

*The Devon County Magazine*

# DEVON LIFE

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# Mouth-wateringly Delicious

It's temptingly delectable and difficult to resist. Malcolm Twigg finds out why Roly's Fudge is such a success story

**W**hen I spoke to him in his shop in Totnes, Peter Riley said that Roly's Fudge has a shelf-life of three to four months. That may well be, but I've yet to see any fudge, anywhere, that lasts longer than three to four hours in my hands, let alone Roly's particular sort of fudge, which tends to disappear as soon as you look at it. That is obviously the secret of Peter's success: make a product so mouth-wateringly delicious that you have to keep coming back for more. In the 18 years since Peter opened his first shop in Torquay, the business has expanded on the strength of a demand that kept him and his wife working all through the night in the early years, until Roly's Fudge is now represented in eight shops throughout Devon and Somerset, either owned by the company or operated on franchise. And what is the secret? Quite simply fudge like mother used to make – or in this case, Peter's wife's grandmother, whose age-old recipe has been passed through the family and is now being magnanimously passed on to the wider world by this enterprising concern.

"The recipe we use is very different from normal fudge products," Peter told me. "We use 95% natural ingredients for a start, all locally sourced from the area where our shops happen to be situated." The fudge is actually made in situ in very small batches and rolled out where customers can see the process. It sometimes seems as though there is no limit to the expansion that Roly's Fudge can accommodate: they have recently introduced a wholesale business and send a weekly transit van to London (where one of their biggest customers is Harrods) to deliver the product to 18 delicatessens in the city. "We're getting people enquiring after franchises all the time," said Peter. "The only limitation seems to be getting hold of appropriate premises."

But the product travels rather further than London. Internet sales account for spreading the fame of Roly's Fudge over much of the world. "We get plenty of international visitors in Totnes who sample it and then order it over the web. We even had one lady in America who liked it so much she didn't care how much it cost to ship it over – 'just send it,' she said." Soon, however, Roly's Fudge won't have to make the trip over the pond, because, courtesy of a new franchise to be opened by Americans Mike and Peggy Bristow, they'll be able to get it over there. The new franchise will be in Kennebunkport, Maine, a coastal resort that is something like Salcombe – a popular boating and holiday destination. Mike and Peggy were actually in the shop learning to make the chocolate recipe when I arrived to speak to Peter – and learning rather well, as a quick sample demonstrated. A retired military and airline pilot, Mike was looking to set up a fudge-making business in retirement and chose Roly's Fudge over dozens of products ordered over the internet.

"It just happened to be the best," said Mike. "The only problem being that it was a long, long way away. So we came over in October to have a look at the operation, and now we're back learning the secrets before we open up back in Kennebunkport. We have fudge



products over in the States, but nothing like this and not in so many flavours, so I guess it's going to go down rather well. To the best of my knowledge, this is the first time that a product quite like this will have been introduced into the States."

Flavours are something else that sets Roly's Fudge apart. Maybe grandmother-in-law didn't have so many in her own recipe book, but the present list of flavours runs out at something like 20 different varieties in one shop, ranging from lemon meringue pie and Cointreau and ginger, to apple and cinnamon. It's odds on that peanut butter flavour will join the list for the American market, where it will be promoted under the label Roly's English Fudge. Doubtless, whatever flavours are represented on the American market, they will elicit the same compliments that Peter regularly receives about his fudge. "I keep a thick file of letters of appreciation I've received from all over the world, and you can be sure I'll be passing these on to Mike and Peggy to help them in their new venture." □

**Above Americans Mike and Peggy Bristow sample a new batch of Roly's fudge**