



Trail

Life is sweet

Explore the tasty village in the suburbs of Birmingham

Time: 1¼ hours

Distance: 2 miles

Landscape: urban

Nestled in the busy Birmingham suburbs Bournville is a tranquil village that seems a world away from the streets and skyscrapers of the city centre.

Like Port Sunlight in Merseyside and Saltaire near Bradford, Bournville was designed as a model village. It was built by the Cadbury family from 1879, but contrary to popular belief, the village was conceived for people from a wide range of backgrounds and not just for workers of the famous chocolate factory.

This short walk explores this 'chocolate village' to find out why life is sweet in this Birmingham suburb.

Location:

Bournville Village, Birmingham

Start:

Bournville Village Green, B30 2AA

Finish:

Mary Vale Road almshouses

Grid reference:

SP 04479 81332

Directions



From the Cadbury World car park - use the pedestrian crossing and follow the signs to Bournville Village, which will take you up a short path and to the village green.

From Bournville station - take the Mary Vale Road exit and turn right. Continue to the junction with Linden Road then turn right past some playing fields. Pass the entrance to Cadbury World then use the zebra crossing outside to enter the Village Green.



Route and stopping points



01 Bournville Village Green

04 Cadbury Men's Pavilion

02 Stock's Wood

02 Mary Vale Road

03 Cadbury World

03 Mary Vale Road almshouses

01 Bournville Village Green

We get our first taste of the Cadbury story at the village green. John Cadbury established his company in Birmingham in 1824 selling tea, coffee and other provisions from a grocery shop on Bull Street. With his brother Benjamin, he soon began to specialise in cocoa and drinking chocolate, which they produced on a commercial scale from a warehouse in Crooked Lane. In 1861 John's sons, Richard and George, took over the business. They continued the focus on chocolate and boosted the company's success.

In 1878 the brothers built a new factory in the countryside about four miles south of central Birmingham. This site gave them better transport links to access the ingredients they needed for chocolate-making and plenty of room to expand.

The Cadburys were Quakers and their religious beliefs meant that they cared deeply about the health and well-being of their employees. Appalled by the "evils of modern, cramped living conditions" they saw in the city, the brothers planned a village beside their new factory to show that good housing could improve people's lives.

At his own expense, George purchased a further 120 acres of land. He used it to design a village, with plenty of large open areas for exercise and enjoyment – but no pubs to lead the workers astray! While the factory was the epicentre of the village, George was keen to create a real sense of community. This village green was a central part of his design.

The green was Bournville's social hub, with schools, a park and a small row of shops around it completing a 'village idyll' appearance. The beautiful surroundings and generous amount of green space were a real contrast to the overcrowded and dirty conditions of Birmingham city centre.

Bournville became known as 'the factory in a garden'. George Cadbury said: "No man ought to be condemned to live in a place where a rose cannot grow". The generosity and care the family showed to their employees did not go unnoticed.

Look in the centre of the green for the eight-sided Rest House. It was presented to George and Elizabeth Cadbury in 1914 to mark their silver wedding anniversary. Go inside and you'll see it was paid for by their staff. An inscription by the employees expresses their gratitude to the family.

Over the next few stops we'll explore the Cadbury family's unique vision by looking at the development and evolution of the village.

Directions

Return to the road, opposite the shops, and follow it to the left. Continue until you reach Maple Road to the left. Take this road, passing by Selly Manor Museum, which is open to the public and was moved to Bournville from its original location by George Cadbury. Continue until you see a wooded area on the right hand side, just beyond Bournville Garden Centre.

02 Stock's Wood

Glancing into the woodland here you might forget that we are within the UK's second-largest city. The beauty of this place, particularly in spring when carpeted with bluebells, suggests much more rural and serene settings. The remnants of this wood, however, help to explain why Birmingham and the local area has become such an urban environment.

Stock's Wood is believed to be part of the large ancient Forest of Arden, which once covered Warwickshire to the north-west of the River Avon. Local boy William Shakespeare's play *As You Like It* features a Forest of Arden, which may have been inspired by this ancient woodland. The majority of the forest was cleared before and during the Middle Ages, with only remnants surviving around Warwickshire and Birmingham.

The wood, mostly comprising oak trees, sits on top of clay soils. Despite creating an attractive environment for oaks, clay doesn't allow water to soak easily into the ground, making it unsuitable for many other trees or crops. So the soil here, and throughout Birmingham, wasn't particularly useful for agriculture. Instead buildings were constructed and a city grew up.

The survival of this wood, and its history, was one reason why the Cadbury family found Bournville an attractive location for their business. They could capitalise on the area's plentiful open space and its natural beauty.

Directions

Retrace your steps back down the road, passing by Selly Manor, turning right on Sycamore Road. Follow this road to the end, turning left at the end of the row of shops and after the church. The Cadbury World entrance driveway is almost immediately on your left. Follow this to the entrance of Cadbury's.

03 Cadbury World

We cannot pass the gates to Cadbury World without taking a peep at the reason for the surrounding village. The large redbrick building is the Cadbury chocolate factory. The Cadbury brothers were clever in selecting this site. Its location provided excellent access for importing the basic ingredients and exporting the finished chocolate.

The Bournville site had direct access to both the Worcester and Birmingham Canal and the new Birmingham West Suburban Railway, making it highly efficient. Milk and cocoa were imported via the ports of London and Southampton then travelled to Bournville by boat or rail.

Chocolate is still made here. Some 1.2 million 100g-sized Dairy Milk bars are produced every day. For a while though production of this iconic bar shifted to Poland, where manufacturing costs were cheaper. This caused much upset in the UK, as jobs were under threat and it seemed Bournville's proud heritage would be lost.

As our world has globalised, many industries have relocated from Britain to other countries. Some (like Poland and China) have cheaper labour costs while others (like Germany and South Korea) have better technology. In 2010 the American company Kraft took over Cadbury, saying they could not guarantee jobs in the UK beyond 2012.

Fortunately, in 2014, they invested £75 million in new machinery to make the Bournville site competitive again. Sadly the Cadbury factory in Somerdale near Bristol was closed. Production was transferred to Poland and at least 500 jobs were lost.

Not all manufacturing companies have remained financially viable or are fortunate enough to receive investment to save their British factories. Just six miles north of Bournville lies Smethwick. In the 19th and early 20th centuries it was home to several engineering and glassmaking factories. Some of these employers were benevolent, like the Cadburys, and created houses for their workers. But following factory closures there is little of their legacy left and Smethwick is now one of the most deprived areas in England.

Cadbury, however, is a globally successful business. It is the second-largest confectionery company in the world (after Mars) and before the Kraft takeover, a regular feature in the FTSE 100. That does not mean that there has not been change. Some of the workers feel the ethos of the company has altered, from the family-feel of Cadbury to a more pressurised environment under Kraft, with higher targets and

increased mechanisation.

Alongside making chocolate, the company makes a valuable contribution to the economy. Cadbury World opened here in 1990 and is one of Birmingham's biggest tourist attractions, with over 500,000 visitors each year. Features include chocolate making demonstrations, tastings, rides, plus exhibitions on the history of chocolate and the Cadbury family. The site also incorporates a research and development centre.

It's amazing to think that all of this is a legacy of the successful business that the Cadbury family built in the nineteenth century.

Directions

Retrace your steps back to the main road, at the turn off point into Cadbury World. Turn left on this road and follow the hill upwards. Take the first left into Bournville Lane, continuing until you reach the Men's Pavilion where you should have a good view of the green sports field in front of you.

04 Cadbury Men's Pavilion

A beautifully manicured cricket pitch is not the first thing you would expect to find within a factory grounds. But as we have discovered, the Cadburys had a great concern for the health and well-being of their workforce. To this end they created plenty of shared space alongside the factory to help the workers and their families relax and stay healthy.

The Cadbury family were not the only pioneers of such ideas. The Rowntree family in York were also exploring the 'garden village' concept. The Rowntrees were Quakers too, and their faith urged them to work for a fairer society. In 1901 they built the model village of New Earswick (just north of York) to provide accommodation for their workers and managers. And just a few years earlier, William Lever created Port Sunlight on the Wirral for workers in his soap factory.

In all of these model villages green space and a sense of community was key. These pioneers wanted to create a 'brotherhood' amongst their workers, irrespective of their background and level of income. Public spaces like this cricket pitch aimed to establish a community, where working positions and ranks were transcended and, outside of the factory, residents could become equals.

Since the Cadbury's created their 'factory in a garden', Birmingham has grown considerably. Home to around 1.1 million in 2014, it is now the most populous city outside of London. Bournville has become enveloped in the suburbs. Nonetheless, the Cadbury brothers' foresight means that the village retains a 'rural' feel.

Today local residents still use this ground for cricket and football fixtures. It's also the site of the annual Bournville Village Festival, which celebrates the traditions of the village. The Bournville estate is now managed by Bournville Village Trust, which was founded in 1900 and is a housing association and charity. The Trust aims to continue to deliver the vision of its founder by providing high-quality housing and estate management services in Bournville and beyond.

Naturally, it is difficult maintaining the family feel established by the Cadburys over the decades, particularly as people come and go, and fewer of them work together in the factory. However, events like the Festival help to create a cohesive community.

There are minor grumbles about life in the village, with questions raised over provision for teenagers and minor acts of anti-social behaviour. Nonetheless a Rowntree Foundation report found that 94% of residents said they were satisfied or very satisfied with the area as a place to live.

Directions

Retrace your steps back to the main road. Turn left and follow Linden Road, before taking the first road on the left. Stop somewhere along this road.

05 Mary Vale Road

Take a good look at the houses along both sides of Mary Vale Road; how do they compare? On the left hand side are houses designed specifically for the Bournville estate. These relatively large, rectangular homes have their own gardens. They were designed to give workers a sense of personal space and were considerably more comfortable than the overcrowded and dark 'tunnel-back' (narrow terraced) housing in the inner suburbs.

The Cadbury family took on an architect called William Alexander Harvey and worked closely with him to realise their vision. Harvey was influenced by the Arts and Crafts Movement, which valued traditional craftsmanship, simple forms and romantic or folk-style decoration. At the very young age of 20, he designed most of the buildings in Bournville. This helped to give the village its coherent and pleasing feel.

The Cadburys intended Bournville to be open to all, whether you worked in the factory or not. Houses could either be bought outright or rented. George soon found that wealthier people were buying up the beautiful houses to sell on for profit, so he started building homes for rent too. George's 'ten shilling' or 'sunshine houses' were deliberately set at an affordable rent, to help those on lower incomes.

In this respect, the Cadbury family established housing which all their employees could afford. Offering people a house was a key way of encouraging people to move into Bournville.

This legacy is continued today by Bournville Village Trust which manages almost 8,000 houses of mixed tenure in Bournville and other areas of Birmingham and Telford. The Trust also provides houses specifically for older people, people with learning disabilities and young people leaving care. Bournville maintains a social and inclusive mix you don't always find in Britain's suburbs.

Sustaining a harmonious community is always a difficult task, particularly as times change and people move. Bournville Village Trust recognises this and is working to provide for people with a range of needs and to sustain the community spirit that makes it such a special place.

Directions

Retrace your steps along Mary Vale Road to the Almshouses on the corner of Linden Road.

06 Mary Vale Road almshouses

This charming row of single-storied, redbrick houses, with little gabled windows is almshouses. They were designed as bungalows to provide appropriate housing for retired Cadbury factory workers. Retired Cadbury employees, and widows and widowers of former employees, are still eligible for a home here, in yet another example of the Cadburys' values inspiring the work of the Trust today.

The Cadbury family built not only a successful business, but also helped pioneer the concept of the garden village. This was a place of affordable housing with pleasant surroundings, where workers and the wider community could live their best lives.

George founded the Trust, as a custodian of Bournville, following the death of his brother Richard in 1899 which had a profound effect on him. The establishment of the Trust meant that even after his death, the homes George lovingly developed would still benefit those in need. They did not want the land to be bought up by private developers as its value increased, and the green spaces filled in with monotonous streets.

Thanks to their foresight, the area today is still remarkably green and it retains its 'village' feel among Birmingham's busy suburbs. Houses prices are high here, but as we saw, a number of houses are maintained at more affordable rates. While chocolate production looked uncertain for a while it seems to be safe for now, at least in Bournville.

Bournville is often credited with laying the foundations for the development of garden cities, which were also influential on Britain's post-war New Towns. These places were carefully designed to provide affordable housing, enhance people's lives, create integrated communities and be places that people were invested in and cared for. These are ambitious aims, and something town planners still strive for.

What is remarkable is that the Cadburys' vision still has an influence on planning today. Bournville Village Trust is developing new sites in Telford that seek to apply George Cadbury's ideas to creating new sustainable communities. Delegates from one of the largest housing associations in Denmark and the Health Ministry in China have also been visitors to Bournville to gain inspiration for developments back home.

Closer to home, in Smethwick, a new development aims to return to the 19th century model of benevolent employers but with a 21st century twist. The new Midland Metropolitan Hospital is being designed to work with and provide for the local community, rather than just being dropped into their midst. The development will include some social housing provision and a large green for sports and vegetable growing. As many of the construction materials as possible are being sourced from the local area and the food served in the hospital will be prepared by local chefs to sustain and create new jobs here.

Although not everything has remained unchanged, and there are challenges to building a harmonious community where all feel included, there is much to be proud of still in Bournville. Bournville Village is a tasteful place to visit and live, and is still making mouths water across the world today. It is not surprising then that for many people in this 'chocolate village' life is sweet.

Directions

To Bournville railway station: Continue down Mary Vale Road, past the Almshouses at The Quadrangle and you will reach the station after about 500 metres.

Back to Cadbury World: Retrace your steps to the end of Mary Vale Road (Almshouses at The Quadrangle on the corner). Turn right and continue down the hill, passing the cricket fields on your right, until you reach the car entrance to Cadbury World.



Trail complete – we hope you have enjoyed it!