Twinings History

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Twinings history, in summary:** The world's oldest continuously-trading tea brand: founded 1706, Royal Warrant from 1837, and part of Associated British Foods since 1964.

Last reviewed by the teas.co.uk team in January 2026.

Twinings is the world's oldest continuously trading tea brand, founded in 1706 in London by Thomas Twining. The original shop on the Strand has operated from the same location for over 300 years. The brand helped make tea drinking respectable in Britain, pioneered the Earl Grey blend, and remains one of the most recognisable tea brands in the world.

The founding (1706)

Thomas Twining opened Tom's Coffee House on the Strand in 1706. By 1717 he had pivoted to tea, opening The Golden Lyon, Britain's first tea shop. The original location at 216 Strand still operates as a Twinings shop today.

Why the 300-year history matters

Twinings is the world's oldest continuously-trading tea brand. The shop Thomas Twining opened at 216 Strand in 1706 is still trading, in the same building, under the gold-lion shop sign that has hung outside since 1787. Few commercial brands in any category have occupied the same premises for over 300 years.

The longevity matters for two reasons. First, Twinings has been blending Earl Grey, English Breakfast, Lapsang Souchong and dozens of other classics for so long that its recipes have become the global benchmark for how those blends should taste; when someone abroad pictures British tea, the reference is overwhelmingly Twinings. Second, the brand carries the institutional memory of how the tea trade evolved, from the early-18th-century Chinese-import era, through the Empire's Indian and Sri Lankan expansion, to the modern Kenyan-led mass market.

The Strand shop and the Royal Warrant

The shop at 216 Strand has been in Twinings hands since 1706. Daniel Defoe wrote about visiting it, Charles Dickens lived nearby and was a regular, and Samuel Johnson and James Boswell both bought tea there. Its narrow Georgian frontage and gold-lion sign are Grade-II listed. Visiting today is one of the more interesting London tea-history experiences.

The Royal Warrant, granted by Queen Victoria in 1837 and renewed continuously through to Charles III, makes Twinings one of the longest-held warrant brands across all UK trades. The warrant is reviewed regularly and requires continuing supply to the royal household, which Twinings has maintained without interruption for nearly 190 years.

The ABF era and modern Twinings

Associated British Foods acquired Twinings in 1964, taking it from family ownership into modern industrial scale. The Twining family stayed on in brand-ambassador roles; Stephen Twining, the tenth-generation ambassador, is the current public face. The ABF era brought global distribution (Twinings now sells in over 100 countries), a far wider range (the functional Superblends since 2018), and the supermarket aisle ubiquity that defines the brand today.

The trade-off has been a gradual move towards industrial consistency. The standard supermarket cup is reliable rather than exceptional; for more of the brand's historic craft, the Strand shop's loose-leaf range and the gift-tin Selections deliver more character. For everyday use, modern Twinings remains the practical British-tea benchmark.

In short: Twinings history

Year	Event
1706	Thomas Twining opens Tom's Coffee House on the Strand, London
1717	The shop pivots to retail tea sales; renamed The Golden Lyon
1837	Queen Victoria grants Twinings a Royal Warrant (held continuously since)
1933	Twinings family-owned brand expands to Earl Grey, Lapsang Souchong, English Breakfast as named blends
1964	Associated British Foods (ABF) acquires Twinings; family operational involvement continues
2006	Twinings celebrates 300 years on the Strand; the original 1706 shop still trades
2018	Twinings Superblends functional range launches; the brand's biggest product expansion in decades

FAQ

When was Twinings founded? 1706.

Original location? 216 Strand, London, still operating.

Earl Grey origin? Allegedly named for the 2nd Earl Grey; several origin stories exist.

Royal connections? A Royal Warrant holder since 1837.

Owner? Associated British Foods, since 1964.

Curator's note: Twinings is the world's oldest continuously trading tea brand. 300+ years of British tea heritage. Worth respecting the longevity. The Strand shop is well worth a visit. Lee, teas.co.uk, Tunbridge Wells.

What to buy now

For a brand-introduction tasting, buy Twinings English Breakfast, Twinings Earl Grey and Twinings Lapsang Souchong, the three historic benchmarks. For a step up, the Strand shop's loose-leaf tin range (in person or online) offers more character than the supermarket bags.

FROM THE CURATOR

teas · If a Twinings tea here sounds appealing, try it once. One cup of Twinings teaches more than twenty articles on its history.

Twinings reading

For more on the brand see the Twinings deep dive; for wider context see the tea history primer and the British tea culture guide; for specific blends see the Twinings Earl Grey and Twinings Darjeeling reviews.

Reference noted

- Encyclopaedia Britannica: Tea (history)

The bottom line

Twinings is the world's oldest continuously-trading tea brand: over 300 years from the same Strand shop, an unbroken Royal Warrant since 1837, and 60-plus years inside Associated British Foods. The historical significance is real; the modern supermarket cup is consistent rather than exceptional. For the historic dimension, visit the Strand shop and try the loose-leaf range; for the everyday cup, modern Twinings is still the practical British benchmark.

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