

## Changing Birmingham - its people and places:

### Bournville Village

By Jim Wells, Friends Trustee

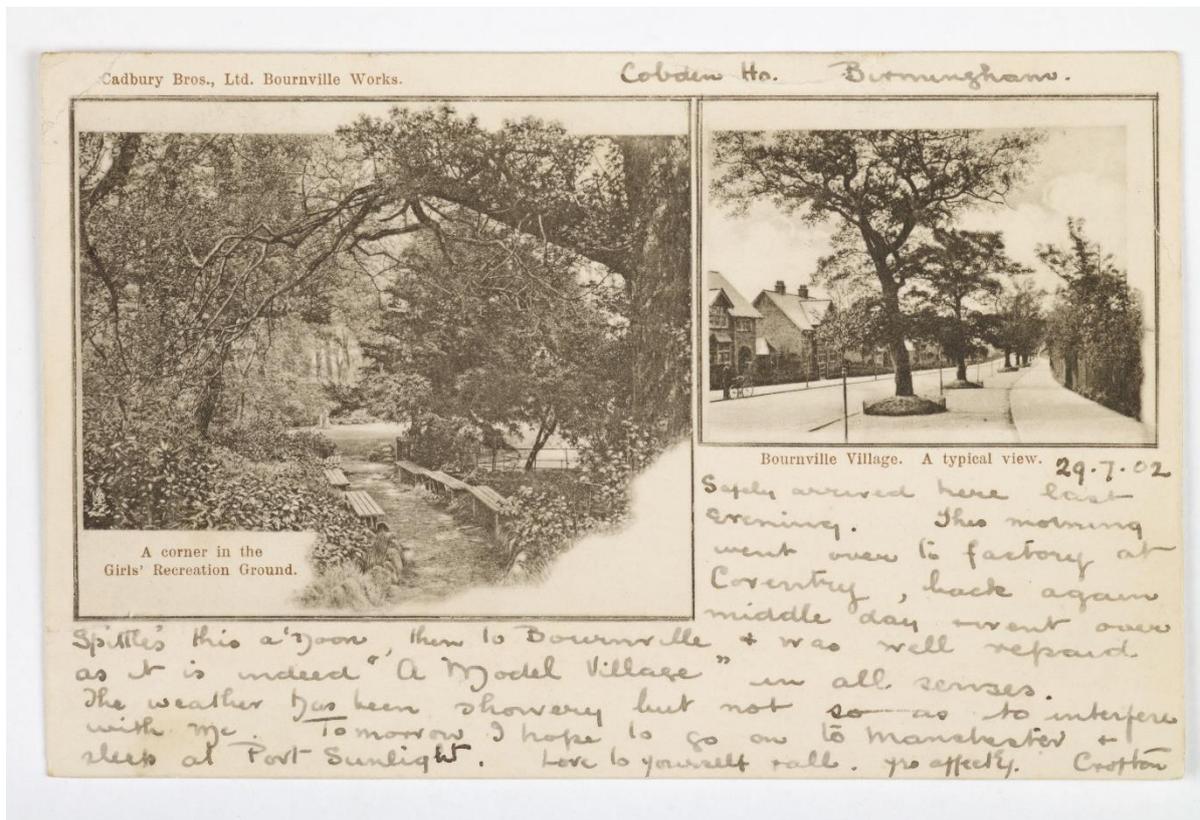
Using Birmingham Museums Trust's excellent online Digital Image Resource, we continue our exploration of 'Changing Birmingham - its people and places'. You can access the resource via the link: <https://dams.birminghammuseums.org.uk/asset-bank/action/viewDefaultHome?browseType=folders>



1980P92; 'A Bournville Workroom (decorating department)', 1910;  
Attributed to: H N Bradbear; Photo by Birmingham Museums Trust, licensed under CC0.

With summer here it seemed like a good opportunity to explore an outdoor feature of Birmingham's history, and that is Bournville Village. Situated in what is now suburban Birmingham, it was initiated by George and Elizabeth Cadbury to be a model for housing reform. George Cadbury was determined to prove that there was a viable alternative to the squalor of the back-to-back housing\* he had seen as a Sunday school teacher at the Severn Street School.

Cadbury bought 124 acres next to the Bournville Factory in 1894 and commissioned a young architect, William Harvey, to plan a model village. The aim was to have a socially mixed development with plenty of open space and well-designed housing. George was a vegetarian, not common at the time, and consequently allotments and large gardens for vegetable cultivation were central to the plan. By 1913 there were 1,100 gardens and 1,104 allotments, with classes to help people get the most out of their cultivation.



1995V632.1153; 'Postcard - Cadbury Bros Ltd Bournville Works', 1902;  
 Photo by Birmingham Museums Trust, licensed under CC0;  
 Topographical Views - Kesterton Collection

To avoid property speculation and paternalism, George gifted the estate to a specially set up Trust which then organised future developments and continues to thrive today. There was always a difficult balance to be struck between art and economy. However, this small part of Birmingham went on to have a positive national and international impact on housing design, in particular interwar municipal housing and the garden city movement, attracting visitors from all over the world. It has had its critics over the years but has stood the test of time and is well worth a summer stroll to admire the range of housing design and impressive public buildings such as the Friends Meeting House and Ruskin Hall. Having built up an appetite why not finish off with a visit to Birmingham Museums Trust's [Sarehole Mill](#) for a freshly made pizza?

#### Further Reading and Sources:

- 1) Michael Harrison, *'Bournville Model Village to Garden Suburb'*, Phillimore, 1999
- 2) Andy Foster, *'Birmingham Pevsner Architectural Guides'*, Yale University Press, 2016
- 3) [Selly Manor Museum](#)

\*<https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/birmingham-back-to-backs> – the last example left of the type of housing Cadbury was looking to replace.



1995V632.1146; 'Bournville, Maryvale Road';  
Photo by Birmingham Museums Trust, licensed under CC0;  
Purchased from Roger Kesterton.



1980P54; 'Girls' Grounds, Bournville';  
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Attributed to: H N Bradbear.

Following Aston Hall's reopening on 7th July 2021, our next topic will be the Holte family.