

W & R Jacob

CELEBRATING 150 YEARS OF IRISH BISCUIT MAKING

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Preface

Generations of Irish people left school with the impression that Ireland had, in essence, little or no industrial history. Thankfully that view is changing. In the light of the new awareness of Ireland's admittedly small but not unimportant industrial past, it would have been remiss to let the years 2001 and 2002 slip by without marking in some way the birth, growth and indeed survival of a remarkable Irish enterprise. 2001 sees the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the production of biscuits by two Waterford brothers, William and Robert Jacob – the 'W. & R. Jacob' engraved on the irresistible biscuits that have been found on Irish and British tea-tables for generations. The year 2002 marks the centenary of William Jacob's death.

Having been brought up close to the heartland of the Jacob workforce in Bishop Street in Dublin, the most obvious, and to a child, the most important evidence of Jacob's presence was the weekly ration of broken biscuits brought home by an older cousin, a 'Jacob's girl'. However, of much more importance was the Jacob's weekly wage-packet, which supported many a south-side Dublin family, or, at least in the case of the thousands of young women, made a significant contribution to the meagre family budget.

Having begun my researches, the more I delved into the history of the company and spoke to the extended Jacob's community, the more I realised that all that could be accommodated in the time and space allotted to the present publication would be an outline of Jacob's history, and a flavour of how the great industry worked and was organised. There are literally thousands of Jacob's stories out there; unfortunately it was possible only to include a small selection of them here. There is ample scope for an extensive oral history project based on the experiences of Jacob's workers. Hopefully such a project will be undertaken.

The creativity and ingenuity, whether in relation to baking, engineering or marketing, that has gone into the enterprise over the century and a half has been colossal. This book is the first history of the company, and its aim is to provide for the general reader with an interest in Irish industrial and social history, whether connected with Jacob's or not, an outline of the founding, development and achievements of the firm – as the title states, to celebrate a great Irish institution. Go maire sé céad caoga bliain eile!