

A&BC Chewing Gum – The Braun family story

by Nigel Mercer ([Nigel's Webpace](#))

A&BC Chewing Gum, the most popular of all gum and card producers, was formed in 1949 by four men: Simon Anysz, Rudy Braun and two brothers, Douglas and Tony Coakley. The story of the Coakley brothers has previously been told as part of [Nigel's Webpace's A&BC Chewing Gum company history](#). This article tells the story of Rudy Braun, and his son René, both of whom played significant roles in the early days of A&BC. I am indebted to two of René's children, Michael and Suzi, for their assistance in preparing this story, and hope that it forms part of a fitting memorial to their grandfather's and father's contributions to A&BC.



Rudolf (Rudy) Braun was born on 27 September 1904 in Uherské Hradiště, Moravia, part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire at the time before it became part of Czechoslovakia in 1918, and is now part of the Czech Republic. His family were alcohol merchants in Uherské Hradiště. Rudy obtained a Doctor of Law from Prague University and became a lawyer based in Prague.

He married Lotte, an actress from an aristocratic family, and they had one child, a son, René, born November 16, 1931. Rudy's grandson Mike tells that Rudy and Lotte were very well known in Czech society.

In 1938 the Germans occupied Czechoslovakia's northern and western border regions, the Sudetenland, and in March 1939 they moved into the remainder of Czechoslovakia proclaiming Bohemia and Moravia the Protectorates of Bohemia and Moravia. Rudy was away on business when the fascists took control in 1938 and somehow the Braun family escaped, presenting in France in September 1939, with Rudy being accepted into the Czechoslovak army in France in January 1940. In the course of the Second World War he fought with the French Underground and other Allies against the Nazis, and was released from the army in 1945. Tragically through the course of the war the remainder of the Braun family perished in Auschwitz and Theresienstadt concentration camps. The remaining Braun family, Rudy, Lotte and René were registered by the International Refugee Organisation in France as refugees in 1948.

After the war Rudy returned to his ancestral home and discovered the fate of his family, but also a bank demand for money from an unpaid business loan (unpaid for 8 years, for obvious reasons). Rudy sold half of all his property in Czechoslovakia to cover this, with the other half sold at auction in his absence. Lotte's family had the same fate, they owned the biggest perfumery in Czechoslovakia named Demartini, but all of their property was 'nationalised' under communism (1948) and lost. In the end Rudy got nothing in compensation or for the sale of his property, his family moved to Cricklewood in London and they started life again in a council flat, penniless refugees.



After the end of WWII Rudy Braun operated a café in Leicester Square named *The Golden Corner* (see photo left) with an Italian family. Rudolph's son, René, remembers working there as an 18-year old. Around this time the decision to create A&BC Chewing Gum was made. At the time, the Coakley brothers were in their twenties, and Rudy was 45. History doesn't tell us how old Mr Anysz was. Nonetheless, it is fair to conclude that Rudy Braun was the senior partner in the company, having retrained himself as an accountant, while the Coakleys provided the technical and marketing expertise. René Braun, Rudy's

teenage son, was an early employee. Interestingly, Rudy Braun could speak four or five languages, but English was not one of his main ones.

A&BC Chewing Gum began life in Cricklewood, north-west London. They concentrated initially on producing gum. At some point both Douglas Coakley and René Braun travelled to the U.S. to view and purchase gum making equipment, though whether they went together or on separate trips is not known. René once told me that he was sent to the U.S. to source the manufacturing equipment for the gum, and the Braun family history records that it was René who brought back the original formula for A&BC's gum from the U.S. René had a degree in industrial chemistry so this may well be true. René's widow, Maureen, remembers that one of René's jobs with A&BC was to research new gum flavours.

A&BC Chewing Gum progressed slowly but well through the 1950s, producing their first set of collectible cards in 1953, and their first set of dedicated football cards for the 1958/59 season. Initially they concentrated on producing gum, and using the cards to promote the gum, but over time the emphasis changed and by the late 50s, and certainly in the early 60s with the success of the Beatles, the cards were the main attraction.

René worked primarily as a chemist for A&BC Gum. He left the company in 1958, aged 27, and remembers that during that time at the Cricklewood factory (1949 to late 50s) there were between 20 and 30 employees at A&BC. His father, Rudy stayed on. René remembered that his father could sometimes be difficult to get along with, and that they did not always see things the same way.

In 1959 A&BC Chewing Gum began their licensing agreement with the U.S. Topps company. The photo shows Rudy Braun, Douglas and Tony Coakley with a truck with obvious Topps connections. According to my discussions with Douglas Coakley, and confirmed by Hyder Jawad in his [discussions with Douglas](#), Rudy Braun sold his stake in A&BC to Topps in 1964, giving Topps a 1/3rd share, leaving the Coakley brothers and Topps as the sole shareholders (Mr Anysz having been bought out very early in the history of A&BC). However, René seemed to remember that his father sold out at the time of the agreement with Topps, soon after he (René) had left the company. Rudy's grandson Mike has confirmed that Rudy sold out in 1961 or 1962. The deal with Topps ended up being very significant for the future and eventual demise of A&BC, for it was with their one third share that Topps took the Coakley brothers to court in the 1970s and forced the winding up of the company.



After selling his stake in A&BC Chewing Gum, Rudy Braun returned to the practice of law. According to his grandson, he never retired. He lived in Hendon with Lotte, and died in 1984, aged 80.

René Braun opened his own clothing manufacturing company in Hackney. I managed to speak with René just before he died in 2009, and though he was ill at that time his memory of A&BC was still vivid. Interestingly, he thinks that it was a mistake for his father Rudy to sell his stake in A&BC Chewing Gum. Whether this is a view formed with the benefit of hindsight (A&BC hitting their highlights from about 1963 to 1969), or whether this was his view at the time is not known. Perhaps more intriguingly, René believes that the Brauns should have bought out the Coakleys! I was in the process of asking René some more questions about A&BC's history when he became too ill to respond, showing how precious and delicate our links with the past can be. René Braun died in London, aged 78.



Rudy Braun was one of the founding members of A&BC Chewing Gum, and worked with the company for more than 12 years before selling his share to Topps. He was there at the start, and helped guide the company through the 1950s and into the 1960s. He is the 'B' in A&BC Chewing Gum. As it turns out, he lived a very interesting life, one which perhaps deserves to be told more fully elsewhere. A&BC Chewing Gum turned out to be only one of a number of the twists and turns in a life full of adventure.

History passes quickly, and fleetingly. If it is not recorded, it is too late, and lost. While these records of the formation and operation of A&BC Chewing Gum may not rate highly in importance on the world stage, they are still important memories and social history. The major players in the entire history of A&BC have either passed away or are getting quite old. If you can add to any of these memories please contact the author of this article at Nigel's Webspaces Football Cards, or via Facebook 'Nigel's Webspaces'.