



SEASIDE ROCK

A day at the seaside was the closest that most 19th and early 20th century factory workers would get to a holiday, and they desired a cheap and cheerful gift to bring home as a souvenir. Legendary Victorian figure Dynamite Dick (rumoured variously to come from Morecambe or Blackpool) borrowed the ideas of Fair Rock and added a flourish of his own - lettering. This ensured rock's association with individual resorts.



The first sugar canes were exactly that - little strips of raw sugar cane cut straight from the field and given to children to suck. The Americans make something very similar - barber's pole-type candy canes - which are best known as Christmas decorations. When sugar first came to Britain, it was very expensive, but by the 19th century it had become plentiful.

Rock as a "pulled sweet" was first peddled at fairgrounds and is still known as "Fair Rock". It is cut into small colourful squares and still breaks many a milk tooth!

Seaside rock is a form of pulled sugar. The recipe is not much different from a classic boiled sweet in content - just sugar and glucose. But after it has cooled slightly, the mixture is repeatedly worked until it becomes aerated and takes on a white, cloudy appearance. Firstly, a batch of sugar is boiled in a large copper pan to 295°F and poured on to a giant cooled table. Any colour is added at this point. By far the most popular is the classic pink, although the depth of hue depends on the area. In the east, it's traditionally a bright fluorescent rose, in the west it is much darker, almost crimson. Flavour is also added - in most cases, mint. When it is cool enough, it is placed on a pulling machine, which churns it around until it assumes a satiny sheen.

Now it is ready for lettering. Each letter is formed of a "cut and paste" process using white and pink sugar mass. This is fiddly and, sadly, impossible to describe accurately without complicated diagrams. At this point, the rock is a huge, floppy cylinder weighing about 40 kg. It is then rolled into shape, cased

in more pink sugar and pulled again by special "batch rollers" which gradually make it thinner. The final rolling is done by hand, before it is cut and wrapped in cellophane (with photographic view inserted), all done with deft fingers which have, in some case, been doing it for over 40 years.

Rock has always been formed into different shapes; ever-popular are replicas of full English breakfasts and, for some strange reason, babies' dummies.

Seaside rock is also very popular today in a different form - corporate advertising. Companies such as Icelandair, MacDonalds, Daf and the BBC use it, because their names can be seen all the way through. For a wedding, the bride and groom will have their names put through rock to present to guests.



This article is based on material in Margate Museum Research Archive where much further detail and many photographs can be seen on request.

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