediate and profound change in perception. Their lives might be completely redirected. Occasionally the recipient of such an “aha!” moment will come up with an idea or invention which evolves in a way which uplifts the rest of humanity forever. A little understood and curious fact is that this magical serendipity frequently involves English travelers and adventurers. Perhaps this is because England has for generations been a nation of eccentrics, free thinkers, magicians and scholars attracted to experimenting with all kinds of imaginative studies.

While visiting Paris in 1840, such an English adventurer named Tom Smith, encountered a dining experience which inspired him to create a party favor which has become an essential part of

holiday meals in his homeland ever since. Tom was delighted by sugar coated almonds, twisted and wrapped in beautiful tissue. The French called them bon bons and offered them to signal the end of a meal along with dessert. Impressed, Tom took the idea home to Clerkenwell in East London and began a

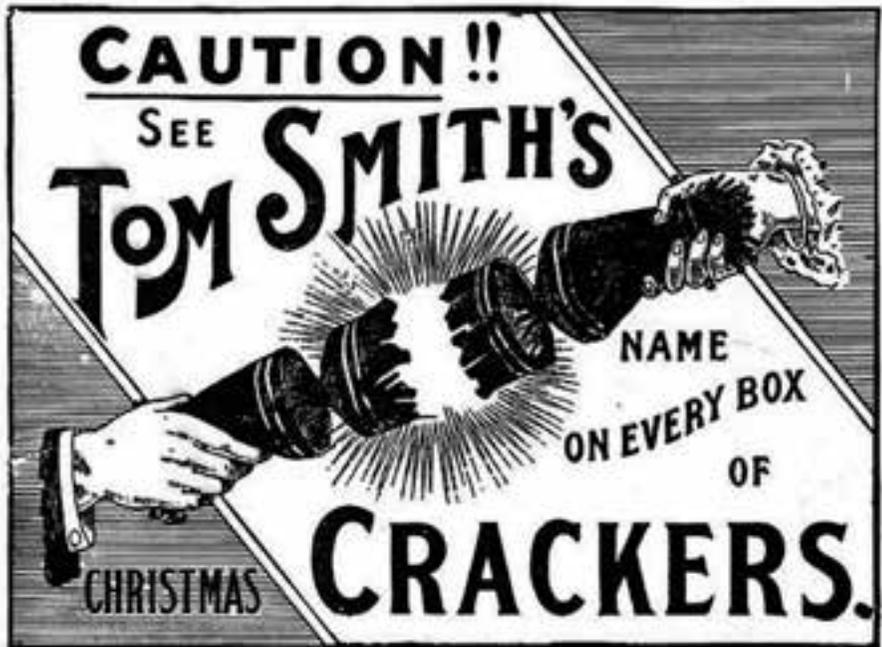
business. He wrapped sugar coated almonds in pretty papers and added hand written love mottos to the tiny packages. Tom's original sayings have been lost in time, but they had mass appeal. In addressing the inner longings of the heart and spirit he might have written:

“Love, madam or sir, like wine will make you drunk if you don't take care.”

or perhaps *“No place on the common Earth with ordinary water and air will do where you with true love will fare.”*

The product became enormously popular. Sales soared near Christmas. One cold winter's night Tom tossed a log on the hearth fire and listened to the appealing crackle and pop sound it made. This gave him another idea. Adding a bit of drama, a pop as the treats were unwrapped would be





interesting. He experimented until he came up with a simple mechanism that became the signature snap of his bon bons. He renamed them crackers. His original invention has remained the same as crackers, offered as party and holiday favors, are pulled open to this day.

Tom Smith was able to move his family to a more upscale London location in Finsbury Square as the demand for crackers increased. His sons Tom Jr., Walter and Henry eventually inherited and expanded the business. Walter erected a drinking fountain in Finsbury in memory of his mother and father, Mr. and Mrs. Tom Smith. Walter had his father's creative and

adventurous spirit. He began to include paper crowns in the crackers. Walter traveled the world in search of new ideas for different candies and unique gifts to add.

As the years passed the Company honored and embraced the changing times. Crackers were created to commemorate the suffragettes, heroic figures linked to the victory in World War I, Charlie Chaplin, Coronations and various other great occasions as well as Christmas. Customized crackers were made for Britain's Royal Family, a tradition which continues to this day.

—LAURIE BELL

