

CHOCOLATE!

No flavor in the world has been so popular for so long as chocolate.

The cocoa bean enjoys a history and tradition as rich as the chocolate we enjoy so much.

Ancient Aztec and Mayan civilisations of Central America gave us this culinary treat. Conquistador Don Cortez, tasted the *chocolatl*, a drink of the emperor Montezuma. It was a thick brew of cocoa and maize meal flavored with vanilla and chilli.

Cortez brought the discovery back to Europe, where it was drunk sweetened.

The Spanish held the method of its preparation as a close secret for almost a century.

In the mid-seventeenth century, when the custom

spread to England, chocolate was very expensive. It was served in London's fashionable chocolate houses, the first of which opened in 1657. These sold chocolate as a drink and also in the form of a pressed cake which could be taken home.

Early chocolate was made by adding potato starch or sago flour to absorb the excess cocoa butter.

Chocolate production was revolutionised by the Dutch who pressed cocoa butter and produced cocoa essence.

These days, cocoa is mainly grown in the tropical areas of West Africa.

Ghana grows the world's top-quality cocoa. Other cocoa-growing countries include Central and South America and parts of Asia.