

HOBBY HISTORY

The Rise And Fall Of The Norwegian Match Industry

[from "Norsk fyrstikindustri for ar 1900" by Olav Wetting; translated by Brita Hess]

The Norwegian match industry's growth depended upon the economic cycle of the economy, and this varied significantly over the 1800's. The 1840's featured strong economic growth and this lasted into the 1850's. The was largely due to the Crimean war. Many match stick factories started up in this period, most of those being small undertakings. In 1857, the economy suffered a setback. This was largely due to the decline of the international money markets, and the industry's dependence upon Hamburg's banks and merchants became painfully obvious.

At the end of the 1850's many of the small match factories closed down. Match prices were falling, and money was in short supply, but even so a few new factories started. The 1860's brought a noticeable increase in chemical production technology, and the match industry moved towards larger factories. In 1866 there was another international crisis, and some factories failed, although the total number of factory workers increased.

The period 1870-1875 saw better times, mainly because of the German-French war of 1870-71. Both borrowing and making money were easy, and enterprise was shown. Another reason for the boom in Norway was better land and sea communication. In four years 14 new factories started, and in 1875, 18 factories were in operation. This was an unrealistically high number, and even though the demand for matches was increasing the competition that ensued caused many closures in the 1880's. Even though this period featured strong economic growth, the match industry suffered. Many factories closed down and only 2 new factories started in 10 years.

From 1880 to 1890 the larger factories underwent rationalisation, and invested in new machinery, to face domestic and worldwide competition. Competition from Japan in the previously Norwegian controlled markets in the East made it particularly important to compete on price, and the advantage moved to the larger, more efficient, factories. Boxes for the matches were handmade until the 1880's at some factories. This was done by people working at home. In the 1880's the industry became dominated by large factories, and label machines, box machines and packing machines were used.

At the turn of the century there were only 7 factories left.

1. Nitedals Taendstikfabrik
2. Adnaes Taendstikfabrik
3. Bryn Taendstikfabrik
4. Halden Taendstikfabrik
5. Elvbakken Taendstikfabrik
6. Oddernaes Taendstikfabrik
7. "Primus" Taendstikfabrik (Veoy in Romsdal)

Of these only the first 4 were of importance.

During the difficult years, when the competition from Japan sapped the morale of the industry, a syndicate was formed in London. "The Match Union". Its aim was to buy up the match industry in several European countries. The syndicate provisionally arranged to buy several factories, but in the end very few were sold.

The development in the 19th century looked like this:

1850	2 specialised factories with 47 workers
1855	8 specialised factories with 172 workers
1860	5 specialised factories with 100 workers
1865	6 specialised factories with 153 workers
1870	8 specialised factories with 436 workers
1875	18 specialised factories with 1293 workers
1880	16 specialised factories with 1087 workers
1885	12 specialised factories with 1587 workers
1890	10 specialised factories with 1699 workers
1895	8 specialised factories with 935 workers
1899	7 specialised factories with 728 workers