

## The Cadbury Shop

It always seems odd to me that Cadbury's do not have a shop – or at least a café – in the centre of Birmingham. After all, that's exactly how they started out.

It was in March 1824 that John Cadbury unveiled his Tea and Coffee Warehouse at 93 Bull Street. According to the company's day book, the first customer through the door was the Quaker gunmaker Samuel Galton. Once the place was open, Galton was there like a shot.

He ought to have purchased gunpowder, I know, but instead Galton bought three pounds of Lapsang Souchong (for £1 4s) and six pounds of fine coffee (for exactly £1).

The Quaker community have always looked after each other. So when one of them opens a shop, it is hardly surprising that the first customer through the door was also a Friend. Added to that, the shop was just a stone's throw (not that Quakers ever did that) from their meeting-house in the same street.

Samuel Galton was a first of a distinguished line of visitors to Mr Cadbury's new venture, many of whom were from the same meeting-house. Next with an order was the banker, Samuel Lloyd, who picked up some Congou and green tea, as well as more of the fine coffee. They were followed by John's father (Richard Tapper Cadbury) and many of the great and the good of Birmingham, including a doctor from the General Hospital. Industrialists like Matthew Robinson Boulton and James Watt junior turned up soon after. As far as we can tell they were not experimenting with some steam-driven cappuccino maker.

The smell of roasting coffee has an irresistible allure and it must have travelled a long way, since the day book records visitors from as far afield as Lichfield and West Bromwich. That Cadbury's early customers were so well-heeled is not surprising either, since a heavy government tax took tea and coffee beyond the reach of most. John Cadbury was entering a niche market, but even his first advertisement (dated, in Quaker-speak, 1st of 3d month, 1824) in the *Birmingham Gazette* suggested an expanding industry. Amid all those stock phrases about "respectfully announcing" and "assiduous attention", he draws the notice of his customers to a list of products that included hops, cocoa nibs and mustard. Clearly these should not be taken together.

The mention of hops shows that not all of his customers were teetotal. As for the cocoa nibs, they were designed for what he called a "nutritious breakfast beverage". The connection between the words "Cadbury" and "chocolate" were first made with these words.

So you open a new shop. How do you attract customers to it? Although he was only 22 years old when he opened the premises, and there were no sales' manuals to guide him, John Cadbury's commercial instincts were exceptionally well honed. It was an early move to replace the traditional small round panes of glass in his shop window (beloved by Christmas card designers) with plate glass, allowing passers-by to get a good look at what was on the shelves.

John also employed a Chinese clerk, suitably kitted out in oriental dress, to add an alluring taste of the East, and he must have been a rare sight in Birmingham. The tea on sale inside, of course, also came primarily from China.

John Cadbury's spell as an apprentice to a tea merchant in Leeds had been well spent. John was the first of all those generations of chocolate makers to be born in Birmingham, his father having migrated to the town from Devon in the 1790s. With the arrival of the Cadburys, Bull Street solidified its place as Birmingham's premier shopping street, and as close as retailers could get to the town's wealthiest residents around Temple Row and Old Square. Benjamin Cadbury ran his draper's shop (formerly owned by his father) from No. 92, with John right next door to him. A street frontage plan from 1840 shows Bull Street as a properly elegant Georgian thoroughfare, packed with establishments selling high-end merchandise such as millinery, cigars, clocks and watches, tea, gloves and pastry confectionery. Not a fast food joint in sight.

But the back of Bull Street was another matter. If John Cadbury's tea and coffee shop faced the road, what lay at the rear of it? Thousands would never have bothered to ask this question, assuming that the answer was storage space and packing cases. But the answer, in fact, was gooseberries.

To venture round the back of late Georgian Bull Street was to set foot into an earlier Birmingham.

Before the pressure of commercial development squeezed them out, there were a number of gardens lurking just off the shopping streets of central Birmingham, and the rear of Cadbury's premises was no exception. It boasted a summer house in the shape of a Greek temple, a clump of worried trees and collection of gooseberry bushes, remnants of an age when a walled garden in the middle of town was just the kind of thing to display in the estate agent's window.

Within a generation, however, the Cadburys had left all that behind, and moved from retail to manufacture, at Bridge Street and then at Bournville. But if the proposed Martineau Galleries come to pass, then the multi-national company down the road might care to rediscover their roots, and set up shop exactly where they first began.