Rakusen's: the Leeds matzo bakery that began in a back room in 1900

From the crackers.biz wiki

Rakusen's is a kosher food company in Leeds. Wikipedia records that Lloyd Rakusen, a watchmaker, started it in 1900 by baking matzos in his own back room, that the company still operates in Leeds, and that all its products are certified kosher by the London Beth Din. Matzo is an unleavened flatbread of flour and water, eaten especially at Passover and sold as crisp crackers all year.

A bakery that began in a back room

Plenty of famous biscuit makers began small, but few began as small as Rakusen's. Its story starts in a back room in Leeds at the turn of the twentieth century, with a watchmaker baking matzos, and it continues in the same city more than 125 years later. Along the way Rakusen's became a familiar name in British kosher food, and, as Wikipedia notes, its products are popular with vegetarians and vegans too. For more of Yorkshire's biscuit makers, see Yorkshire biscuits.

Lloyd Rakusen

Wikipedia records that Rakusen's was established in 1900 in Leeds, West Yorkshire, by Lloyd Rakusen, a watchmaker by trade, who started by baking matzos in his own back room. The company still operates in Leeds today.

Lloyd Rakusen died in 1944 and passed the company to his family. Wikipedia records that Rakusen's has been owned by Andrew Simpson since 2015.

What matzo is

Matzo, also spelt matzah, is one of the oldest breads in the world. Wikipedia describes it as an unleavened flatbread that is part of Jewish cuisine, made from flour and water, and explains that the flour must come from one of five grains: wheat, spelt, barley, rye or oat.

The key word is unleavened. Wikipedia explains that dough is considered to begin the leavening process 18 minutes from the time it gets wet, so matzah must be made within that time. The sheets are pricked with a fork or a similar tool to keep them from puffing up, and baked at a high temperature. That is why a matzo cracker is flat, dotted with rows of little holes and crisp all the way through.

The Open Food Facts record for Rakusen's Matzos shows just how simple it is: wheat flour and water, nothing else.

Why matzo is eaten at Passover

Matzo has a special place in the Jewish festival of Passover. Wikipedia explains that, according to the Torah, matzah commemorates the Exodus from Egypt, when the Israelites left Egypt in such haste that they could not wait for their bread dough to rise. During Passover, leavened bread is not eaten, and matzo takes its place.

Matzo at the Seder

Matzo is at the centre of the Seder, the ritual meal on the first night or nights of Passover. Wikipedia explains that matzah symbolises redemption and freedom, but that it is also called lechem oni, poor man's bread. The final matzah eaten at the Seder, called the afikoman, is considered a reminder of the Passover sacrifice.

Some matzah is made with extra care. Wikipedia describes shmura, or guarded, matzah, made from grain that has been under special supervision from the time it was harvested, to ensure that no fermentation has taken place. It also notes that the requirement to eat matzah at the Seder cannot be met with egg matzah, and that some Ashkenazi Jews do not eat egg matzah during Passover at all, except for the elderly, the infirm and children.

Cooking with matzo

Matzo is an ingredient as well as a cracker. Wikipedia describes matzah balls, traditionally served in chicken soup, and matzah brei, a dish of Ashkenazi origin made from matzah soaked in water, mixed with beaten egg and fried. And matzah meal, it explains, is simply crisp matzah that has been ground.

From hand to machine

For centuries matzah was made by hand. Wikipedia records that the first matzah making machine was invented in France in 1839, and that cracker like, mass produced matzah then became the most common form in Europe and North America. Rakusen's crisp, flame baked matzo crackers belong to that tradition.

Matzo all year

Matzo is not only for Passover. Wikipedia notes that while soft matzah is produced only before Passover, crisp varieties are available all year, and that most British supermarkets stock some Rakusen's products all year, with special Passover matzo at Passover. Wikipedia also notes that Rakusen's products are popular with vegetarians and vegans.

Kosher

Every Rakusen's product is kosher. Wikipedia says they are all certified kosher by the London Beth Din. What kosher certification means for biscuits, including the difference between meat, dairy and pareve foods, is explained in kosher biscuits, and the Purim biscuits of the Jewish year are in hamantaschen.

More than matzo

Rakusen's makes much more than crackers. Wikipedia lists matzo, matzo meal and matzo crackers, along with soups, beans, Tomor margarine and other products.

Rakusen's on our shelf

We stock three Rakusen's matzo products:

- Rakusen's Matzos, 200g.
- Rakusen's Matzos, 300g.
- Rakusen's flame baked matzo crackers.

How to eat matzo crackers

A matzo cracker is a plain, crisp base for almost anything. Spread it with butter, top it with cheese, or break it into soup. Its plainness makes it a good partner for strong cheeses; see the best crackers for cheese.

Matzo belongs to a family of dry, flat breads made to keep, which includes Scandinavian crispbread, Scotland's oatcakes and the sailors' hardtack. Each grew from the same simple idea: flour and water, baked dry.

Diet notes

Rakusen's Matzos list wheat flour and water, so they contain gluten; the Open Food Facts record labels them vegan and vegetarian. For the ginger biscuits and digestives, check the pack for allergens.

Quick facts

Founded	1900, in Leeds, by Lloyd Rakusen
How it began	Baking matzos in Lloyd Rakusen's own back room
Kosher	All products certified by the London Beth Din
Owner	Andrew Simpson, since 2015
Products	Matzo, matzo meal and matzo crackers, soups, beans and more
Matzo	An unleavened flatbread of flour and water

Questions people ask

Who founded Rakusen's?

Lloyd Rakusen, a watchmaker, who began baking matzos in his own back room in Leeds in 1900, according to Wikipedia. After his death in 1944 the company passed to his family, and it has been owned by Andrew Simpson since 2015.

What is matzo?

An unleavened flatbread made from flour and water. Wikipedia explains that it recalls the Exodus from Egypt, when the Israelites left in such haste that they could not wait for their bread dough to rise.

Why do matzos have holes?

Wikipedia explains that matzah is pricked with a fork or a similar tool to keep it from puffing up as it bakes.

Are Rakusen's products kosher?

Yes. Wikipedia says all Rakusen's products are certified kosher by the London Beth Din.

Can you eat matzo crackers all year?

Yes. Wikipedia notes that crisp matzah is available all year, and that most British supermarkets stock some Rakusen's products all year, with special Passover matzo at Passover.

Sources

1. Rakusen's, Wikipedia
2. Matzah, Wikipedia
3. Rakusen's Matzos (5010112006161), Open Food Facts

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