

An example of a Rowntree certificate of long service

Confectionery firm Rowntree and the city of York are inseparable in the minds of many people.

Thousands of locals worked for the company since its foundation in the 1860s, lived in the homes built in its model village, or took their leisure time in the public park laid out by the Quaker family that ran the business. And, even if they shared none of these links, they could not escape the aroma of chocolate lingering over the city when the production of Kit Kats, or Aeros or Smarties was in full swing.

Now, a wide selection of these various memories have been gathered into one of the largest publicly accessible oral history archives for an English manufacturer. York Remembers Rowntree has worked with more than 1,000 people who shared reminiscences or helped as volunteers to create a record of the company, the Rowntree family and life in York from 1937 to 1990.

Speaking about the project, which was completed in March, Dr Bridget Morris, Director of The Rowntree Society, said: “There were a number of surprising and unexpected results that have helped us to shape and define some exciting new lines of development for the Society.”

These included a link up with York and Huddersfield Universities running workshops or delivering lectures for undergraduate or postgraduate students in human resources, social anthropology and public engagement. A relationship was also established with Visit York and York Chocolate Story, two organisations that promote the city as a tourist destination.

The organisers also found themselves in demand to speak at a number of academic conferences; in Newcastle to the Social History Society, in Manchester for the Oral History Society, and to the Mass Observation archive in Brighton.

Assisted by volunteers the project produced an interactive virtual map that combines audio recordings, documents, transcripts and images of some of the 300 artefacts that were donated to the project. Another technological first saw the installation of an audio post in Rowntree Park through which visitors can hear a selection of minute memories extracted from the oral history archive.

A replica psychometric test was also put together, based on the one drawn up by the company for its employees from the 1930s to the 1960s. The replica test was to prove a hit with children at a range of public events where the project organisers ran information stalls.

Further details on the project can be found on the Rowntree Society website.



People visiting a Rowntree Society pop-up exhibition

York Remembers Rowntree