

# The Tale Of Toffee Town



**phoenix** RADIO  
96.7 FM

**Howard Priestley**

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## THE TOFFEE KING'S PROCLAMATION.

**"I am John Mackintosh—The Toffee King— Sovereign of Pleasure—Emperor of Joy. My Old English Candy—Mackintosh's Toffee—tickles the palates of my millions of subjects. I was crowned by the lovers of good things to eat. My Court Jester's name is Appetite. My most loyal subjects are the dear little children. I rule over the Kingdom of Health and Happiness. There is no oppression in my domain. My regime is one of enjoyment and delight. My throne is guarded by an Imperial Unarmed Army of Candy-makers. My coronation took place many years ago. I am an unusual monarch—all my subjects are knighted. Those who become members of my Royal Court must eat Mackintosh's Toffee at least once each day in the year.**

**My recipe for the manufacture of Mackintosh's Toffee is unequalled. My candy kitchen is the largest in the world. Hundreds of tons of Toffee are sold each week in England. Think of it! I am the world's largest consumer of butter. My own herd of prize cattle grazing on the Yorkshire hills supply me with my milk. I buy sugar by the train load.**

**I have a legation in all parts of North America. Ask your dealer for it. If he does not sell it, show him this decree. If you will do this for me I will confer upon you the Order of the Milk of Human Kindness.**

**I am, John Mackintosh, The Toffee King of England, and I rule alone."**

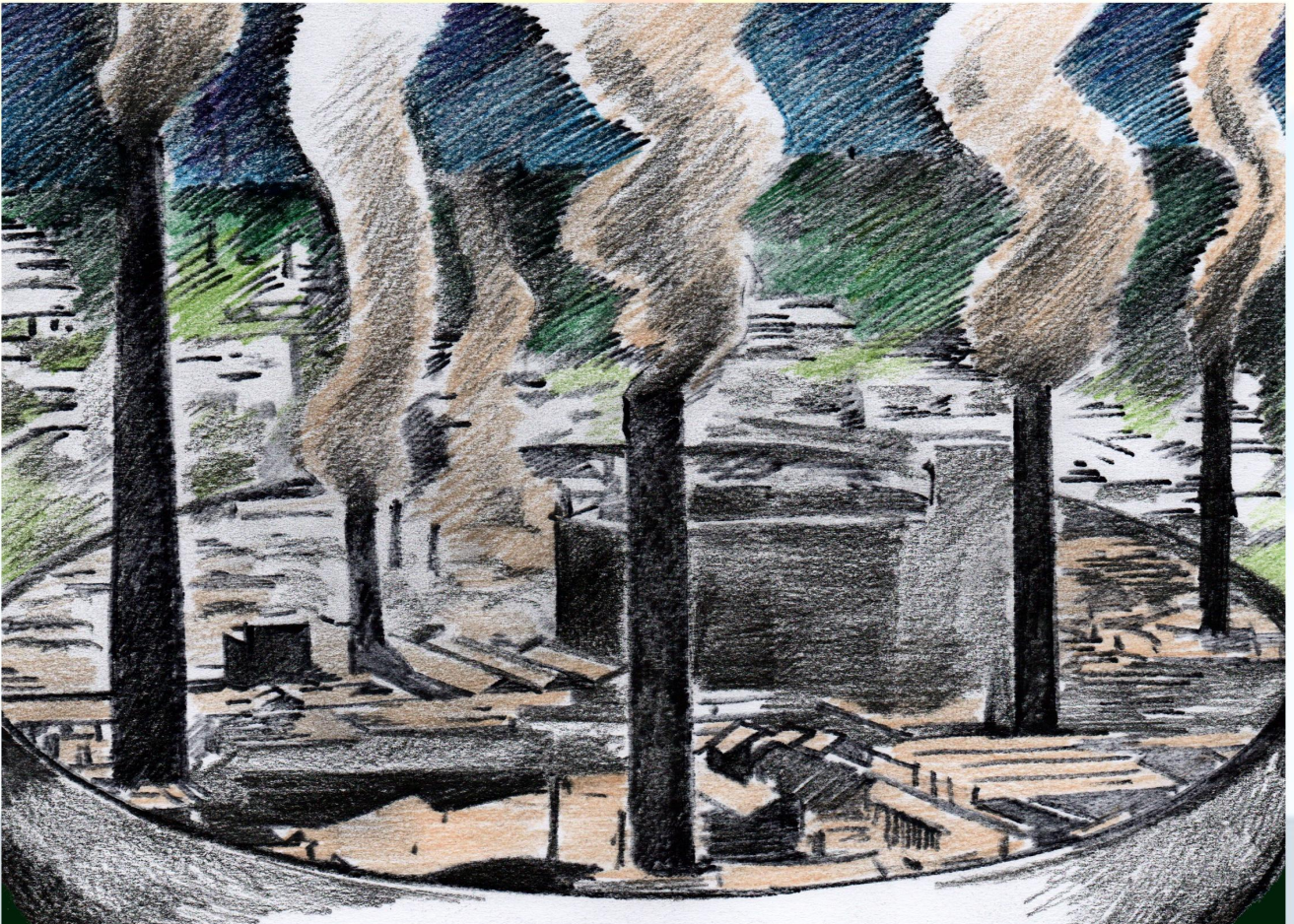
**Text from an unused American advertising campaign**



## Introduction

**Halifax in West Yorkshire has been called many things. The Town Of A Hundred Trades was one name, another was the Devil's Cauldron. This name was given to the town because it is in a basin surrounded by hills and in the old days hundreds of smokey chimneys made the basin look to be full of smoke rising out of a cauldron. However, at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, it was going to be given a new name with a new industry putting the town on the World map.**

**What was in the Devil's cauldron would soon become a golden colour and the smell of sweet success was about to rise from it!**



## Chapter I— The Early Days

**Joseph Mackintosh, the father of John, married Mary Jane Burgess, in July, 1865 and lived in the town of Dukinfield, Cheshire. That was also the year that the American Civil War ended and with it stopped what had been called the Cotton Famine which had seen many Cotton Mills having to stop their workers from doing their jobs. John Mackintosh was born on the 7th of July, 1868.**

**Within months of John being born his Mum and Dad moved to Halifax, a town that was growing into a great town for finding work in. The family lived at Woodfield Cottage.**



**John Mackintosh later became engaged to Miss Violet Taylor. They loved each other dearly and shared both a religious belief and later a belief that they could create their own business in Halifax.**

**John and Violet married in 1890 and bought a pastry cook's shop in King Cross Lane, Halifax, where he became a 'manufacturing confectioner'.**



**There were only a few days between their wedding and the opening of the shop so those days were spent buying things that they needed with what money they had left.**

**A sack of sugar, a tub of butter and a few pastries were the things with which John Mackintosh began the business which grew to worldwide success.**



## Chapter II - The Toffee Shop

***"I spent the first six years buying experience, cutting my wisdom teeth, and putting back into the business every penny I made."***

The success of Mackintosh's Toffees was very quick in coming. After the first months in the pastry cook business John Mackintosh began to look for something different to sell.

At this time he had already worked out that half of the week's money was taken on Saturdays. That meant that Friday was the hardest working day of the week in the bakehouse preparing meat pies, fruit pies, Madeira cakes, Eccles cakes, sponge loaves and many more attractive looking cakes, pies and buns for the window display.

What was missing was one special item, something totally different to everything else on show. Turkish

Delight was considered, then chocolate and Yorkshire Mint Rock but none of these excited John Mackintosh.

Then he began to think about toffee. At this time English toffee was hard and brittle, whereas America had started to send over caramels that were very soft. Violet worked on a recipe that would combine the two and so 'Mackintosh's



**Celebrated Toffee' was created in Halifax and would soon be celebrated throughout the world.**

**An advertisement was placed in the local newspaper inviting everybody to come to the pastry shop to try a free sample of this new toffee.**

**Hundreds of people came and before the shop closed it had all gone. The following Monday morning another advertisement was placed in the newspaper asking people to come along again and this time buy the toffee.**

**ON SATURDAY LAST,  
you were eating  
MACKINTOSH'S TOFFEE  
at our expense;  
NEXT SATURDAY pay us  
another visit and eat it at  
your own expense.**

**The next Saturday morning the largest display of toffee ever seen in Halifax was displayed.**

**The pastry shop now looked like a toffee shop and all the pies cakes, cheese tarts and the Eccles cakes could not compare to this mouth watering mountain of golden toffee.**

**Although the window was painted with lettering that told everybody that it was a pastry shop, people were quick to rename it. So the name changed and people from all over Halifax started to know it as "The Toffee Shop."**

**That first supply of toffee was boiled by Violet Mackintosh in a brass pan over a kitchen fire. It took an hour to boil and cool 4.5 Kilograms in weight of toffee. Elsewhere, people were creating bright coloured, exciting flavoured sweets and chocolates and selling them based on their looks as well as how they tasted.**

**This home made recipe was made from sugar and butter and only had its taste to make people want to**



**buy it but it was this 'homely' recipe, with no frills attached that appealed to people.**

**Any business needs publicity. This is what people see when they think of a product. John Mackintosh advertised on the very first day that he opened his shop in King Cross Street. The place wasn't ideal as it was just outside of the main town and shops around it were always closing and reopening.**

**Over a certain length of time John counted two thousand people passing his shop door. He worked out that if twenty five per cent of them bought something from the shop that he would be happy.**

**John noticed that people were always walking past his shop and they mainly came from Sowerby Bridge and King Cross. Of these people nine out of ten walked down his side of the road. So on Friday or Saturday mornings he sent flyers round Sowerby Bridge. As well as this he used the local newspaper to advertise which brought people from other parts of the town.**

**There was, however, a problem about to happen. Up until this time, most people walked but buses were about to start running. The "two penny" bus meant that John lost 25% of his money because people now rode past the shop.**

**He kept the shop in King Cross Lane open but asked a shop in Sowerby Bridge to start selling his toffee. Business grew and so John asked shops in Halifax Town centre to do the same.**

**Because of this he then decided to sell the original shop and become a full-time manufacturer of toffee.**





**The toffee had still being boiled at home and poured into trays and finally packed in a travelling tin trunk.**

**It was then carried to market in a hand-cart where the toffee was broken up with a hammer.**

**John Mackintosh knew nothing about glucose, vanillian crystals or even thermometers, which later toffee makers would need to understand about. There was only sugar, butter and a pan to boil the mixture in.**

**Good quality, common sense, fair dealing and advertising did the rest.**

***"Early to bed, early to rise,  
never get drunk and advertise."***



**Highly coloured and highly flavoured sweets were then popular, and these, together with chocolates, had the confectionery trade practically to themselves.**

**John Mackintosh's venture was regarded as risky, but from the first he realised the value of such a homely commodity as toffee as a commercial item.**

**It wasn't long before this Halifax Toffee reached other nearby towns and more shops wanted to sell it.**

**From the West Riding of Yorkshire it began to spread to the whole of Yorkshire and then across the North before becoming famous throughout the whole of England.**

**From there countries that were buying products from England, especially those countries who were part of the British Colonies, wanted to try this English toffee.**

**It wasn't long before countries all around the world wanted Mackintosh's toffees. A local seed that had been planted in King Cross Lane had now grown into a factory that gave 1000 people jobs and gave Halifax a new name ,**

**Toffee Town.**



## Chapter III – Toffee Town

The second six years of business saw the toffee spread throughout the North of England down to the Midlands. The company worked thoroughly in one county at a time, never missing a single town. In the office hung a map with different coloured pins in it to show the towns that they had been to and those still due to sample Mackintosh's toffee.

In 1894 the original shop had become too small all together and the growing business found a new home in a warehouse in Bond Street, Halifax. The following year the business moved to larger premises in Hope Street. As the company became even bigger a new factory had to be built. In 1899 this brand new factory was opened on Queen's Road and equipped with modern toffee making machinery developed by John Mackintosh himself.

At the beginning of the new century more factories opened in other parts of Halifax.

Although the business carried on growing with factories opening in other parts of the country, money to keep going became harder to come by. For example, at this time, the British Government put a tax on sugar which meant that it would cost more to buy.

John Mackintosh refused to give up,

*'I will never be beaten and if necessary I will begin again at the bottom!'*



He was able to keep the business going but in the dead of night, on November 2nd, 1909 there came a knock on the door of John Mackintosh's home. A man stood there politely explaining that a puff of smoke was seen coming from under the warehouse door of the Queens Road Factory.

Soon after this the factory roof collapsed illuminating the surrounding countryside with the great fire. John and Violet Mackintosh lived close to the factory whilst John Mackintosh's mother lived opposite it.



They rushed 'round there and together with his mother they knelt in prayer on the floor of the little parlour, illuminated by the factory as it burned to the ground. Gradually the entire business was rebuilt in the town with ten times the capacity of the Queens Road Factory.

Queens Road Factory was rebuilt to make chocolate products and carved in stone above the entrance were the words

"Mackintosh's Chocolate Works."



## Chapter IV – The Toffee Takes Off

***"I determined to bring London to our way of thinking."***

**John Mackintosh**

**As the business grew outside of Halifax, John Mackintosh began to advertise in such newspapers as the Yorkshire Evening Post and as the toffee became even more popular in other parts of the country, a national advertising scheme had to be planned.**

***"I was already getting wise to what was wrong with my business. If I wanted to keep it from those who would have stolen it if they might, I must do more advertising and so make the public my body-guard as it were."***

**John Mackintosh approached a London based Advertising Agent and it was decided that magazines would be the best place to advertise. A young man was also given the job of meeting wholesalers, whose job it was to supply retailers (shopkeepers) in London. This didn't work, even though John Mackintosh knew, through talking to shopkeepers, that the public wanted the toffees.**

**At the end of the year he instructed the man to stop calling to see the wholesalers and, instead, asked him to open a London office and depot and to put an advertisement in the 'Telegraph' for salesmen who would work on a commission. This meant that their wages would be made up from a percentage of what they sold to shopkeepers. The more they sold, the more money they made for themselves. Fifteen salesmen were hired and each night they posted their orders to**



the depot.

Thousands of parcels were regularly sent out and by the end of that year the company was doing business with most retail confectioners in London. Even the wholesalers became interested; now that they were losing out on making money. Mackintosh's depot grew and now had its own motor delivery vans, travellers and salesmen on commission. Other depots were soon established in other areas of the country.

John Mackintosh believed that there was a science to advertising that required a vast understanding of human nature. He saw advertisements from the point of view of the man in the street and he got rid of anything that might confuse or mislead people.

*"When I read a fancy phrase I know it is just put there to tickle my mind, and I discount it accordingly."*

He believed that a straight story was the only lasting form of advertisement and will be remembered as a great Press advertiser on a national scale who always gave his personal attention to the adverts.

In 1909 explorer Ernest Shackleton had just returned from the South Pole and had taken a case of Mackintosh's Toffee with him on the expedition. Quick to act on the national popularity of Shackleton, a new advertising campaign was created. It showed the crew with their sledges and dogs in front of the Pole. On the Pole was a notice,

*"If you cannot get Mackintosh's Toffee in the neighbourhood, leave the neighbourhood."*



Next to the sign there stood two penguins, one saying, *"It's jolly good advice!"*



John Mackintosh often expressed his views on advertising in a series of "Talks to the Trade" that reached the thousands of shopkeepers with whom he was now doing business .

The following is a statement he made in which he compared newspaper advertising with other forms of advertising.

*"The whole front-page of this newspaper is one of the most expensive advertising spaces in England today, if you look at it in the wrong way; but it is the cheapest way of sending you our message if you look at it in the right way. The net sales of this paper today are, say, 1,000,000 copies, and the advertisement rate for a front page is £350.*

*To post a similar number of copies of this advertisement to both trade and public would cost:*

*Printing, cost of envelopes, addressing, despatching, & c. £1,700*

*Postage at one halfpenny each ... £2,500*

*Total ... £4,200*

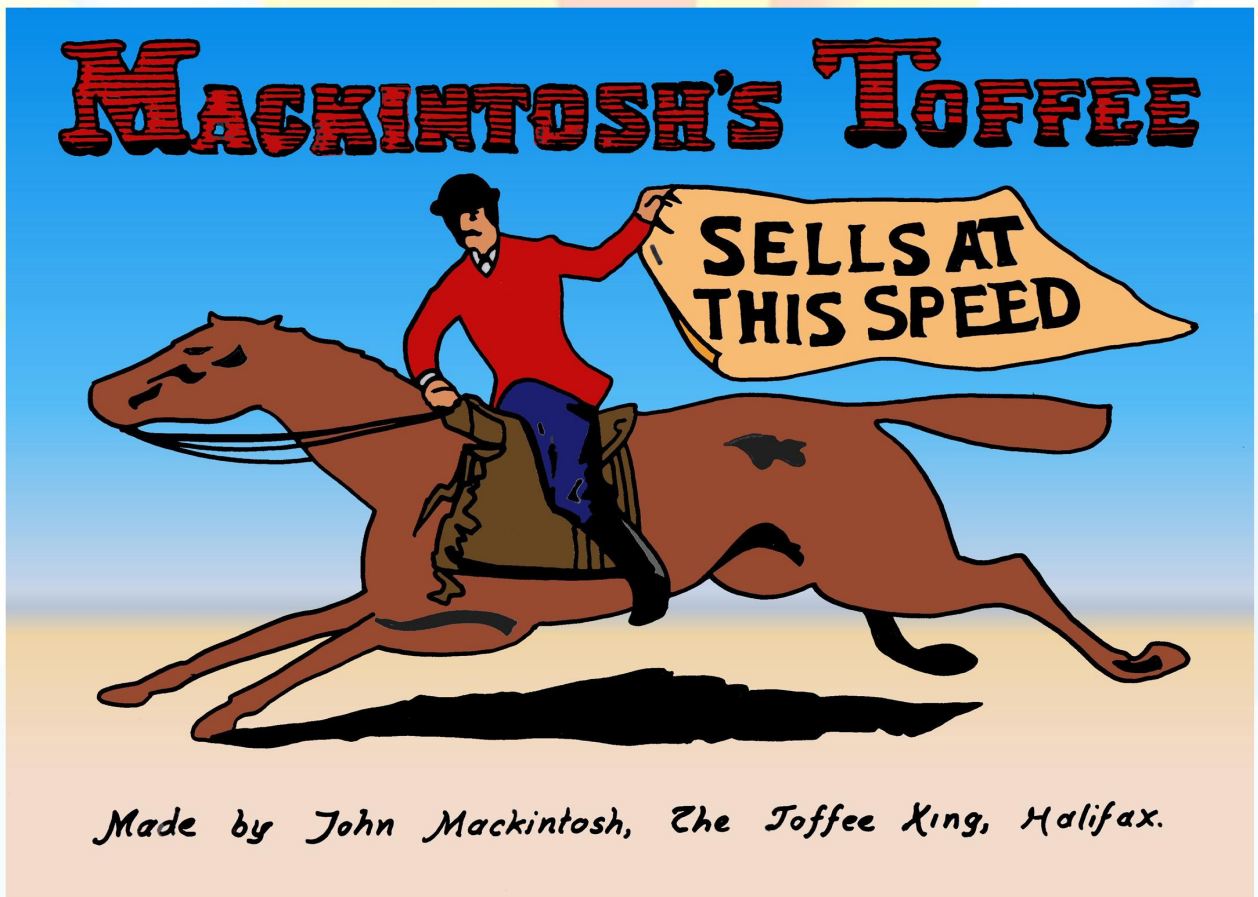
*So you see we are going the cheapest as well as the quickest way to work."*



The newspaper owners were so impressed with this statement that they spent thousands of pounds in reproducing the page, adding an announcement of their own.

It appeared in almost every newspaper in the United Kingdom the following week.

This is a great example of the approach that won him the confidence of both tradesmen and the public alike.





## Chapter V – Toffee Travels

As the business grew John Mackintosh spent much of his time travelling to promote the company. His travels took him to Europe, Asia and America. He started his first travelling to Northern Europe in July, 1902. By 1903 he had toffees selling in Italy, Spain and China. In the Autumn of 1903, along with his brother-in-law, he also had a quick tour of America and Canada to look at business possibilities. John Mackintosh was aware that in America more cattle were killed for food than kept alive for making butter to the point where butter was becoming scarce. When something became harder to find, the price of it goes up. Butter made in Siberia was becoming available outside of Russia and large cold stores were being built by an English company for the storing of butter. If the quality of the butter was good then John Mackintosh wanted to buy it. John Mackintosh called at Brussels, then Cologne and Berlin. After a 30 hours railway journey he reached the Baltic port of Riga in Russia. From there he went to St Petersburg and Helsingfors and sailed to Stockholm. From Stockholm he went to Christiania, Gothenburg, Copenhagen and Hamburg. The journey took him past Hohenzollern where he noted a fleet of German warships at Kiel. From Kiel John Mackintosh went to Amsterdam staying where the first Peace Conference took place. After a brief time spent at Rotterdam he set off back to London...

*"just in time for the coronation."*

All this travelling proved very successful and John Mackintosh bought £5,000 worth of butter and arranged for it to be transferred to Hull.



**This gave him a full year's supply of butter when it was almost impossible to buy large amounts of it in England. Countries on the Continent were now aware of Mackintosh's Toffee and so he looked towards America.**

**Importing toffees to America would be too expensive and so John Mackintosh had to open new factories in the United States. He visited The States the following year and by now their own brand of advertising had given him a new name, the "Toffee King". In 1904 Factories were opened with some employees moving over from England. Shops were opened in the main cities of America but surprisingly Americans weren't familiar with the word toffee, or even toffee itself. Canadians were much quicker in responding to English toffees and by the time the second visit to America ended the toffees were selling well and his face became his trademark. An idea that he would never have agreed to in England as he was a very quiet, modest man but his agent told him that his face was the only thing his competition couldn't copy.**

**This advertising campaign was seen in every magazine and newspaper throughout America and his portrait appeared on the gable-ends of twenty-storey skyscrapers. At that time it was said that President Theodore Roosevelt and John Mackintosh were the most photographed people in the United States.**

**Before the First World War one third of the toffees were being sold throughout the world and over forty countries were selling Mackintosh's Toffees. More Factories were opened in Australia whilst special toffees were created to suit the tastes of people in Africa and China.**



## Chapter VI - The Great War

The introduction of Mackintosh's Toffee to Continental peoples was not so simple a matter as it might appear. Mistakes were made through the confusion of toffee with coffee. Toffee being a novelty to the people and many letters were received by the firm from customers stating that they had poured the boiling water on the toffee without satisfactory results.

In Germany, about the year 1906, John Mackintosh had established a factory at Crefeld, near Cologne. Eventually the Toffee became well known in Germany and the surrounding countries and was accepted as a symbol of British manufacturers. It was very common to see in a shop window of a Gentleman's Outfitters, whose goods were chiefly of British origin, a few tins of Mackintosh's Toffees. These were supposed to prove that the business was of a genuine British character. The toffee was not for sale, but was treated by the shop keeper as part of his window-dressing outfit, the British "Hall Mark" of his stock in trade.

John Mackintosh personally watched over the business in Germany. He visited the factory at Crefeld every year and was able to travel about and do business wherever he went. He opened a series of retail shops throughout Germany and built up a considerable trade which was lost because of the outbreak of war in 1914.

The factory at Crefeld was also active until this time. Factories established abroad were always managed by men sent from England and unfortunately several of these men were put into prison when the war started.



During the Great War the Mackintosh advertisements were of a topical character. In the autumn 1914, when the first hundred thousand British soldiers, the Old Contemptibles, were fighting to resist the German invasion of Belgium and France, a full page advertisement was issued showing the Kaiser standing astride the maps of Belgium and France, staring across the Channel to the British Isles, on which stands a tin of "Mackintosh's Toffee." The title, "So that is what makes them fight so well".

On being asked to describe his sensations when he first went over the top, a Halifax soldier replied that "All he could remember was that he was eating 'Mackintosh's Toffee.'



## Chapter VII – The Charming Mr Mackintosh

In the month of June, 1919, John Mackintosh gave a great "Victory Ball" to celebrate the return of most of his men from the War and to celebrate the coming of peace. Over 1200 guests went to the Victoria Hall (now the Victoria Theatre). This would be the last time that John Mackintosh met all his employees at a social occasion. During the event the fun stopped as John Mackintosh spoke to the audience about the sorrow shared by himself and the other workers,

*"For those who are feeling very lonely through the loss of loved ones."*

John Mackintosh unveiled a Roll of Honour, and a permanent photograph of the members of the staff who had died during the Great War and also announced that nearly £10,000 had been paid by the firm to the wives and families of soldiers on active service. At the same event he launched the Bounty Scheme which he now wanted to introduce as further support for his workers. The scheme meant that all employees, men and women received £1 for every year they had worked for Mackintosh's. Relatives of those who had died during the war got twice the amount.

On Monday January 26<sup>th</sup>, 1920 Violet Mackintosh was slowly recovering from a serious illness. Throughout her illness, every morning, John Mackintosh had spent the first half an hour sitting with her to lift her spirits. That morning they talked about taking a holiday together. After breakfast he left their home, 'Greystones', went to the Magistrates Court where he held a position as Justice Of The Peace and then went to his office.



**Most of the day was taken up with him making plans to build a space for his workers refreshment and recreation.**

**He returned home and went to sit with Violet, again, talking about their holiday. That evening he went to his Church on Queen's Road for the Annual Trustees Meeting and where he accepted office as treasurer for the twenty eighth year in succession. Afterwards he took the Minister and anyone else going his way home in his car and when he himself got home he sat down and wrote two letters.**

**On Tuesday morning, January 27th, 1920, John Mackintosh went to pay his morning visit to Violet. Sitting quietly by her bedside he suffered a heart attack and passed away. He was only 51. After his death his son, Harold, took over the running of the company and it continued to grow, giving the World delights that we still enjoy today. Quality Street, Rolos, Caramac and Toffee Crisp are the most famous and it all started in the town of Halifax, West Yorkshire.**

**In 1932 Violet passed away and in a locked desk drawer was found a small box that held three things. A photograph of John Mackintosh at the age of 18, a letter from her Sunday School and a page, torn out of a notebook. On the page, in Violet's handwriting, was that first recipe for the toffee that would grow to be celebrated throughout the World.**



**Thank you to the Heritage Lottery Fund for supporting the Toffee Town project. Also to all the staff and volunteers at Phoenix FM. The former workers at Mackintosh's and any other people in the town who shared their memories of 'Macks'.**

**This book is dedicated to the memory of Violet and John Mackintosh who proved that when people in Halifax did something well, they did it on a global scale.**

**Any young person reading this should remember that and think that your own achievements very often begin with dreams.**

**Visit our website at [www.toffeetown.org.uk](http://www.toffeetown.org.uk) to learn more about the history of Mackintosh's.**



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