

## Artefacts: Autumn 2023

# Changing Birmingham – its people and places: 'Every Picture tells a story': Cadbury Women

By Jim Wells, Friends Trustee

Amongst the items in BMT's Digital Asset Resource there is a classic late Victorian wedding photo, taken in 1891, depicting the Cadbury family and the Southall family. In the photo are two remarkable women: Geraldine Southall (1865-1941), the bride and a young Beatrice Cadbury (1884-1976), sitting in front of her as a bridesmaid. These women were from successful, wealthy manufacturing families, two of Birmingham's successful Quaker dynasties. The Quakers, a Christian non-conformist movement originating in the seventeenth century, were committed to a frugal and an egalitarian lifestyle. This article will provide an overview as to how Geraldine and Beatrice explored very different but striking paths to reconcile the potential contradictions of wealth with their Quaker beliefs.



*'Photograph of the Southall and Cadbury families', 1891; 1968M68.2*

Birmingham has a marvellous portrait of Geraldine Southall by Thomas Garvie in its collection.



*'Portrait of Geraldine Cadbury Nee Southall' by Thomas Bowman Garvie (d.1944), 1912; 1979V534*

Painted in 1912, the portrait gives us a real sense of the person she was. Prior to the First World War, Geraldine had been involved as a voluntary probation worker at one of the first children's courts, which were an experiment in removing children from the adult criminal justice system. Once the legal restrictions on women being magistrates were removed in 1920, she took on that role specifically for juvenile courts. As part of her international travel, she was able to see what other countries were doing in terms of providing a more humane and a less punitive juvenile justice system. This resulted in her involving her husband, Barrow Cadbury (1862-1958), in a project for a purpose-built children's court complex in Steelhouse Lane in Birmingham, which she designed and presented to the City on 17th July 1928. Her promotion of child guidance and psychological assessment in a more child-friendly environment was recognised nationally and she was chosen to take on prominent positions on Home Office Committees during the inter-war period.

Whilst Geraldine was involved in reforming the justice system, a Quaker tradition dating back to Elizabeth Fry, her sister-in-law Beatrice was living in Holland with her Dutch husband, Cornelius Boeke. She was frequently on the other side of the law, with regular spells in Dutch prisons for preaching a strongly pacifist message at street meetings. Beatrice made what could be called an 'absolutist' interpretation of her strict Quaker upbringing in regard to pacifism and wealth, and in 1920 she took a dramatic decision. In the aftermath of the horrors of the First World War she took the view that private ownership of capital was wrong. As a result, she felt that she could not continue to draw on the income of her inherited Cadbury shares. Her proposed solution was to hand the shares over to a workers committee, to give them a say in the running of the company at board level and access to the income. We are fortunate that many of the documents pertaining to this episode are in the Birmingham archives and we have an excellent biography of Beatrice by local author Fiona Joseph. In a letter to her brother, Barrow, in 1920 concerning her proposal, Beatrice writes: *'It will be very kind if thou wilt do all thou canst – to see that our letter to the workers is brought to their notice'*. One can only imagine the reaction of her brother, a director of a company which prided itself on its care for employees and its donations to charitable causes. After much correspondence involving the heads of the Men's and Women's Works Councils at Bournville, Tom Hackett and Kathleen Cox, a compromise was reached involving setting up the Boeke Trust to administer the funds on behalf of the Works Councils, supporting workers' welfare and international peace projects. It did not provide an input into the Board, which left Beatrice frustrated but accepting.

Tom Hackett and Kathleen Cox, the two representatives from the Works Councils, became a key link to the Cadbury company for Beatrice in subsequent years. The Councils had been set up after the First World War, with equal representation of employees and management.



*'Girls' Grounds, Bournville', attributed to H N Bradbear; 1980P54*

In 1931 Cadbury employed 7,327 people of which 3,694 were women. So what was life like for women on the shopfloor in this period? We are lucky to have some recorded memories from the inter-war era, one of which is Marjorie Malley talking to Carl Chinn in 1997. Marjorie started at Cadbury in 1931: '...the wages then were 11s 10d a week when most other firms paid 10s a week... Discipline was very strict, but they did look after your welfare, you know, resident doctors and dentists. And we had good sports and social activities provided'. These sports facilities for women were exceptional for the time and included cricket, athletics, and a swimming pool with time off work to learn to swim.

Geraldine and Beatrice both left lasting legacies in very different ways which this article has only briefly been able to touch upon.

## Illustrations:

- 1) <https://dams.birminghammuseums.org.uk/asset-bank/action/viewAsset?id=7662&index=4&total=38&view=viewSearchItem>

'Photograph of the Southall and Cadbury families', 1891; 1968M68.2; Photo by Birmingham Museums Trust, licensed under CC0 - a black and white photograph of the Southall and Cadbury families, showing the Liberty wedding.



- 2) <https://dams.birminghammuseums.org.uk/asset-bank/action/viewAsset?id=4691&index=1&total=2&view=viewSearchItem>

'Silk Wedding Dress' made by Liberty & Co, 1891; 1968M68; Presented by Mrs Cadbury, 1968; Photo by Birmingham Museums Trust, licensed under CC0.

This ivory pongee silk wedding dress was worn by Geraldine Southall at her wedding in 1891. It had a high neck trimmed with a wide ruffle; and long, tightly fitted sleeves. A drape of fabric from the right-hand side of the waist to the left hand shoulder conceals the front fastening. The back of the dress has a fitted bodice. The draped panel falls from either shoulder into a train, which is trimmed with a deep lace frill.





- 3) <https://dams.birminghammuseums.org.uk/asset-bank/action/viewAsset?id=8914&index=1&total=38&view=viewSearchItem>

'Portrait of Geraldine Cadbury Nee Southall' by Thomas Bowman Garvie (d.1944), 1912; 1979V534; Transferred from Birmingham Reference Library; Photo by Birmingham Museums Trust, licensed under CC0.



- 4) [Birmingham Museums Trust | Image Details - 1980P54 Girls' Grounds, Bournville](#)

'Girls' Grounds, Bournville', attributed to H N Bradbear; 1980P54; Photo by Birmingham Museums Trust, licensed under CC0. Showing the Cadbury chocolate factory in Birmingham.



## Sources and further reading

### 1) Fiona Joseph, 'Beatrice', Foxwell Press, 2012

A remarkable book telling a story that is usually only a footnote in Cadbury histories. It provided the trigger for this article.

### 2) Janet Whitney, 'Geraldine S. Cadbury, 1865-1941: A Biography', Harrap, 1949

Written not long after Geraldine Cadbury's death, it gives a full insight into her life from a contemporary perspective. Particularly interesting are the appendices where the author visits and describes the various institutions created by Geraldine such as the Children's Court.

### 3) Carl Chinn, 'The Cadbury Story: A Short History', Brewin Books, 1988

Carl Chinn, Birmingham's leading historian, gives a good account of the history of the Company with plenty of direct quotes from people who worked there over the years.

### 4) Deborah Cadbury, 'Chocolate Wars - From Cadbury to Kraft: 200 Years of Sweet Success and Bitter Rivalry', Harper Press, 2010

Written by a relative of the Cadbury owning branch of the family it provides a detailed history of the competition between the various Quaker English Chocolate makers, and later with the American and Swiss companies. She also examines the interaction between Quaker values and what became very successful capitalist enterprises, and the way in which the contradictions were dealt with.

### 5) Siân Roberts, 'Dame Geraldine Southall Cadbury', Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, 2014

A good succinct biography about Geraldine, which includes her husband, Barrow Cadbury as many of their projects were a joint enterprise.

### 6) Iris Carrington, 'Cadbury's Angels: Memories of Working with George Cadbury from Bridge Street to Bournville', Monks Bridge Books, 2011

The title refers to how the Cadbury female employees wore white overalls, giving an angelic appearance and of course they were often the majority of employees with women (single!) gaining senior positions in terms of shopfloor supervision.

### 7) Selly Manor Museum website: Cadbury Women: [Selly Manor | Cadbury Women \(sellymanormuseum.org.uk\)](http://sellymanormuseum.org.uk)

Selly Manor was moved and restored by the Cadbury family and is now a museum.

### 8) Library of Birmingham Archives

The Cadbury family archives, now held in the Library of Birmingham, are a fascinating resource with hand written letters by Beatrice and Geraldine and all the documents relating to the desire by Beatrice to handover her inheritance to the Cadbury workers.