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RODERICK LAWRIE LEADS RESURGENCE OF SNUFF IN NORTH EAST

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From his family home, Roderick Lawrie is single-handedly leading the North East resurgence of the powdered tobacco now used by many as an alternative to smoking.

In his makeshift laboratory the 50-year-old has concocted a plethora of flavours which are tickling the nostrils of snuffers from around the world.

Whether it's whiskey and honey to Mongolia, peanut butter snuff to Hawaii or selling Alaskans tins of chocolate snuff, the small-time business from Berwick-upon-Tweed is making a name for itself overseas.



Roderick, a former smoker of more than 20 years, said: “Some might say our situation is remarkable, especially given the credit crunch, but we are exporting all over the world. I think we are the first new snuff company for 100 years. We found it was a very old habit and wanted to modernise it somehow.

“People must realise this is not a magic cure, it is still addictive as it is tobacco but it is a lot less harmful than smoking.”

Traditionally a craze during the 18th Century, snuff was later favoured by miners unable to smoke underground because of the danger of naked flames. Taking a pinch of the tobacco powder they'd sniff it to feel the effects.

Its popularity dipped but since the 2006 smoking ban was brought in more and more smokers have been looking for an alternative to standing outside for a quick cigarette.

Entrepreneur Roderick set up his business to coincide with the ban and now works full time creating his Toque Snuff products using industrial coffee grinders and 100% natural flavourings.

He said: “We are a family-run business but our expansion has been rapid.

“I used to be a wine trader but couldn’t afford my own vineyard and the trade was dying out.

“I wanted to use my nose, saw the ban was coming in and so researched the alternatives to smoking.

“Last year we were runners-up in Northumberland’s heroes for export award and were delighted with this. Our biggest market is in Yorkshire because, I think, of its former mining industry.

“More than half of our customers are men aged 18-25 and we supply to a lot of the Glastonbury crowd.

“ I don’t know if it’s because of the ban but nowadays it seems younger people just don’t want to smoke, which is fantastic.”

While still an addictive tobacco product snuff is less harmful than smoking as it doesn’t include chemicals and tar which can lead to lung cancer and heart disease. Supporters also say its a lot cheaper than buying cigarettes, £1.59 for a 10g tin.

The Action on Smoking and Health group (ASH) say that while there is no such thing as a safe tobacco product “if you compare like for like snuff is far less dangerous than smoking cigarettes.

“For existing smokers concerned about health risks and looking for an alternative, but wanting to continue using nicotine, this would be something they could consider.” A NHS North of Tyne spokesman said: “Although snuff does not contain any carbon monoxide or tar it is carcinogenic meaning it causes cancer.