

# Building Bournville

A community research project  
investigating the working class and  
industrial history of Bournville.



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When you walk through Bournville, you can't help but feel as though you have stepped back in time. It makes sense for it to have been around for centuries. But that is just the point. It hasn't. It's hard to believe that it has actually been less than 150 years since its creation. Alongside its old buildings and country village feel what gives Bournville that old time nostalgic feeling is almost certainly the people. By that I of course do not mean the physical appearance of the people but rather the strong and deep ties that the community seems to have. In less than 150 years the working-class people, both workers of Cadburys and other residents of Bournville, aided by the generous Cadbury family and firm, have managed to create an environment and atmosphere that very much has that communal feel to it. When we set out to discover the working-class history and 'building' of Bournville it seems we discovered that 'Building Bournville' refers not to the physical village itself but instead the building of a community, the building of a Bournville spirit.

Through the research conducted for this project we have been able to track how throughout a lifetime, childhood to adulthood, the people of Bournville continued to contribute to this Bournville community at every age. To quote Yuen and Johnson what is most 'vital in the creation of community' is the encouragement of 'citizen involvement' . We explored how residents involved themselves within the community. We started with the children's experience of the Bournville community by looking at school, leisure clubs and outdoor space. Similarly, we explored the adult experience of the community through education, leisure clubs and trips and outings. To offer an outside perspective, we also made note of the visits of tourists, both national and international, to Bournville, as they capture how the community looks to those not in it. For Helena Chance, 'the Cadburys were place making -creating not only a place of work but also an entire social and cultural space'. It is within this space, the space of Bournville and the space of the community created that has allowed us to explore who really built Bournville.

# The Children of Bournville

## Education

Let's start at the beginning. School. For most of us school is the first time we start to properly experience the outside world. As a result, school is the often the first time we experience and participate in our local community. Bournville Village Junior school was opened in 1906, as a gift from the Cadburys, who placed great belief in the need to offer children a good education guided by Christian principles, particularly the ideas of tolerance and forward thinking. The Cadburys themselves often visited the school, exemplifying the ties between the firm and the Bournville residents, with Mr Harris recalling how he and his sister received a shilling each after bumping into him one night after school.

On the first ever day of Bournville Junior school, the 25th April 1906,' the children were admitted at 9 o'clock and were very quickly arranged and classified in their different standard and ages'. Dame Elizabeth Cadbury praised the hard work of the headmaster and the staff, calling them 'excellent'. From day dot it seems a high standard was set and maintained and the children enjoyed an environment in which they could grow individually and as part of a local community. Mrs Florence Hackett attending the school at its opening called it a 'happy time' whilst Howard Clay attending the school decades later in the 1950s remembers the teaching as 'quite strict but we had some excellent teachers who encouraged us to keep bettering ourselves'. It is no wonder then, as these testimonies generations apart show, that Mrs Florence Hackett labelled her first day as 'a very special day for me'. It was a day in which she and many others on their first days of school in the decades that would follow were given the opportunity to be a part of the community, story and spirit of Bournville.



*Figure 1: Stella Ena Pritchard at school in Bournville. Taken from Michelle Seviour 'Ernest Allan Pritchard, Part Three, Between the Wars'.*

Perhaps what made Bournville Village Junior school so well liked was the varied curriculum. This gave children the opportunity to experience all sorts of different things including childcare lessons. Mrs Ivy Brown remembers being taught with a real baby' as well as 'the art room' and, most loved by her, 'the Library, where we sat in armchairs and read the books of our own choice'. Howard Clay remembers the sportier aspects of life at the school as he captained 'both the football and cricket teams' and remembers the annual sports day held at the Men's Recreational Grounds. The contrasting images of the cosy Library and the outdoor Recreational Grounds offers an insight into the varied school life the students experienced. On a side note, as shown through the use of the Men's Recreational Grounds (an area not owned by the school but by the Cadburys and used by Cadbury male workers) we can see the togetherness of the people of Bournville as space was shared between different sections of the community.

From these memories we can gather that the primary school acted as a wonderful place for children to grow up and learn about themselves and the world and interact with each other. Howard Clay puts it perfectly when he says that growing up in Bournville 'thankfully allowed us to have opportunities that improved us as individuals and likewise respect the environment we grew up in', a memory that seems to be shared among children who grew up in Bournville.

## Leisure

Aside from school another important part of the children of Bournville's lives was leisure. There were many groups and clubs for children to join, both educational and non-educational, that allowed the children to participate in the local community doing things that they personally enjoyed.

Learning to swim was one such out of school activity. Swimming lessons took place in the Men's Instructional Bath (there was also a girl's swimming pool too) by the birdcage area of Bournville. Howard Clay remembers starting 'on Saturday mornings and Bill Smith was our instructor. When we became more proficient, we moved up to join classes in the Girls baths with coaching on a Monday night. The club was called Bournville Aqua Marines and we were taught to race swim, play water polo and do personal survival and lifesaving skills. More senior swimmers started the C Urchins section that taught scuba diving'.

Non-academic clubs that were available to children included the numerous youth clubs, such as one for under 13s which met every Monday and Wednesday, and a senior club that took place in the Village Hall. Howard Clay recalls the wide range of activities the youth club took part in, from sports tournaments to art shows. The club was mostly organised by the youths themselves who would do 'car washing in the car park to raise funds once month on Saturday mornings'. It was not all activities and competitions. Howard Clay also recalls the music on Saturday nights. He mentions 'Black Sabbath, ELO, Wizzard, Rocking Berries and many other individuals Our regular bands were The Couriers and Johnny and the Alpines.'

Other clubs that proved popular with the children of Bournville were the Scouts and guides. The 1st Bournville Scouting Pack was formed in about 1912 and its meetings were held in an old farm building next to Old Farm Hotel. Another similar group for older girls was the Campfire girls. The leader and girls of this group all took names from the Indian language, with the 'Kenuki' camp meeting once a week. Joan Anney, a Bournville resident and employee of Cadburys, was majorly involved in the Guide Movement in Bournville. She started the Bournville Brownies and 'there will be many guides who will remember her and be thankful for the help they received as they were growing up'. She helped hundreds of girls to achieve their Duke of Edinburgh awards.



*Figure 2 (left): Joan Anney, founder of the Bournville Brownies.*

*Figure 3 (above): The Campfire girls, date unknown.*

As per George Cadbury's famous quote 'no man should be condemned to live in a place where a rose cannot grow, outdoor space also played a vital role in the development of the community of Bournville. For children this space was mainly the park. The first playground in Bournville opened in 1896 in Bournville lane, followed by the opening of Bournville Park in 1907. Bournville park as an outdoor space best represents this idea of communal spirit as the cost of its upkeep was split between the residents of Bournville and the trustees. The park was opened every day from 8am to sunset with the first park keeper being Mr Hooper. In the park there was also a tuck shop, which unsurprisingly was popular with the children. Memories of this shop include 'when it opened all the children would rush to it to spend their pocket money'. There was a 'wide selection of sweets from lollipops to liquorice sticks, aniseed balls to sherbet dabs and gobstoppers, as well as homemade ice cream. It was Mr and Mrs Summer who ran the shop and they also made tea with bread and butter and cakes'.



*Figure 4: Roy, Ron, and Stella with a model yacht.*

Not far from the park was the yachting pool where Howard Clay remembers having 'yachts to sail on the water and in the big freeze of 1963 the water froze on the yachting pool to such an extent that we all hired skates and had great time for several days skating'. Through this we can see how these outdoor spaces helped to offer an environment in which the children of Bournville could participate in fun but different activities and so participate in building the Bournville community.

Another outdoor space that was and is located in the heart of Bournville was the Men's Receptions Grounds. According to Howard Clay the 'highlight of the year for us children was the Children's Festival held on the last Saturday in June'. Starting in 1902, this was held in the Men's Recreation Grounds and included competitions (such as the fancy dress competition), plays, bands, singing and maypole dancing alongside the crowning of the May Queen. Howard Clay also remembers how at the end of the day; a tea was put on by the Cadburys for the children in the dining hall alongside watching cartoons such as Tom and Jerry. It is testament to the community of Bournville and the strong ties that the local people have that The Bournville Village festival is still held in the Men's Recreation grounds every year to this day.

As we seen, the children of Bournville were given many opportunities to participate in their local community. Through the school, local clubs and local festivals they were able to develop their own passions within the safety and support of the community. We now leave the children to their swimming lessons, youth clubs and maypole dancing and move on to how the adults of Bournville were able to develop the Bournville spirit and community.



*Figure 5: A postcard from 1908 of the Childrens Festival, maypole dance, on the men's recreations ground.*

# The Adults of Bournville

## Education

The opportunity to access good education was not limited to the children of Bournville. The Cadburys also created the Day Continuation Centre. As a response to the Fisher's Education Act of 1918, which dedicated itself to providing education for those aged 14 and over, the Day Continuation centre helped to provide a space for the adult community to learn and develop. It also helped to connect attendees with those around them, as the Junior school had done for residents when they were children. Attention must be drawn to the fact that whilst we are looking at the Day Continuation Centre's contribution as an environment that helped to benefit the adult community, a large portion of those who attended were children, under 18 years of age. However, as a big percentage of those attending the centre from aged 14 were working during this time, they had hence already moved into the adult community sphere of Bournville and so are treated as thus for this short section. The Day Continuation Centre opened in 1913 and, by 1925 around 2400 Cadbury employees attended classes at the school (1850 girls and 550 boys) whose attendance was equivalent to roughly one day per week. There were further educational opportunities with weekend courses, summer schools and evening adult classes. Like the junior school, the Day Continuation centre had 'a wide general education and also more specific areas of study' and so, like the Junior school, its curriculum was broad. The layout of the centre reflects upon this, as by 1925 it had 'twenty classrooms [...] for example a science laboratory, a music room, domestic science rooms. An assembly hall and gymnasium were provided for each sex and each of these halls contained facilities described as a cinema box'. This broad curriculum clearly resonated with attendees as Neville Thompson who attended the centre from 1946 starting when he was 14, easily recalled the varied opportunities offered to him there. He mentioned the many physical education lessons and the annual sports days as well as more creative lessons such as the amateur dramatic society and the silver band which he himself joined. Don Pinder, who attended the school from 1948, also fondly remembers this mix of academic and creative lessons, mentioning the drama productions as well as the metal working.



*Figure 6: Students leaving the Day Continuation School*

It was not only academic opportunities that the centre offered. Don Pinder remembers the more social aspects of the centre, referring to an International Youth Festival held at the centre in which young people attended from all over.

The broad curriculum and social opportunities offered at the Day Continuation Centre allowed attendees like Neville Thompson and Don Pinder the ability to not only develop skills they would need in the working and professional world but also expand their own interests and passions helping them to become both participating members of the community and individuals in their own right. As the Bournville Village Works Magazines affirms, the Day Continuation Centre placed 'an emphasis on the value and importance of social service in the life of the company' but also felt it important to push attendees to grown on their own 'even when day classes are left behind'.

As we have seen the Day Continuation Centre offered many opportunities to socialise outside of the confines of an educational setting and perhaps it is through the encouragement given at both the centre and the Junior school that meant that employees and residents of Bournville were able to set up their own leisure and educational clubs and spaces. In 1921 a commentator in the Bournville works magazine mentions 'the inception of the works departmental games association sees a revival of the ideal which was set up by the original promoters of sport at Bournville – that of games and contests in which everybody may participate'. Leisure was thus an important part of adult life in Bournville.

## **Leisure**

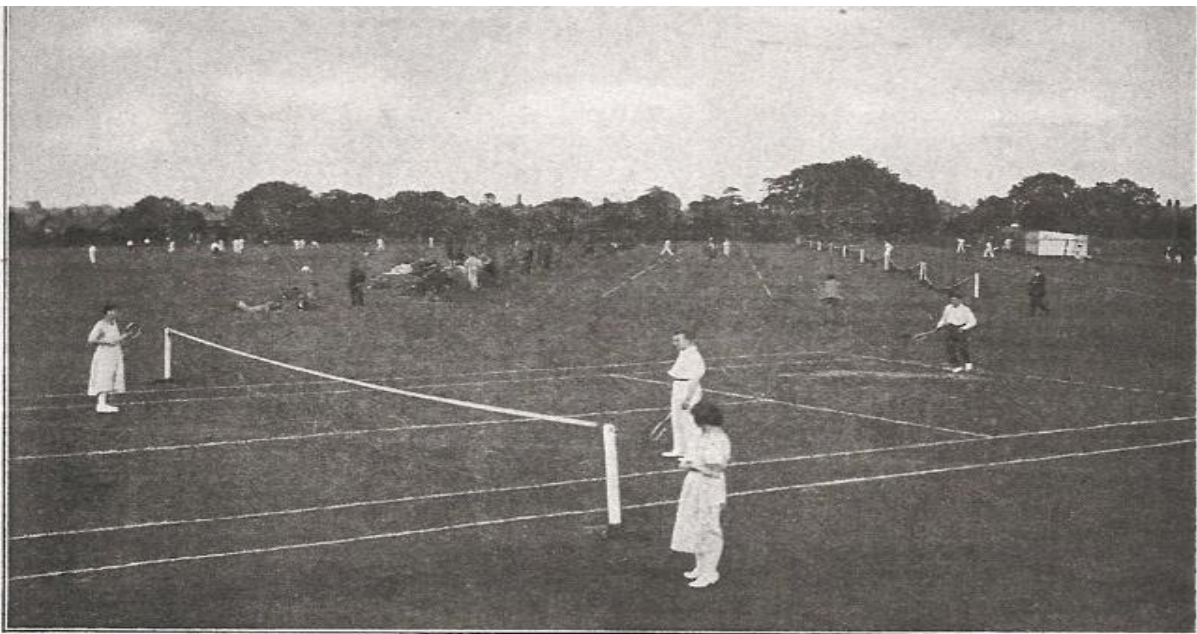
Examples of leisure clubs that were set up involve many sports clubs including but not limited to football, bowls, gymnastics and archery. The Weoley Hill cricket club was set up in 1929 and is still going strong today. Since its inception 'over 1000 players have been associated' with it. Many different people were involved in the club and Howard Clay, a member since 1965, remembers how everyone was involved from the male players themselves to player's wives, mums, girlfriends and daughters who 'were responsible for doing teas, first in the Village Hall and then in the clubhouse and Weoley Hill teas were some of the best on the circuit'.

It was not only sports and physical activity-based clubs that were set up by local adult community members as the St Johns Ambulance groups show. The first of these was set up in 1904 and the 'St Johns ambulance brigade provided a first aid service for the Bournville residents'. Ernest Allan Pritchard was active within the health and welfare of the employees of Cadburys and he became a first aider there. In 1908 he 'was awarded his bronze medallion from Royal Life Saving Society' and by 1909 he 'passed a course of instruction by the St John's Ambulance Association'. He would carry this passion throughout the rest of his life and it was through the St Johns Ambulance that in 1915 at aged 23, during the First World War, he signed up for a British Red Cross mission to send medical aid to Serbia. He would remain a volunteer with St John's Ambulance until 1934, but his passion for helping others continued throughout the rest of his life. His story and the participation of many others in the adult clubs and



societies set up in Bournville really show how the adults of Bournville created their own community through improving and expanding their own interests.

We cannot talk about leisure clubs and societies without mentioning Rowheath Pavilion, which was and still is located just up the road from Bournville. When this Pavilion opened in 1924 its facilities included '14 football pitches, 4 hockey pitches, 2 Rugby, 31 tennis courts, 4 Netball grounds, 2 bowling greens, 2 croquet lawns, an athletic track, clock golf, boating and fishing lake'. Alongside this there were 34 dressing rooms, 14 shower baths and 20 washbasins. The terrace room also had seating availability for 250 people and in the summer the pavilion also hosted open air concert and theatre productions.



A GENERAL VIEW OF THE TENNIS COURTS.

*Figure 7: The Tennis courts at Rowheath.*



*Figure 8: The Bournville football team photo on the recreation grounds.*

Perhaps most loved by families and young adults within the community was the Rowheath Lido. It opened in 1937 and had two pools, one of which had diving boards. Originally only meant for use by Cadbury employees the Lido offered a space in which the community could come together outside of work and offered, most importantly of course, a place to cool down when the factory became hot during the summer. The Lido, whilst no longer in existence, holds many happy memories for the people of Bournville. Anne Oxley humorously recalls bluffing her way into the Lido by pretending she was with another family. When Mr Gunn, who manned the admissions gate, caught on to what she was doing he commented on not realising she had so many brothers, but still let her in anyway.



*Figure 9: The Lido at Rowheath Pavilion.*

As a side note the Pavilion did not just cater to leisure activities for the Bournville Community. During the Second World War it acted as a centre for 'Stay at home holidays'. During this difficult time events were put on to keep the community going with theatre productions, sports and dancing all taking place. June Clarke fondly remembers 'terrace dancing on the grass at Rowheath with boys on one side and girls on the other and everyone home by 11pm. ' L.J. Knight who ran the radio shop in Heath Road supplied the music for dancing and the RAF had a dance band when they were stationed there. Popular dance tunes at the time were the Valetta and military two step'. It is admirable how the adults of Bournville turned the Pavilion into a space to support each other and have a good time during such a dark period and it only deepened the ties within the community.

The leisure clubs further show this desire to create a community in Bournville by providing opportunities to better residents through educational clubs, like the aforementioned St Johns Ambulance, but also grow and expand the community in shared experiences of happiness as the experiences of sports clubs and Rowheath Lido show.

Specifically, the employees of Cadburys also had their own community within the community of Bournville. A.T.King remembers working from 6am to 5pm with ' half an hour breakfast and one and a quarter hours dinner', with 'tea and breakfast in the morning being ready at 6'. He

also fondly remembers George Cadbury, particularly the time he brought in a bicycle for the boys to learn to ride at dinner time and allowing them to ride it home in turns when they did. During free time at work there were also fun activities put on such as the 'Front vs Back' Cricket and Football games with the personnel in the Office and Warehouse, known as 'the front' going against those in the Works known as 'the back', followed by afternoon teas in the warehouse. All of these activities encouraged workers from different sections of the company to bond together.

What also helped to bond the workers together, outside of the boundary off the factory were the day trips and holidays organised by the Bournville community. From the foremen to the gardeners to the office staff to the metal plate workers, the warehouse staff and electrical department (to name but a few!) each section of the firm organised their own outings. Mr T.J O'Brien described the Cadburys as having a 'faithful and honest crew, ' and, for him, not having Bournville would be a 'loss [...] to the human race'. He echoes this idea of a communal spirit, especially between the Cadburys and the residents and workers of Bournville, suggesting that 'the kind and loving spirit which has existed between employers and employees in the past will continue from generation to generation, and if my wish is fulfilled, I do not think we need fear for the future of Bournville'. We see this in the trips employees took.

One of the 'most delightful trips ever taken by the staff' was to Chepstow accompanied by a visit to Tintern Abbey. The whole day was themed around literature with a quote from literature chosen by Mr and Mrs Johnson accompanying each activity. For example, the group arrived in the office at 8am ("Business first, pleasure afterwards, as King Richard the Third said 'afore he smothered the Princes in the Tower.'" - Sam Weller). Then they worked until 9:25am and then left Bournville at 9:45 by train ("Away with a shriek, and a roar and a rattle." - Dickens). At 1:15 was the dinner ("I almost die for food and let me have it. Sit down and welcome to our table." - As You Like It).

Another trip included an outing to Malvern in June 1904 by the electrical department. Thirty people went by train to Malvern where they climbed the hills and drank a basket of ginger beer provided by an old lady who 'will remember us for the rest of her days'.

Employee outings were not restricted to departments. In 1908 departments mixed and at the start of the general holidays, 1,275 employees and friends went to the seaside'. Four trains left Bournville – 250 passengers went to the North Welsh coast, 325 to Cardigan Bay resorts, 300 to Blackpool and the Isle of Mann and 400 to the South coast.

These trips, outings and holidays were also not restricted to England. Howard also recalls how Cadburys encouraged the young men and woman to organise educational tours abroad. Howard's mother, Miriam Clay, went with the group to Norway in 1935 and she wrote a report of the trip in the September edition of the Bournville Works Magazine. All of these many trips mentioned connected the community through shared happy experiences allowing them to spread the community outside of work.

## Visitors to Bournville

Lets leave the adults to their holidays and outings and talk about those who went on outings to Bournville instead. As testament to the strength of the community of Bournville, people from outside the area and indeed outside the country took notice. There was significant interest in Bournville from as far away as 'Japan, including the Prince and Princess Takamatsu of Japan in 1930 and Africa -especially countries where cocoa was produced'. In a particularly funny anecdote, King Khama of Bechuanaland came to Bournville in 1895 and went missing. He was eventually found in observing the packet of an export case 'in the hope, possibly, of seeing it again in Africa'. In the visitor's book there can be seen entries in 'Welsh, German, Chinese, Swedish, Spanish, Afrikaans, French, Danish, Erse, and Finnish' and 'even visitors from the United States admit that they are impressed'. There seems to be notable pride placed on the German response, calling it 'the best organised works I have ever seen'. The German Burgomaster of Aachen further praised Bournville and the Cadburys with emphasis placed on the 'way in which the Firm looked after the health and physical development of the workpeople'.

It was not only international visitors that were fascinated by Bournville and its community, on a national scale 'Cadbury also ran excursions for people from other places to come and see the factory from 1929. In 1933 156,000 people came to see the factory, mostly on half day excursions at prices varying from 6/9 from Birkenhead to 15/- from Newcastle.'

Local people and employees got involved in shaping the experiences of the visitors. William Anney served in the firm for 40 or so years and he eventually became involved in these visits. He said that 'in those days we had up to a thousand visitors a day'. He had to 'make sure tables and chairs were ready for the different parties' tea at the end of the tour'. Miriam Clay also helped touring visitors in the 1960s. As a former forewoman she knew the factory and Bournville well and so she became a guide and helped to describe Cadburys and Bournville to visitors for a number of years.

As a result of these national and international visits the spirit and community of Bournville spread outside of the village, with George Cadbury explaining to visitors that 'their visit had not been to create a rivalry as to which could destroy men's lives most easily, but to create a health rivalry as to which should make the homes and lives of the workers happiest'. Indeed, this aim that George Cadbury speaks of, of spreading the spirit of the community of Bournville, is reflected in the comments in 1934 of French author Andre' Mauroise that 'there is nothing pleasanter at a time of world crisis than to visit a community which is happy and deserved to be happy'.

Links were also created with other garden city movements. 'The German Garden City association visited on July 12, 1909 and the following year again, as well as the French Garden City association, demonstrating an international level of interest in the Bournville project'. Through these links with other cities, the international and the national visits we see the development of a wider community, one that exists beyond the boundary of Bournville Village.

Through looking at the perspectives of both the children and the adults alongside the opinions of visitors to the village our research has led us to understanding how the working- class people of Bournville have built Bournville by creating their own community. It is nice to think that we too are a part of the community as we are continuing the tradition of telling and expanding on the story of Bournville. In the Bournville village works magazines we see a strong desire to start a local history scheme, aimed at creating a collection of 'photographs and lantern slides', originals or from old maps or drawings, for 'articles, lectures and class-lessons' to document the history of the district. As well as the Bournville work's magazine history project, the children of Bournville created their own research project about the history of Bournville, particularly of their school. In 1993 they created a booklet, titled 'Time tells a tale', which aimed to tell the history of the school from the perspective of the clock on the tower. Our project is therefore a continuation of what seems to be a tradition of local people and history enthusiasts developing and exploring Bournville's history and therefore we have added our own small contribution to the hard work and effort put into Building Bournville.

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