

A household name in Ireland, Jacob's this year celebrates a century of making cream crackers. But, as MARION FITZGERALD discovers, there is much more to the legendary firm founded by William and Robert Jacob (see illustration below). From a small family concern in Waterford Jacob's has expanded to one of the most technologically-advanced food production companies in this country at the Irish Biscuits factory in Tallaght, Co Dublin.

Celebrating a century

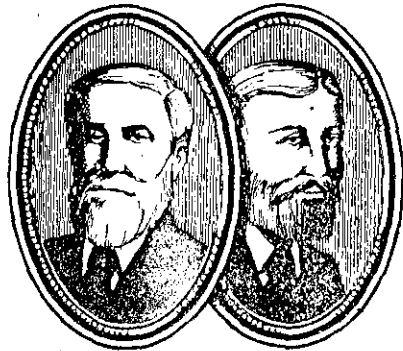
THE first cream cracker was made here in Ireland by Jacob's, just one hundred years ago, in 1885. But the story of the Jacob family in Ireland started more than two hundred years earlier.

Richard and Joane Jacob came to Ireland in 1675, because they had taken up baker practice and fear of religious persecution forced them to leave Britain. They settled in Waterford, where they set up a bakery business and also barn (yeast) brewery. 'Ship's' biscuits were an essential food for seafarers for centuries. The men who sailed the old ships, making long voyages across the seas, depended much on the biscuits they called 'hard tack'. Such biscuits were essential food for men who would be away from land and sometimes for months on end. Over the years the Jacob family built up a thriving bread and sea-biscuits baking business.

When the great, great, great grandson of Richard and Joane died in Waterford in 1839, they left two sons, William and Robert, to carry on the business. Within a short space of time they were to launch a new business, the beginning of W. & R. Jacob as we know it today.

Ireland went through hard times between 1839 and 1851, but the 1850s brought to Ireland some of the mechanised benefits of the industrial revolution. The Jacob brothers were quick to see that with the introduction of suitable machinery there were great possibilities of mass producing a palatable fancy biscuit suitable for general consumption. After some initial experimentation, they introduced to the Irish market a new fancy style biscuit which, as it turned out, was such an instant success that in the same year they decided to form a fancy biscuit company at Waterford.

Success brought with it many problems, but mainly that of distribution, and by 1852 the Jacob brothers had moved to Dublin, believing it to be more central, and offering greater facilities for the expansion and further development of their business. They had acquired a large coach factory just on the edge of the Liberties, and with only one cutting machine, two hand ovens, and one



5 HP engine they began producing fancy biscuits.

The business prospered and it's interesting to note that in 1853 the brothers achieved sales of £4,653, by 1859 sales had increased to £21,124, and four new ovens had been installed, including two 'travelling' ovens. At this stage the old Waterford bakery was sold and the brothers concentrated all their effort on the Dublin factory.

Prosperity was in sight, but tragically for Robert Jacob it was all very short lived. In 1861 a seaside walk with friends ended in tragedy; the walkers were swept out to sea by a freak wave and drowned.

By this time George Joshua Newsom had joined the partnership and in 1863, two years after Robert's accident, William Frederick Bewley came in to offer his expertise. The three family names, Jacob, Newsom and Bewley, continued to be associated with the firm right up to modern times. Indeed the present production director is Jonathan Bewley, a great-grandson of William Frederick Bewley.

In 1880 tragedy struck again when fire ravaged the Dublin factory, but though it was a setback at the time, it forced the partners to rebuild their factory on the most up-to-date lines. Demand for fancy biscuits took off in both Ireland and England and W. & R. Jacob discovered their place in a fast expanding market.

Jacob came back with samples of the plain American cracker which was just taking off. This provided the inspiration for the Jacob's Cream Cracker. Various experiments were carried out in the Dublin factory, and when all concerned were satisfied they had a truly unique and marketable product, a new plant was commissioned. In 1885, production began and in a very short time Jacob's Cream Cracker were to become hugely successful at home in Ireland and throughout Europe, the Americas, Asia and Australia.

Today, a hundred years later Jacob's cream crackers are still selling all over the world as the 'Original and Best', and this legend still appears on all packs, and also spans Dublin's Butt Bridge across the River Liffey.

Today, of course, Jacob's expertise extends far beyond cream crackers alone, and over the years the company has become famous for its extensive range of plain, fancy, and chocolate biscuits. Names like Lamberley, Mikado, Marietta, Club Milk, Polo, USA, Afternoon Tea, Fig Rolls and many, many more have been household names for generations. The common denominator through the years has been the company's total and absolute commitment to quality and value, the recognition that in the final analysis you must satisfy the customer. Jacobs have been doing just that for more than 130 years.

In 1883 W. & R. Jacob became a limited liability company, and almost immediately one of the Jacob's family members was despatched to America in search of new product ideas.

This little piece of enterprise was well rewarded for young

From Bishop Street beginnings...

THE old coach factory, in which William and Robert Jacob first set up in business in Dublin in the early 1850s, was in Peter Row. Ultimately Jacobs came to own the entire block, bounded by Peter Row and Bishop Street, Peter Street, and Bride Street.

Eventually they also acquired premises in nearby Kevin Street as well, and in Stephen's Street and New Row. And when they could no longer spread outwards they went upwards, with some sections of the plant rising to seven stories.

In all this expansion the employees were not forgotten, and by 1888 the company was supplying refreshments for employees by having milk on sale in the factory, and in 1891 a coffee bar was erected and dining rooms were built. The first factory doctor was appointed to the company in 1894. By January 1899 the total number of employees had reached 1,346.

Down through the years Jacob's

became one of Dublin's best known landmarks and indeed its location was to ensure it a place in the history books. During the 1916 Rising the big fortress-like factory with its high towers was chosen by leaders of the Rebellion as a key vantage point and on Easter Monday morning a group of Volunteers entered and occupied the factory. Some maintenance workers who were on the premises that morning were taken prisoners temporarily, but on the instructions of the Volunteers commanding officer, the watchman was allowed through the barricades twice daily to feed and water the company's delivery horses.

In the 1940s, despite the obvious difficulties of running an industry of this size during a period of international crisis, biscuits continued to be made by Jacob's Machines were rolled into working order by sheer ingenuity, using a variety of firing



This former coach factory, bounded by Peter Row, Bishop Street, Peter Street and Bride Street, housed the first Jacob's factory in Dublin, and became a landmark for many generations of Dubliners.

methods — electricity, gas, turf, coal and coke. Necessity was always being the mother of invention, members of the staff again rose to the occasion and designed two turf-burning ovens which were built to augment output. The success of these ovens is vouched for by the fact that the Government of the day leased a County Wicklow bog to provide turf exclusively for the industrial needs of the company.

The factory housed the company's own laundry, printing works, and tin making plant. But by the mid 1960s the results of more than 100 years expansion and development of a city centre site were beginning to cause problems. Also, the movement of Dublin's population from inner city to new suburban developments was likely to result in problems of labour availability in the longer term.

About this time Jacob's position as the sole manufacturer of bis-

cuits in the Republic of Ireland was being challenged by Bolands Ltd., who had opened a fine, modern biscuit factory at Deansgrange in Co. Dublin. The competition engendered by this new factory resulted in the expansion of the Irish biscuit market. However, possible EEC membership and its attendant tariff implications caused both companies to realise that the way to face international challenge was to pool their resources. This decision was supported by the Industrial Reorganisation Branch of the Department of Industry and Commerce, and early in 1966 the announcement that W. & R. Jacob & Co., Ltd., and Bolands Ltd., had been negotiating with a view to a merger of their biscuits interests was hailed by the financial press as a major development in Irish industrial life.

Apart from the many advantages to be gained by the merger, it was considered essential in the

interests of economic management that both the Jacob's factory in Bishop Street, and that of Bolands in Deansgrange should be run under single ownership. To achieve this, a new company was incorporated under the name of Irish Biscuits Ltd., and this became the manufacturing and trading company for Jacob's and Bolands' biscuits, both of which, to this day, continue to be marketed under their own brand name.

Towards the end of 1967, and having examined all the options, the company decided to re-locate its manufacturing facilities. This would involve closing both the Bishop Street and Deansgrange factories and transferring all production and services, including warehousing and distribution, to a truly mammoth task.

Stage one was to identify the right location, which among other things had to have:

(1) immediate availability of essential services such as water and electricity, and

(2) a location which was convenient for employees and in an area where a suitable labour pool existed or was likely to exist in the immediate future.

Tallaght became the obvious choice as the Dodder Valley drainage scheme was in the course of construction, water and electricity were available and Tallaght was being developed ahead of the other proposed satellite towns. Interestingly about 80 per cent of the company's employees lived in an area roughly half-way between Bishop Street and Tallaght. A total site area of close on 40 acres was acquired and the mammoth task of designing and building the new complex began. In April 1971 the first production plant was commissioned in the new factory, and the transfer of plant and offices to the new premises in Tallaght was completed by 1977.