PG Tips History: The 1930 to Today Timeline

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **PG Tips history, in summary:** A 1930 Brooke Bond CTC blend (the "PG" from "Pre-Gest-Tee"); the chimps ad ran 1956-2002, Unilever bought it in 1984, the pyramid bag arrived in 1996, plastic-free bags in 2018, and it now sits under Lipton Teas & Infusions. Real heritage, big brand marketing and corporate scale, all at once.

PG Tips is one of Britain's most familiar tea brands. This sits in the brand-history cluster beside Tetley history.

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

Origins and the "Pre-Gest-Tee" name

The story begins with Brooke Bond, founded in 1869 by Arthur Brooke in Manchester (the "Bond" was added purely for marketing balance). Already a substantial mid-market brand by the 1920s, Brooke Bond launched PG Tips in 1930 as a move into the premium-tippy CTC category: the "PG" stood for "Pre-Gest-Tee", originally marketed as a digestive aid before that claim quietly disappeared from the labelling by the 1950s, and "Tips" referred to the higher proportion of leaf tips in the blend. The early product was a CTC blend from East African and Indian gardens, blended for the British milk-and-sugar cup and sold loose in cartons, then in flat square bags from the mid-1950s. The brand name has been on British shelves continuously for more than ninety years, which gives it the real heritage the modern marketing leans on.

The timeline

Year	Event
1930	Brooke Bond launches PG Tips ("Pre-Gest-Tee") as a tippy CTC blend
1956	Chimps TV advertising campaign begins
1968	Brooke Bond becomes a public company
1984	Unilever acquires Brooke Bond, including PG Tips
1996	Pyramid bag introduced
2002	Chimps campaign ends on welfare grounds
2007	Monkey and Johnny Vegas campaign launches

Year	Event
2018	Plastic-free biodegradable bags rolled out
2022	Unilever spins off its tea division as Lipton Teas & Infusions

Advertising, ownership and sustainability

The chimps TV campaign launched in 1956 and ran for forty six years, the longest running British TV ad campaign in history, with its most famous scenes from the 1960s and 70s, retired in 2002 on welfare grounds and replaced by the Monkey and Johnny Vegas era, the detail the PG Tips chimps guide covers. The ownership path ran from independent public company (1968) into Unilever (1984) and then into the standalone Lipton Teas & Infusions spun off in 2022. The modern sustainability moves are real rather than cosmetic: the 2018 switch to plastic-free biodegradable bags led the broader UK tea-bag-plastic conversation, the point the teabag plastic guide makes, and Rainforest Alliance certification of the Kenyan CTC base began in 2007 and expanded across the range. The pyramid bag (1996) was a genuine format milestone, the story the pyramid bag story tells.

Where it fits in British tea history

PG Tips entered the market in 1930 as Brooke Bond's premium-tier answer to Typhoo and Lyons, in the era when brand-loyalty packaged tea was replacing the old tea-merchant model. It emerged from wartime rationing (1940-1952) with strong share, capitalised on the post-war housing boom and the explosion of TV advertising, and through the 1960s-90s divided the everyday market with Tetley, Typhoo and the rising Yorkshire Tea (founded 1977), the wider arc the history of British tea guide tells. It remains a household name with roughly 15 to 20% of the UK market by volume, second behind Tetley by some measures, and a brand that spans generations: different decades of drinkers remember it through different campaigns. A careful buyer reads it with both halves in mind, real heritage and corporate scale, the same know the brand standard as is PG Tips good.

Common questions

What does "PG Tips" stand for? "PG" from "Pre-Gest-Tee", its original digestive-aid positioning, and "Tips" from the leaf tips in the blend. It launched in 1930.

Who owns PG Tips now? Lipton Teas & Infusions, the standalone company Unilever spun its tea division into in 2022. Unilever had owned it since 1984.

Why are the chimps no longer used? The famous 1956-2002 campaign was retired on animal-welfare grounds and replaced by the Monkey character.

When did the bags go plastic-free? 2018, an early move ahead of the wider UK conversation about plastic in tea bags.

Try the icon for yourself

See how the household name brews from the PG Tips brand page, or compare it across the wider brand directory and the full tea shop. Judge PG Tips on what each cup costs; over £35, delivery in the UK is free.

Browse the tea range

Reference noted

- Encyclopaedia Britannica: Tea (history)

FROM THE CURATOR

teas · Ninety years on, the price per cup is still the fair test. Loose leaf usually wins, though PG's own bags sometimes do too.

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