

**AROUND  
KEYNSHAM & SALTFORD  
PAST  
AND  
PRESENT**



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AROUND

KEYNSHAM & SALTFFORD  
PAST & PRESENT

“Remembering Somerdale”

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Cover illustration;

6000 of these medals were struck and, mounted in a presentation case, were given to all Fry’s employees in 1928 to commemorate the bicentenary of the birth of Joseph Fry, the founder of the firm.

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[www.keysalthist.org.uk](http://www.keysalthist.org.uk)

## **1. BEFORE 1920**

The firm of J S Fry and Sons Ltd was notable in claiming a foundation based on the earliest manufacture of chocolate; its roots stretching back for almost two hundred years to 1728. The introduction of drinking chocolate through Europe from Central America was dependent on the individual services of the coffee houses of London until well into the eighteenth century.

- 1728** Joseph Fry born. Walter Churchman founded a business to make chocolate in Bristol.
- 1729** Letters Patent granted by His Majesty King George II to Walter Churchman for a water engine used to make chocolate. Churchman probably used water-powered edge runners for preparing cacao beans by crushing on a far larger scale than previously.
- 1731** Advertisement in Felix Farley's Bristol Journal for Walter Churchman's chocolate made with his patented water engine invented for 'the expeditious, fine and clean making of Chocolate to greater perfection than by any other method'. (After the death of Walter Churchman the business was continued by his son Charles).
- 1756** Joseph Fry in business and advertising 'the best sorts of chocolate made and sold wholesale and retail by Joseph Fry, Apothecary, in Small Street, Bristol'. This advertisement is one of the earliest associations of the name of Fry with chocolate.
- 1761** Charles Churchman died in May, and in November an advertisement was published:- 'Churchman's Patent Chocolate is now made by Joseph Fry and John Vaughan, the said Churchman's executor, shop for the sale of Churchman's Patent and other the present sole proprietors of the famous Water Engine at Castle Mill' (Both the Churchman and the Fry families were members of the Religious Society of Friends, colloquially known as 'Quakers')
- 1777** Joseph Fry moved to Union Street 'opposite the upper gate of St James's Market, where he keeps sorts of Chocolate Nibs and Cocoa'. But eating chocolate was virtually unknown at this time and the production at Union Street consisted of tablets of chocolate, which the consumer placed at the bottom of a chocolate cup and added water or milk.
- 1787** Death of Joseph Fry. His widow, Anna, and their son Joseph Storrs Fry (b 1767) carried on the business under the name 'Anna Fry and Son'.

- 1795** Joseph Storrs Fry patented a new technique for grinding cocoa beans. A Watts steam engine was installed to provide the necessary power for the cocoa grinding machinery.
- 1803** Death of Anna Fry. A Mr. Hunt joined the firm that traded as Fry and Hunt until 1822 when Mr. Hunt retired. Joseph Storrs Fry's three sons, Joseph, Francis and Richard then joined the firm and the name changed to J S Fry & Sons
- 1820** The proportion of female to male employees was 2:1. In the early years they were often the daughters of older male employees.
- 1835** Death of Joseph Storrs Fry.
- 1850** Girls working in the factory were provided with overalls, but they had to contribute to the cost.
- 1851** The company won a gold medal for its chocolate at the Great Exhibition at the Crystal Palace in Hyde Park, London. Over the following fifty years, 300 prize medals and diplomas were won at exhibitions here and overseas. The quality of the company's products led to a number of Royal Appointments, the first being to Queen Victoria, 'by Special Warrant, Manufacturers of Chocolate and Cocoa to the Royal House'.
- 1854** The Crimean War. Fry's sent tins of chocolates to the British troops fighting in this campaign.
- 1866** The famous Chocolate Cream bar was first made. Fry's also made Homoeopathic Cocoa, said to have 'a delicacy of flavour, perfect solubility, and highly nutritious properties'.
- 1867** Emperor Napoleon of France by a Special Brevet issued at the Palace of the Tuileries appointed J.S. Fry & Sons Manufacturers of Chocolate and Cocoa to the Imperial House.
- 1890** A visitor to the factory noticed the 'hundreds of neatly dressed girls preparing fancy chocolates, filling fancy boxes, wrapping chocolates in pretty tinfoil, weighing cocoa, or covering little balls of cream with chocolate'. Most of the girls were on piecework, for example, they were paid three-farthings (0.313p) or one penny (0.417p) for filling a tin of 140 creams. However, they could be fined for poor work, such as persistent waste of raw materials, dropping work on the floor, eating the products or spoiling their work. Only single girls were employed. Thus, there was a high turnover due to girls leaving to get married.
- 1896** Fry's became a registered private company on 1<sup>st</sup> January with authorised capital of £1 million. There were nearly 4,500

employees. Directors were seven members of the Fry family:- Joseph Storrs Fry, Jnr, (Chairman & great-grandson of Dr Joseph Fry), F. J. Fry, A. M. Fry, R. A. Fry, R. J. Fry, Conrad P. Fry, Cecil B. Fry (last member of the Fry family to be associated with the business. He died in 1952.) In the words of a contemporary report, the Fry family was *'well and honourably known in Bristol and the district and revered for their good works.'*

**1902**

King Edward VII confirmed the appointment of J. S. Fry & Sons Ltd as Manufacturers of Chocolate and Cocoa to the Royal House. Fry's had previously held a similar appointment for forty years when the King had been Prince of Wales. Fry's marked the coronation of King Edward VII and Queen Alexandra, with Mr Joseph Storrs Fry, Jnr officiating at social gatherings on three successive days when 2,000 employees assembled in the Colston Hall.

**1903** Worries about fire safety. During the latter part of the nineteenth century Fry's had built more factories in the vicinity of Union Street, Bristol as the business continued to grow. Massive factory blocks were erected on the sites of slum tenements in what is now the Broadmead shopping area. (Later the Odeon cinema would be built at the bottom of Union Street on the site of Fry's five storey building, No 5 factory.) A contemporary report described the factories as 'solid blocks of iron, steel, red and white bricks, Cornish granite and concrete; they are built as substantially as the masons' art and lavish expenditure can make them. Under their tremendous loads of machinery they stand as firm as the everlasting rock'. But in 1903, suddenly, there was nationwide alarm about people working in high rise buildings, following a fire in workshops and offices in Queen Victoria Street, London. Nine workers died in the fire, partly because the fire brigade did not have enough long ladders quickly available to reach people trapped on the top floor. Bristol Fire Brigade reacted by purchasing a ladder that could be extended to a height of 80ft (24m) and this was tested satisfactorily at Fry's tallest seven storey building. Perhaps some of the 'neatly dressed girls', or 'Fry's Angels' as they later became

known, were treated to being ‘rescued’ by firemen on this occasion!



Fry's Union Street Factory

- 1910** New factory for box making built at junction of Quay Street and Christmas Street. By now Fry's had a substantial export business with products going to Australia and New Zealand, North America, Mexico, South America, Mediterranean countries and the Middle East, Africa, India, China and Japan.
- 1914** The First World War had a significant effect on Fry's as many of its younger male employees left to join the armed forces. The company gave a guarantee to these men that they would be able to return to their jobs when the war was over.
- 1917** It was reported that there were more than 2,500 girls working in the Union Street factories, together with a number of 'clerks, lady clerks, typists and travellers in the offices'.
- 1918** The end of the First World War, but sadly more than 100 of the men who had left to join up had died in the conflict. Among them was Leslie Harrington Fry, a great-great grandson of the firm's founder, Dr Joseph Fry. The names of those who died were recorded on a bronze War Memorial erected at the company's



premises. The memorial was later moved to Somerdale. It now stands at the south end of D Block. In 1918 Fry's merged its financial interests with Cadbury Brothers Limited, founded 1831, to form the British Cocoa and Chocolate Company which then held the ordinary shares of Fry's and Cadbury's. Major Egbert Cadbury became a director and worked with Cecil Fry on the mammoth task of moving Fry's factories from Bristol to Keynsham.



The bronze war memorial

## 2. THE KEYNSHAM HAMS

The meadows bounded by the River Avon Had long been famous for fattening cattle. Farmers came from as far afield as Ireland, bringing their cattle to graze on the grass which thrived on the rich alluvial soil.

J S Fry & Sons Ltd was looking for a site before the First World War outside Bristol, in order that they could build a new factory to expand their chocolate making business.

They initially purchased the large old farm with its acreage. The last occupants were Albert and Rhoda Clothier. It is probably that Chandos Road was named after the farm as all the land had been owned by the Dukes of Buckingham and Chandos, successors to the Bridges Family.

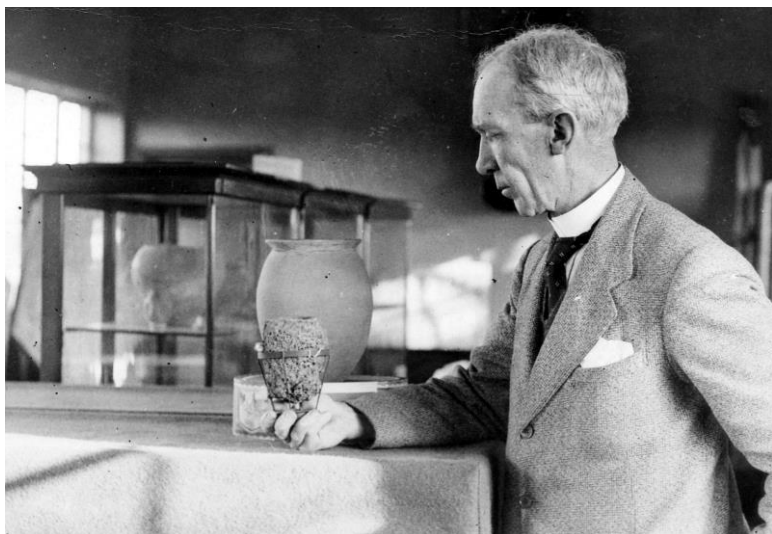


Clearing the site

The Hams containing the common strips were then bought, the whole acreage totalling 230 acres.

Notes: A complete history of the site from the Roman period to the present by Mrs. Barbara Lowe, Society president, is contained in Journal No. 9 and can be found for sale on the publications sales table. It is well worth perusing.

Mr. Ernest W Hilton who moved down from Manchester was the architect appointed by the Fry's. He lived in Station Road and was the uncle of the late Miss Joyce Knight. His enthusiasm was instrumental in recovering and recording the roman remains.



Above, Ernest Hilton in 1932 holding a roman crucible in the Museum (below) that was housed in No 1 Lodge.



### **3. ABOVE THE FLOODS**

An aerial photograph of Somerdale taken during the floods of July 1968 shows the factory apparently standing on an island surrounded by water. But there was some flooding of the office basement and all the telephones were out of action for a time.



In planning the factory in the 1920's the directors of J. S. Fry & Sons Ltd. had attempted to ensure that the buildings would be above anticipated flood levels.

Nearby Keynsham Hams had long been recognised as a flood plain. When not under water the hams provided rich pastures for the fattening of beef cattle.

A key level was the 'Ordnance datum' line, which represented the average tide level at Liverpool, and an article in the bicentenary edition of the Fry's Works Magazine, published in 1928, described the principles on which the Somerdale factory and its ancillary buildings were being constructed.

The buildings are on two levels, the Stores level which is forty-four feet Ordnance datum, and the Factory level which is fourteen feet higher. A distance of fourteen feet separates each floor from its next floor or floors'.

Ordnance Survey maps show that most of the Keynsham Hams are nine to ten metres (30 to 33 feet) above the ‘Ordnance datum’ line whereas the land at the edge of the stores and the factory rises to fifteen metres (50 feet) above the line. The top gates at the junction with Station Hill and Chandos Road are twenty-five metres (85 feet) above.

Before building work started in 1921 the well-known Bristol firm of surveyors, J. P. Sturge & Sons had checked on old records of floods in the area and found that only on two occasions in the previous 120 years had floods higher than 11.75 metres (40 feet) been recorded, and in neither case did the level exceed 12.05 metres (41 feet) above ‘Ordnance datum’.

The information undoubtedly influenced the directors in their decision on the site of the factory. Records kept subsequently at the Somerdale Power House show forty-six occasions on which significant floods occurred over a period of fourteen years from late 1924 to early 1939. None was as high as the two that occurred before 1921. The highest was 11.53 metres (37ft 10ins) recorded at 10.00pm on 5th January 1925.



Part of the girder construction 1922

#### **4. CHOCOLATE COMES TO KEYNSHAM**

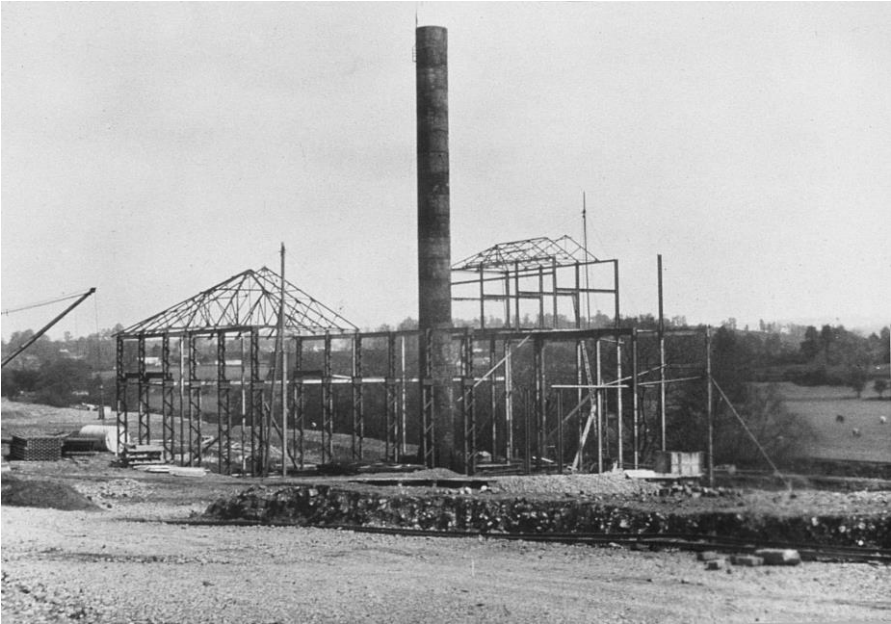
The assimilation of a large modern chocolate making factory in Keynsham during the 1920's was responsible for the growth of the former small-time village community to that of a busy town. It was an intrusion that, originally, was resented by Keynsham's older inhabitants but, inevitably, that feeling was dissipated as the advantages became apparent. Preparations to remove the business to the 230 acres of green fields in Keynsham were underway in 1921 after years of struggling to accommodate its ever-expanding premises in a cramped area of central Bristol.



Roman coffins uncovered on 2nd May 1922.

**1922** The contractors for building the factory were Byards of Gloucester and by March they were digging the foundations for A Block, a huge four storey building in which Fry's chocolate products would be made. In May the remains of a Roman house together with stone coffins, pottery and other artefacts were unearthed in the A Block excavations. In July foundations were dug nearby for a power house to contain four vertical coal-fired boilers, and two steam generators for emergency electrical power. By October the steel frame of A Block was completed.

**1923** The power house chimney was finished in May, and the steelwork was up by July. Construction work on other buildings on the factory site was also gathering pace, including J Block which would house machinery for roasting cocoa beans.



The powerhouse chimney in 1923

**1924** Work on B Block started in March. Unlike A Block which had no basements, B Block would have basements on two levels. Water was of course a vital requirement. William J. Mullins, a water diviner and well contractor of Bath was asked to survey the site for a cheap source of good water in competition with the expensive supply from the West Gloucestershire Water company. An underground supply was found near the bottom entrance to the site and about a quarter of a mile from A Block. A brick-lined well was sunk and surmounted by a pump house with automatic pumps. A four-inch main was laid across the fields to A Block. In due course water from the River Avon was used for cooling purposes in the production of cocoa and chocolate. Bristol Corporation Electricity Department (BCED) supplied electric power to the factory site, and they were described in the bicentenary edition of Fry's Works Magazine in 1928

as pioneers in the production of cheap electric current. BCED commissioned a new power station at Portishead in the late 1920's.

**1925** Work started on K Block. This building would house equipment for nut roasting and raisin sorting. These ingredients would be needed for the production lines in A Block, and eventually in C Block. Limited production started in A Block late 1925/early 1926. Part of P Block, housing workshops for engineers, carpenters and other tradesmen was in use by the end of 1926, and K Block was completed.

**1927** Developments continued apace, with ground clearance for L and O Blocks started in January. O Block was to be used for the making of boxes and the roof structure incorporated northern lights to give maximum daylight to the interior. The erection of steelwork for B Block was underway by February. A start was made on steel erection for L Block in June and for M Block in July. L Block would house mould-cleaning equipment. M Block would be the main store for incoming bulk supplies of cocoa beans, sugar, nuts and raisins direct by rail from Avonmouth, via the siding from Keynsham Station, and would be in use in 1928.

**1928** B Block completed, and one of the first products to be manufactured there was cocoa, with tins being made on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor and filled with cocoa on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor.

**1929** More production in B Block, including Fry's Chocolate Cream tablets, for which moulding machines were installed, together with chocolate melangeurs and a 6,000 lb (2,727 kg) capacity chocolate kettle. Mould cleaning department machinery installed in L Block. In October the steelwork for the new canteen was being erected. The directors were able to report that more than 500,000 sq ft (50,800 sq m) of floor space – production departments, stores, workshops and offices – had been built in six years.

The 1930's would see yet more buildings going up, so that by 1934 all of Fry's production had moved from Bristol to Keynsham, and in 1936 more than three thousand employees were working at Somerdale.

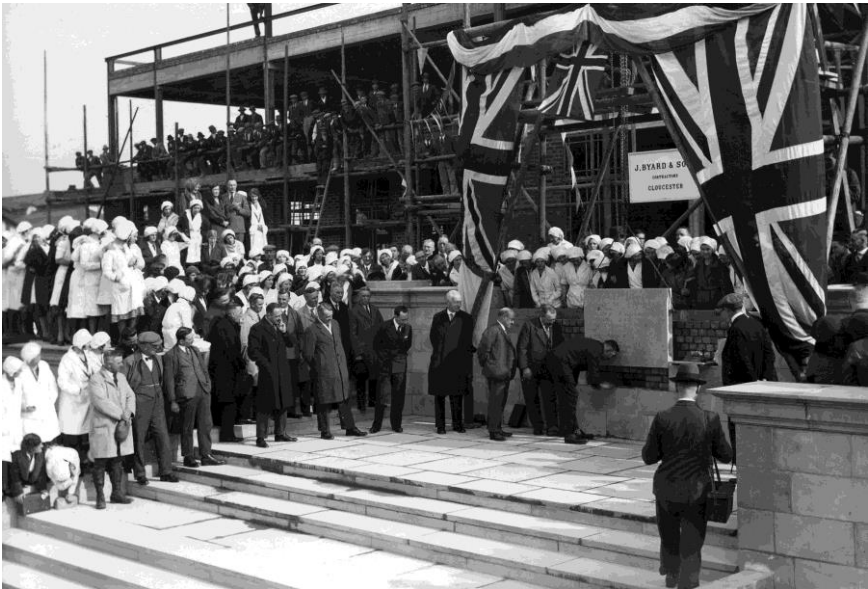


## **5. THE MOVE COMPLETED**

With the building of the third large factory building – C Block, and a large office block plus other ancillary buildings at Somerdale in the early 1930's, the site was now able to house all the activities of J. S. Fry and Sons Ltd. The building programme had been almost non-stop for more than eleven years, and the following timetable gives some idea of the later stages:-

### **1930**

- January. Steel work for new Dining Hall being erected. New sheds built for Sentinel steam lorries. Extension to Sawmill.
- February Extension to Machinery Stores
- March. Roofing of new Dining Hall
- April. New Dining Hall almost complete – windows glazed and garden laid out. Digging foundations for C Block – basement to be two floors deep.
- October. New Dining Room building work complete.



16th March 1932, Mr Cecil Roderick Fry, Chairman of the company unveils a commemorative stone on the steps to the new office block.

### 1931

July Excavating site for Office Block.

September Steel work being erected for C Block and Office Block.

### 1932

February Erection of steel work for R and T Blocks. R Block was to house the site's laundry.

March Cecil Fry lays the foundation stone for the Office Block.

July New Dining Hall in use

### 1933

May. Office Block building finished, subject to fitting out. New Sports Pavilion completed. C Block was also finished in 1933 and with a two-level basement and five floors above ground was the largest of the three main factory blocks. B block also had a two-level basement but its fifth floor did not extend fully over the fourth floor. The large 'FRY' sign which was on the south end of B Block was replaced by a neon 'FRY'S' sign on the south end of C Block. This sign was taken down for security reasons at the start of the Second World War and re-erected after the end of hostilities.



C Block with reinstated Fry's neon sign 1949

## **6. THE RAILWAY LINK**

Prior to J S Fry and Sons Ltd's move to Keynsham two directors, Major Egbert Cadbury and Mr Cecil Fry made a number of journeys by train from Bristol to the surrounding area in their search for a new factory site. Good transport links were essential not only to enable company employees to get to work easily but also to facilitate the movement of large quantities of raw materials – cocoa beans, sugar etc – and finished goods to and from the factory. Clearly Keynsham was a good choice – a large site for the factory, yet only a few minutes by train from Bristol on the Great Western Railway (GWR). Employees could alight at the existing Keynsham station. But early on the nearby River Avon was seriously considered as a mode to bring in bulk cocoa beans, sugar and coal with transhipment from sea going vessels to lighters at Avonmouth for onward transport to a new wharf adjacent to the factory. Meetings were held between Fry's directors, the Port of Bristol Authority and various companies specialising in river transport. However problems were anticipated – the Avonmouth dockers would want more money to tranship the cargoes – traffic was liable to disruption when the River Avon flooded - there was a restriction to the size of vessel that could use Hanham lock – special vessels would have to be built to carry the cargoes. Road transport for bulk materials was not a viable option. Roads were generally poor and often narrow. Lorries were slow, not particularly large, running on solid tyres, often steam driven and with a maximum permitted speed of 12 mph.

So rail was the best option but it was necessary to build a siding running from the GWR main Bristol to London Paddington line at Keynsham Station into the factory grounds and up to the main buildings. This involved crossing the public highway at Station Hill by means of a level crossing. Fry's had to obtain permission from Somerset County Council (SCC) to do so. SCC gave permission on 5 January 1921, but Fry's had to undertake entire responsibility for operating the crossing, subject to certain conditions:-

- (1) That the road should be stopped twice a day for five minutes
- (2) That the stoppages be at specified times
- (3) Fry's had to warn traffic at their own expense during such stoppages
- (4) No gates should be erected across the road

Despite these conditions, the siding and level crossing were used successfully for more than fifty years. The last train left the siding in September 1978. The building of the siding and crossing Station Hill

involved a lengthy digging exercise, much of it by pick and shovel to get the crossing down to the level of the railway track at Keynsham Station. The photographs with this narrative illustrate the depth of the cutting. Much of the spoil was taken away by horse and cart, but as the siding developed railway trucks were used for this task, albeit horse drawn within the factory grounds. Construction of the siding started in January 1922, the GWR laid the crossing on Station Hill in May 1923, and the first commercial consignment to use the siding was on 17 January 1925. The railway lines on the factory site comprised 2½ miles (4 kilometres) of single track laid on 4,000 sleepers with a foundation of 9,000 tons of ashes.



Although GWR steam locomotives hauled the trains along the siding to and from Keynsham station Fry's purchased a Sentinel steam locomotive, works number 7492 in 1928 to shunt railway wagons within the factory limits



## **7. GETTING TO WORK**

The move of the factory to Keynsham meant that thousands of Fry workers would have longer and possibly more expensive journeys to work. Doubtless many of them, living in Bristol, would have been within a short distance of the Union Street factories and could have easily walked or cycled there. At most they would have had a short, inexpensive bus or tram ride. Railway historian Russell Leitch in his 1997 book 'The Railways of Keynsham' has identified three morning trains which would have suited the Fry workers.

One starting from Parson Street, Bedminster reached Keynsham at 7.27am. Five minutes later a second train arrived, having started from Horfield. Both would have delivered workers at Keynsham in time for the start of the factory day. A much later train starting from Clifton Down reached Keynsham at 8.36am but this was in good time for the Fry office staff to start their working day. All three trains stopped at St Anne's Park station. But a correspondent writing to a Bristol newspaper in February 1925 expressed concern at how much the Fry workers, especially the girls who were doubtless on very modest wages, were paying every week to travel by train. 'At present it is costing some of these girls as much as 4s. 0d. (20p) to 4s. 6d. (22½p) of their weekly earnings, and often they have to be content to ride in the milk or guards van at that.' It seems from this that overcrowding on commuter trains between Bristol and Bath is not just a 21<sup>st</sup> century phenomenon! But regardless of cost the train service continued to be well patronised by Fry workers for many years. Indeed Russell Leitch recalls travelling from Bath to Bristol in the 1950's on one of the late afternoon trains used by the workers to get home. This train had seats for more than 500 passengers, and appears to have been fully loaded, by the time it left Keynsham. 'Our train drew up at the still tightly packed (Keynsham) platform.....the door opened, a gaggle of giggling gregarious girls fell rapidly into the compartment ... the doors slammed closed... the guard blew his whistle and another load of Fry's Angels\* were on their way home. The gossip and the laughter were non-stop....' (\* according to Russell Leitch, Fry's Angels was the generic term for the female employees both within the factory and by the railway men)

## 8. 'SOMERDALE GARDEN CITY'



An estate of houses was built adjacent to the factory grounds in 1927 and named Chandos Road.

This was the description given in the *Bicentenary Works Magazine* of 1928 to the housing estate adjacent to Fry's Keynsham factory, no doubt with the extensive Cadbury's Bournville estate in mind. As early as January 1921, the Bristol 'Times and Echo' newspaper, when reporting the proposed move of the Fry factories to Keynsham, stated:- 'The Directors will assist the migration to the Garden City by providing houses at least to a total of sixty, at rents ranging from 11s 1d (55p) to 12s 8d (63p) a week plus rates which are at present about 3s(15p) in the £'. The houses were built near an old farm occupied by the Clothier family, and work started in 1924. The picture of the gardens being laid out is dated 28 March 1927. In the 1920's much of the nation's housing stock was distinctly sub-standard. Almost two-thirds of the population lived in accommodation rented from private landlords.

While housing in many urban areas was grossly inadequate, it was not much better in the countryside. More than 4,000 rural parishes lacked a piped water supply, and over 100,000 cottages were condemned as 'unfit' dwellings. The low standard of housing is reflected in the general level of rent paid which, according to surveys carried out at the time, was on average 5% of wages. As most working men did not earn more than £3 per

week, this gave a weekly rent of about 3s (15p). From this it can be seen that the rent and rates of the Somerdale houses were something like four times as much!

But the Somerdale tenants would enjoy the benefits of modern good-sized houses with bathrooms and inside toilets, gardens and a semi-rural setting. Additional benefits were a 'walk to work' location and consequently no travel costs! Despite early hopes of expansion, the Somerdale estate remained small, with just a few more houses being added after the Second World War to those originally built in the 1920's. By the 1950's some of the original houses were still occupied by former Fry's employees now enjoying a well-earned retirement.



The gardens being laid out, 28th March 1927

## 9. 'EVE COMES TO STAY'

In 1928 when J S Fry & Sons celebrated its Bicentenary the special edition of the works magazine carried an article under the heading 'EVE COMES TO STAY', a somewhat tongue-in-cheek review of the employment of women in the company's offices. The year was significant nation-wide as it marked the extension of the franchise to all women over the age of twenty-one. Indeed it had only been ten years earlier when women in the United Kingdom were entitled to vote for the first time. In July 1918, towards the end of the First World War, Parliament passed the Fourth Reform Act which enabled women over the age of thirty to vote. The further extension in 1928 gave rise to the expression 'The Flapper Vote' and many older people reacted unfavourably to the prospect of frivolous young women doing anything as important as voting in a General Election.

Something of this reaction can perhaps be detected in the tone of the Fry's magazine article. It explained that the company employed only two women, both confidential secretaries, in the offices prior to 1914, but that the Directors were soon compelled to employ many more, albeit on what was perceived as a temporary basis, to replace men who had left to join the forces. The use of the word 'compelled' implies that, given the choice, the Directors would have gone on employing men whenever possible!

But, to quote from the article:-

*'And when the War was over, although every gallant soldier who returned was re-instated, the sweeping changes which took place in the Offices and the wholesale mechanisation of invoicing and accounting processes made it necessary for the Firm not only to retain the ladies they had, but also to engage a large number of others. And so Eve came into our Offices, first in ones and twos, then in dozens, scores and hundreds.'*

But it seems that the women had to overcome a great deal of prejudice, as the article went on to say:-

*'At first we were inclined not to take her very seriously. We thought that after a few days' steady work Eve would be probably knocked up and absent with an attack of hysteria, the megrims or the vapours.'*

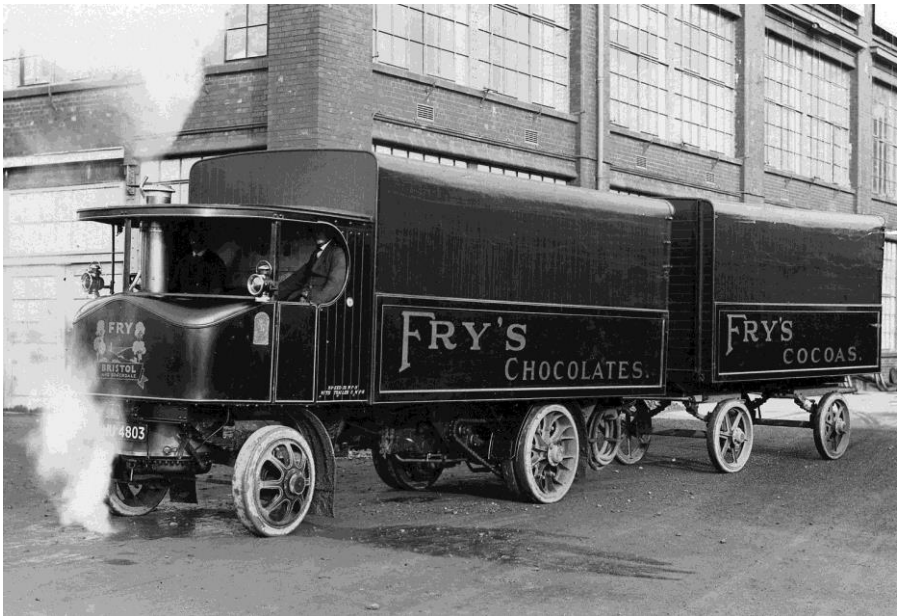
But the women proved their worth! Thus, the article acknowledged:-

*'Eve has been with us several years now and we have become quite attached to her. For she has done her job both in Peace and in War. So Eve has come to stay.'*



## 10. ON THE ROAD

Faced with the challenge of providing transport links for the Keynsham factory, Fry's directors were obliged to discount road vehicles as the primary method of moving goods and materials in bulk. In the early 1920's the country's road network was still poor, and not until the 1930's was there any substantial development of trunk roads, although the Portway, linking Avonmouth to the centre of Bristol, as part of the A4, was opened in 1926. It had cost £800,000 to build and was at the time the most expensive road in the country. Large commercial vehicles in the early 1920's were primitive and slow-moving, running on solid tyres and lacking such refinements as enclosed cabs and electric lighting. Steam-driven road vehicles were popular and typical was the Sentinel steam waggon. Sentinels were made by Alley and MacLellan at Shrewsbury from 1915 onwards, and the company, which had its origins in Glasgow, always referred to their road vehicles as 'waggon's' rather than 'wagons'.



HU 4803 dating from c 1924, and shown in Fry's livery, was a Sentinel 'Super'. This type was first made in 1923. Optional extras for the 'Super' model included a windscreen and electric lighting, but, judging

from the photograph, it appears that Fry's directors declined both refinements. At least without a windscreen the driver and his mate could enjoy plenty of fresh air on their travels!

The Sentinel 'Super' had a vertical steam boiler in the cab, and was capable of a road speed of 24 mph (38 kph), but by law was restricted to half that speed. Only the rear wheels were fitted with brakes. In 1922, to increase the vehicle's load-carrying capacity, Alley and MacLellan developed a trailer that could be towed by the waggon, as seen here. Unfortunately this arrangement restricted the vehicle's permitted speed still further to a mere 5 mph (8 kph). Both speed limits are printed on the Sentinel's cab door. At 5 mph the Sentinel and trailer would have taken more than an hour to travel from the Union Street factories to Somerdale. The eye-catching sign that appeared at the side of the Great Western Railway showed the distance between the two by rail to be less than five miles, but by road it was at least six.



Fry's persisted with steam-driven road vehicles into the 1930's, and a special shed was built at Somerdale to house the Sentinels. The Road Traffic Act of 1930 permitted much higher speeds for many vehicles, and with technical advances in such items as pneumatic tyres, new Sentinel models capable of travelling at up to 30 mph (48 kph), and faster were introduced. Replacement pneumatic tyres were fitted to many older 'Supers', allowing them to be driven at higher speeds. In the 1920's Fry's purchased a number of smaller commercial vehicles from another company

with Scottish roots, the Albion Motor Car Co Ltd, of Scotstoun, Glasgow. The two vans HU 7241 and HU 9649 date from c1926/27.

The petrol-engine Albions would have been far more comfortable to drive than the large Sentinels, and capable of much higher speeds, but it is slightly disconcerting to note the condition of their front tyres. Doubtless tyres would have been changed around regularly so as to ensure that those with greater depth of tread were always on the rear wheels, but, had MOT's been in force in the 1920's, both vans may well have failed the test! Another Albion was the small coach HU 6116 with its smart peaked-capped, white-coated driver. This provided staff transport between Bristol and Somerdale. There is a story that, because of the shape and size of the coach, it was often mistaken for a hearse when seen in the vicinity of Arnos Vale Cemetery, and gentlemen pedestrians would stop and respectfully remove their hats.

Chauffeur-driven cars were much in demand by the directors and senior managers who had to divide their time between Union Street and Somerdale over the years 1921 to 1932 during which the factory move took place.



The open top car shown, dating from c 1922 again shows the careful economy of using front tyres until they become almost bald, although the tyre on the spare wheel appears to be new. The position of the spare wheel would make it difficult for the driver to get in and out of the car.

‘The Sick Car’ was the title given to a bull-nose Morris touring car HU 424 dating from c 1922/23, and possibly originally a director’s car, that was first used by Fry’s on 23 March 1937 as a sick visitor car for a trip to Winsley Hospital. The car was laid up during the Second World War but brought back into use in the post-war period. Bald front tyres are noticeable yet again!



It was necessary for Fry’s to employ a considerable number of sales representatives or ‘commercial travellers’ as they would have been known in the 1920’s. The company supplied cocoa and chocolate direct to thousands of retail outlets, including traditional corner shops, around the country.

A fleet of vans was used distribute advertising material and supply the products to keep the shops’ shelves well stocked.

Some of Fry’s vans are seen drawn up on the main drive at Somerdale c 1931, with C Block still under construction in the background.



The leading van HY 899 is a Morris Minor, with its smartly-dressed driver wearing a bowler hat. Some of the other men sport snappy trilbies. No man with any sense of being properly dressed would have gone hatless.



Some of the charabanc drivers relax with a cup of cocoa

## **11. FACTORY GUIDED TOURS**

Tours of Fry's Somerdale factory were started as early as 1928, and a photograph taken at the time shows fifteen guides, all women, with the head of their department.

The tours quickly gained in popularity and parties of visitors, both adults and children, came from a wide area, many of the children being organised in school parties. The annual number of visitors ran into thousands, and by 1930 the number of guides had increased to forty-eight.

Many of the visitors, especially the school parties, came on special excursion trains to Keynsham and Somerdale railway station. All visitors received a souvenir box or tin containing samples of Fry's chocolates.

The tours were suspended during the Second World War but by the early 1950's had been reinstated and proved as popular as ever. But soon, as production methods became increasingly automated, there were fewer areas to which large parties of visitors could be admitted safely, and the factory tours were ended in the 1960's.



In the centre is Mr. C. Read who was in charge of this department, pictured here on 19th September 1928 with his guides.

## 12. FRY'S FLYING COCOA

Air travel was very much in vogue in the early 1930's. Bristol's Whitchurch Airport, just four miles from Keynsham, opened for business on 31st May 1930, and was soon offering four flights a day to Cardiff. According to Reece Winstone's book 'Bristol As It Was 1928 – 1933' the flying time was 15 minutes and the return fare was 17s 6d (87½p).



13th September 1932 saw the introduction of the aerial transport service. Here the cocoa is being loaded on to the aircraft before it took off from the sports field.

The management at Fry's, Somerdale, never slow to seize an opportunity for publicity, invested in a small aeroplane to transport some of the company's products.

Bunty Dunford, writing in 1981, reported that the service was inaugurated on 13th September 1932. Fry's advertising manager arranged for sixty journalists to travel by train from London to Keynsham to witness the event at the Somerdale factory's sports field.

It was claimed subsequently that the inaugural flight was referred to ‘editorially in no fewer than 127 newspapers and periodicals throughout the country’.

Fry’s aeroplane was a de Havilland Puss Moth, piloted by Flying Officer W. N. Pope. A load of four hundredweights (204kg) of Fry’s Malted Milk Cocoa was put on board and the Puss Moth took off to cheers from a large crowd of employees. It flew to London and landed at Hendon. The cocoa was transferred to an International Stores van which delivered it to a London store.

There was speculation in the press as to future developments. The Yorkshire Evening Post envisaged deliveries by parachute at Birmingham, Leeds, Manchester and Newcastle, en route from Somerdale to Scotland. Cecil Fry and his co-directors had even grander ideas, contemplating deliveries by air to South America and China.

But by February 1933, Fry’s Puss Moth was on loan to a group of people sponsoring ‘The Houston Mount Everest Flight’. The Puss Moth took part in reconnaissance and communication flights, prior to the first flight over Mount Everest itself, which was undertaken by two other aeroplanes, a Houston-Westland and a Westland Wallace.

Nothing more seems to be known about the ‘By Air from Somerdale’ scheme. Bunty Dunford concluded her report with the comment: - ‘The researcher is left somewhat ‘in the air’ as it were’!

### **The de Havilland Puss Moth**

The de Havilland DH 80A Puss Moth was a well-tested and popular aeroplane by the time Fry’s purchased one in 1932. The prototype first flew in September 1929, and in March 1930 the first production model was available. It was then sent on a sales tour of Australia and New Zealand.

Orders came in quickly and during three years of production to March 1933, no fewer than 259 Puss Moths were manufactured in England. Twenty-five more were built in Canada. Although most were used as private aircraft, many also flew commercially for both passenger and mail carrying. The wings could be folded back for storage.

The load-carrying capacity of the Puss Moth was 785 lbs (357kg) so, allowing for the weight of the pilot, about 600lbs (273kg) of cargo could be carried. The four hundredweight (204kg) of cocoa taken on the Fry’s inaugural flight was safely within the limit, but was only a fraction of



the carrying capacity of one of the company's larger road vans. The vans were restricted to a maximum permitted speed of 30 mph (48 kph), whereas the Puss Moth could manage 128 mph (205 kph). It had a range of 300 miles (480 km), so a direct flight from Somerdale to Newcastle-upon-Tyne was feasible, whereas one to Edinburgh or Glasgow would have required a re-fuelling stop en route.

Weighing up the options, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that flying Fry's products in the Puss Moth would not have made economic sense. This may well be why the service did not continue.

Footnote

The world-famous aviatrix Amy Johnson, CBE, (1903 – 1941), piloting a de Havilland DH 80A Puss Moth, set a solo record for the flight from London to Cape Town, South Africa, in July 1932.



The de Havilland Puss Moth taking flight

### **13. 'A NOVEL DEVELOPMENT IN BRITISH SALESMANSHIP'**

This was how Fry's Show Train was described when it was first introduced in 1933. It comprised three railway coaches converted from other uses. One had been a restaurant car, the other two scenery vans for the use of travelling theatre companies. The restaurant car became a tea lounge 'tastefully decorated with Lloyd Loom furniture, comprising eight tables and twenty chairs'. The coach also contained sleeping quarters for the two salesmen who accompanied the train as it toured the country. The words 'FRY'S SHOW TRAIN' on the outside were in gold on a royal blue background. The first visit of the train to London for the benefit of the general public was for six days commencing 25 November 1935. Admission charges were 2d for adults and 1d for children. The whole proceeds were donated to St Mary's Hospital, Paddington. A free chocolate bar was given to every visitor, to the value of the admission money (this would possibly have been a 2oz (57g) 'Sandwich' milk & plain chocolate bar for adults and a 1oz (28½g) 'Five Boys' milk chocolate bar for children).



The train toured most of the country each year, being stabled for exhibition purposes in convenient station bay platforms or in adjacent sidings. It was attached to passenger trains when on the move from point to point. When the Second World War came the train was laid up in sidings at Somerdale. It was not used again and was eventually disposed of in the 1950's.

## **14. THE SCHOOLBOY AND THE CHOCOLATE FACTORY**

Mr Ron Hart, writing from New Zealand in the 1980's, recalled a visit that he made to Somerdale as a ten-year-old in 1934, from his home in Southville, Bristol. He had learnt of a boat trip that could be made from the centre of Bristol to Keynsham, which also included a conducted tour of Fry's Somerdale factory, afternoon tea in their cafeteria and a souvenir tin of assorted chocolates to take home, all for 2/6d (12½p) adults and 1/6d (7½p) children.

Ron saved up his pocket money, earned from running errands, and as the August school holidays arrived he had amassed 1/6½d, and was ready to go on the trip, unaccompanied. He spent a ½d going across the Bristol harbour by ferry to save time, and arrived at the Centre an hour before the boat trip was due to start.

Ron remembered little of the river journey, but recalled being impressed by the hospitality shown by the personnel at Fry's. He saw bars of chocolate being made, and King George V chocolates on a conveyor belt, with skilful girls piping decorations onto them.

After touring the various departments, the visitors were invited to tea in the cafeteria. Suddenly Ron felt very lonely, a poorly-dressed ten-year-old among a party of adults who, judging from photographs of visitors taken at the time, were probably decked out in their Sunday best. But a visitor on holiday from Plymouth befriended Ron and invited him to share a table. Ron then felt at ease and went on to enjoy the best tea of his life:- 'I suppose I did have a cup of tea, but I remember most the assortment of chocolate biscuits, and the bread with real butter'. The reference to 'real' butter is significant. At the time many poorer families had to make do with margarine, so 'real' butter was a luxury.

Ron concluded his reminiscences:-

'On departure from the factory our hostess presented each of us with a Fry's Selection Box, which was worth 2/6d. From that moment on, I couldn't get home quickly enough to tell the family all I had done for my 1/6d, and Dad was most impressed.'

## **15. THE SECOND WORLD WAR FRY'S**

A series of photographs taken at Somerdale during the years 1939 to 1945 give an impression of the impact that the Second World War had on the factory and its employees. As the war progressed, shortages and rationing added to everyone's problems.

**1939** As war loomed, one of the greatest fears was of air raids. The city of Guernica had been heavily bombed only two years previously during the Spanish Civil War, and German aircraft had taken part in that raid. One senior British politician remarked gloomily that the bomber would always get through, implying that anti-aircraft defences would be virtually useless. Another great fear was of poison gas. Again its use had been experienced, and many soldiers fighting in France during the First World War suffered badly from its effects.

With its extensive buildings and a large work force, Fry's factory was highly mobilised for the war effort. They had their own Home Guard, Decontamination Group in case of a gas attack, a First Aid Unit, a Mobile Canteen and so on.

A wall of sandbags had been built by September 1939 to protect part of the factory against bomb blast, shrapnel and machine gun bullets. Camouflage was used to disguise and protect valuable and vulnerable equipment, including Fry's Sentinel railway engine. Although mainline steam locomotives hauled trains of railway wagons into and out of the Somerdale sidings, Fry's own engine was vital for moving individual wagons around the extensive sidings, and marshalling vans full of finished goods into trains for the mainline locomotives to haul away at regular intervals.

The Sentinel was put 'under wraps' for safety. Its loss would have hampered the factory's output considerably.

Two months after the outbreak of war on 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1939 various defence organisations were busy around the Somerdale site. There was of course plenty of space in which they could practise.

Photographs taken in November 1939 show the Decontamination Squad at drill, and a visit from 'I' Troop 7/2<sup>nd</sup> S/L Regiment, Royal Artillery. Gas masks were provided free for the whole civil population and had to be carried at all times. Masks for Fry's employees were assembled at Somerdale and a photograph shows this work being done. A girl is seen wearing a mask. For some they had a claustrophobic effect.



**1940** Although King George VI and Queen Elizabeth stayed in London to face the blitzes alongside their subjects, the King's mother Queen Mary was 'evacuated' to Badminton House, Gloucestershire' where she stayed with the Duke and Duchess of Beaufort, and from where she set out in her chauffeur-driven Daimler limousine on frequent, and often unannounced, visits to local industries.

The visits were described as 'morale boosting' and one was made to Somerdale on 19<sup>th</sup> January.



The Queen was photographed tasting chocolate and at the end of the visit Mr Cecil Fry presented her with a very large selection box. The same month saw sweet rationing imposed on the population in general. The allowance was just three ounces (85g) a week. Not much of a morale booster!

The first German air raids on the Bristol and Bath areas came in the summer of 1940. Well before then, landmarks at Somerdale that may have assisted the Luftwaffe's navigators were removed or disguised. Thus the large 'FRY'S' sign at the end of C Block was taken down and the 'SOMERDALE' sign on the railway was covered over.

The basement in C Block was considered safe as an air raid shelter and a photograph taken in August 1940 shows employees taking refuge there. It was possible for some of the office staff to continue working in the shelter. With sweets on ration, greater emphasis was placed on the production of cocoa, for the armed forces as well as the civilian population. A 'Shelter Service' was established with specially equipped vans taking supplies to centres where large numbers of people seeking refuge from the air raids gathered.



There was also an emergency 'Cocoa Canteen' van. All the vans, still painted in the traditional Fry's colours of chocolate brown and cream (coincidentally the same colours as Great Western Railway passenger train carriages), had to operate in trying conditions. Headlights were masked for

night time use in unlit streets, in order not to attract the attention of the Luftwaffe during air raids.



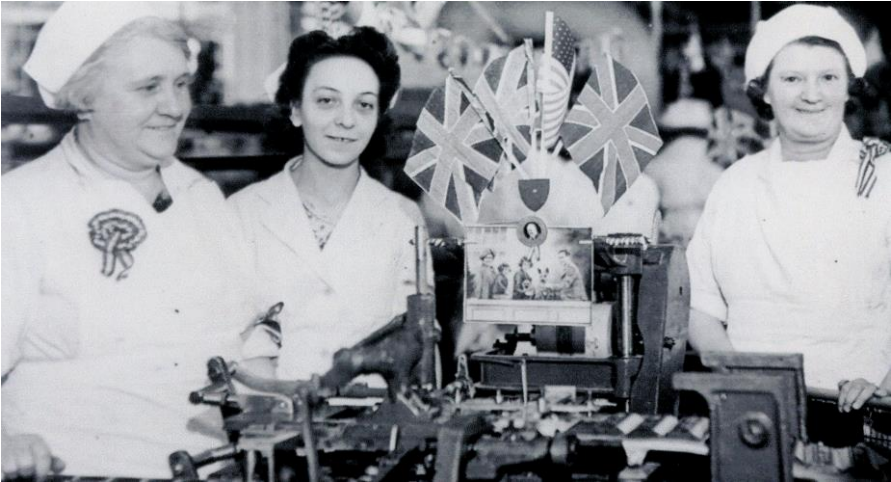
**1942** There was more ‘belt-tightening’ nationally in July, when the sweet rationing was reduced to 2oz (57g) per week. This was equivalent to just a single 2d (0.83p) bar of Fry’s Sandwich chocolate.

**1941** Early in the year there was a great upheaval at Somerdale when many members of the office staff were transferred to War Work in South Wales. John Dunford’s father was one of them. A massive Ordnance Factory had been built, stretching for about a mile alongside the main Great Western Railway line from Cardiff to Swansea, north of the line and east of Bridgend. It was a shell-filling factory, and a subsidiary of Woolwich Arsenal. John attended a school near the factory and remembers loud explosions that caused any unsecured open windows to slam shut. His father would say ‘Just some waste being burnt in the Burning Grounds’. John’s mother also found employment, as a tracer in the factory’s Drawing Office.

**1944** The South Wales ‘exiles’ returned to Somerdale but could not resume their old jobs, as their workspace was now occupied by the Bristol Aeroplane Company (BAC). This company had acquired a great deal of extra production, storage and office space in many business premises in and

around Bristol. The number of their employees had more than doubled from the pre-war figure of 13,000, in order to meet the demands for military aircraft production. But as the tide of war turned, it proved possible for BAC to switch some of its staff to working on civilian contracts. Thus the returning exiles found themselves attached to the BAC offices dealing with the manufacture of prefabricated houses.

**1945** The war in Europe ended in May and Fry's produced some special 'V.R.' chocolate that was sent to children of occupied countries.



In 1945 a special production of chocolate was made and sent to the children of occupied countries

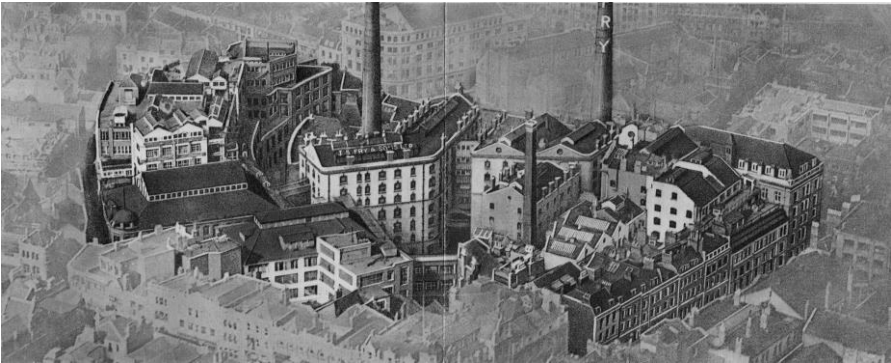
At home, sweet rationing remained in force, and even three years later in 1948 had only risen to 4oz (114g) per week. There was a brief interlude of sixteen weeks during the summer of 1949 when rationing was abolished, but such was the demand for confectionery that supplies soon proved inadequate. Rationing had to be brought back immediately and did not finally finish until 1952.

Many young women, including Fry's employees, had been called up for National Service during the war, and served in the A.T.S., W.R.N.S. and W.A.A.F. The emergency nursing services also recruited extra staff. Their work often took them into dangerous situations. Nine of Fry's female employees gave their lives and their names are recorded alongside twenty of their male colleagues on the Somerdale war memorial for the Second World War.



## **16. THE BRISTOL LEGACY**

The completion of the move of Fry's business to Somerdale in the early 1930's left a large estate of empty properties in Central Bristol.



There were no fewer than nine factories, most of them crammed into narrow streets, bounded by Union Street, Wine Street, Pithay, Tower Lane and Nelson Street. The factories here were numbered 1 to 8, the oldest No 1, dating from before 1841, the most recent No 8, having been built in 1911. There was also a box-making factory some distance away in Quay Street, adjoining Colston Avenue.

By September 1936 Fry's were making efforts to sell the properties. A photograph of Nos. 5 and 6 factories with frontages on Union Street and Broadmead, taken then, shows a large 'FOR SALE' board advertising 'A CENTRAL GROUP OF FREEHOLDS'. The agents were the well-known Bristol firm J. P. Sturge & Sons, who had also been involved in Fry's move to Somerdale in the early 1920's.

At the same time the box-making factory was being demolished, as the Colston Avenue area saw a number of new developments, including the Evening World building and Electricity House. Soon the new Odeon cinema was built on the site of No 5 factory at the corner of Union Street and Broadmead while stretching up Union Street over the site of No 6 factory came Union House, a new three-storey block with shops on the ground floor.

But in the narrow lanes behind Union Street nothing changed, apart from the demolition of the tall chimney of No 2 factory in January 1937. This chimney was one of three within the Fry estate and they vied with the

spires of the old city churches to dominate the Bristol skyline for several decades.

Economic recovery was slow, following the depression of 1929 to 1932 when unemployment doubled. The South West area of England was not as badly affected as some parts of the country, but even so more than one person in six of the working-age population was without a job. In Wales the figure was more than one in three. Not until 1937 did unemployment generally drop to the 1929 level.

So there was no demand from developers for several of the empty factories. Then the Second World War virtually stopped all new building work. But despite the intensity of German air raids on central Bristol during the winter of 1940/41, the old factories survived largely unscathed.

A set of nine photographs in the Society's archives show various views of the old factories. The photographs are undated but there are clues which help to establish when they would have been taken.

In the first view with a row of bollards across a narrow street, the building on the right carries posters advertising 'Air Raid Hostels' and 'Forward the Fire Bomb Fighters'. Given the ephemeral nature of such posters the photograph probably dates from 1940/41.

The same date can be applied to the scene with a horse and cart and a lorry. The lorry is a Fordson and carries wartime masked headlights. The registration number HAE 482 would have been issued early in 1941.

The frontages of the Union Street shops were damaged by bomb blast in April 1941, but the shops were repaired quite quickly and re-



The Union Street shops were repaired but small 'utility' windows had to be fitted, as a temporary measure.

opened for business. But the wartime shortage of plate glass meant that small ‘utility’ windows had to be fitted, as a temporary measure.

A close-up shows the Fry showroom, also fitted with ‘utility’ windows. Fry’s occupied the unit at the bottom end of the Union Street shops within Union House, and immediately next to the Odeon cinema. The kerbstones still show traces of the white paint that was meant to help pedestrians navigate the streets at night during the wartime blackouts. It may be assumed that these two photographs date from the late 1940’s. Soon afterwards, when plate glass became plentiful again, full size windows were installed.

Post-war redevelopment in central Bristol was concentrated at first in establishing a new shopping centre in and around Broadmead. So the old Fry factories lingered on unwanted for another decade, although one was given a temporary lease of life as the Bristol branch of Her Majesty’s Stationery Office.

But eventually the developers came in the 1960’s, with new buildings at the western end of Fairfax Street, from under the Union Street Bridge, sweeping in a curve to link up with Nelson Street.

The view of the upper floors of the 1885 building, known as No 4 factory, was probably taken in 1960. Its frontage was on Duck Lane, which was to the west of the original Fairfax Street and became part of that street in the redevelopment. It is recorded that the chimney on the left in the photograph was demolished in January 1961. It was built in 1877 and was the tallest of the three Fry factory chimneys.

The old factory buildings were very solid and hard work to demolish. Some were seven storeys high. Later ones, built in the first decade of the twentieth century, were finished in an attractive dark red brick and were designed by the distinguished Bristol architect Sir George Oatley (1863 – 1950).

Among Sir George’s other work were the Bristol University tower, the Royal Fort Physics Laboratory, the Homeopathic Hospital, St Monica Home of Rest and several churches. He was also greatly involved in the restoration of St Mary Redcliffe Church, and was working on that project almost up to the time of his death at the age of eighty-seven. The writer of his obituary said ‘His work was always scholarly, finely proportioned, sincere and worthy of a great city’.

The words ‘sincere and worthy of a great city’ might also be applied to his clients, the Fry family, who had built up an ethical and successful business in Bristol over a span of two centuries.

## **17. “DOWN FRY’S” (MEMORIES OF AN ARTICLED CLERK)**

On 1st January 1956, having just left school, I started my first job. My employers were a firm of Chartered Accountants, named Grace, Darbyshire and Todd, with offices at 19 Whiteladies Road, Bristol, just a few yards from the BBC.

A few weeks previously, my father had signed a rather forbidding looking document which bound me to work for the said Grace, Darbyshire and Todd for a period of five years. At the end of that time, if I proved to be sufficiently diligent and passed the necessary exams, I, too, would become a Chartered Accountant. Meanwhile I was an Articled Clerk, in other words an apprentice, on a salary of £3 10s (£3.50) a week! Imagine my surprise therefore, within three weeks of starting work, to find myself ‘Down Fry’s’!

I should explain that Messrs Grace, Darbyshire and Todd were Quakers, as of course were the Fry family. More significantly so were Cadbury’s who by the 1950s controlled Fry’s as one of their subsidiary companies. Cadbury’s auditors were Impey, Cudworth a Birmingham-based firm of Chartered Accountants, also Quakers, who, to save the cost of sending their people to Somerdale to check the books, sub-contracted the work to Grace, Darbyshire and Todd.

So as very much the junior member of the team I found myself walking the corridors of the Somerdale office block, fetching and carrying books and records for my senior colleagues to check and examine. Our team leader was Geoffrey Atherton who shortly afterwards ‘changed sides’ by leaving Grace, Darbyshire and Todd to join the Somerdale staff as head of the Wages Office. This office together with others such as the General Office employed large numbers of people, including rows of women operating comptometers and mechanical accounting machines. But alongside the mechanisation there were still plenty of hand-written records. I recall that, in the salaries office, clerks wrote up the books with pens dipped in inkwells, and with the entries being blotted carefully with large sheets of white blotting paper.

As visitors we became aware of the various strata of management throughout the factory and offices. There was segregation in the canteens according to staff grades, and men and women sat at separate tables. I remember that some of the foremen wore brown jackets with white stripes, but that senior foremen had blue jackets with white stripes.

As auditors we met the brown-jacketed foremen when we visited the factory stores to check stocks of cocoa beans, sugar and packing materials. However it was necessary to make an appointment with the blue-jacketed senior stores foreman in order to check the stock of rose oil, a special ingredient used in making Fry's Turkish Delight – 'Full of Eastern Promise'. The rose oil was kept in a stone jar, locked away in the senior stores foreman's safe, and was measured out carefully in very small quantities to mix with the other ingredients.

Fry's Turkish Delight, along with other well-known products of the Somerdale factory, could be bought by members of the staff at discounted prices. Imagine my 'delight' as a teenager with a healthy appetite when I discovered that the staff discount was available to me and my colleagues in the audit team as well! There was a strict no-smoking rule in the office block. As a non-smoker, in an age when most people smoked, the rule went unnoticed as far as I was concerned, but on one occasion one of my colleagues, a somewhat flamboyant South African, lit up in the small room we occupied on the first floor of the office block. A Somerdale manager, walking past, noticed what had happened. He entered the room and gave my colleague a dressing down. My colleague's indignant comments after the manager had left were unprintable!

Our room was directly above Major Sir Egbert Cadbury's office and on days when he was working at Somerdale he would park his car immediately outside. His office window reached almost to ground level so that it was easy to step out onto the driveway. If Major Cadbury brought his dog to the office, at intervals during the day the office window would open, allowing the dog out to run across the sports field. It seems that Major Cadbury also owned a penny-farthing bicycle. I never saw it, but there are photographs of it being ridden in 1961, by Graham Hendy, engineer in charge of office machinery and all the time clocks at Somerdale. He wore Victorian clothes for the occasion.  
-Dennis Hill.



Graham Hendy riding the penny farthing in 1961

## **18. MODERNISATION AND EXPANSION**

The 1950's saw the highest ever number of employees on the Somerdale payroll.

Sweet rationing which had been abolished in April 1949 was re-imposed only sixteen weeks (!) later in August 1949, and then remained in force until 1952. But then rationing was truly and permanently abolished and after more than a decade of shortages, suddenly all the delights of the world of confectionery were available to everyone, the only limitation being the size of the customer's purse!

In order to keep up with demand, Fry's took on more employees and installed new and larger machines to speed the production processes. Fresh lines of confectionery were introduced to tempt the sweet-toothed customer.

Towards the end of the 1950's it was realised that more factory space was needed and so the company invested in a new building known as D Block, which was fitted out with all the latest production machinery.

It is interesting to look back over the decade to see how some of the many changes came about.

**1950** Cocoa beans were still being delivered to Somerdale in large hessian sacks by rail and a great deal of manual labour was needed to handle this material. The method was the same as it had been in the 1920's with an elevator being used to build the sacks into high stacks in the M Block stores. Four men were involved, two at the bottom of the elevator and two at the top. Every single sack had to be manoeuvred by hand.

At this time Punch bars were being made on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor of C Block, as were Fudge bars and Quartet bars (chocolate mint creams), with the ever popular Crunchie bars being produced on the 5<sup>th</sup> floor. The other hallmark Fry product, Chocolate Cream Tablets were being made on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor of B Block.

The market gardens to the right of the Office Block were still being cultivated, a legacy from the Second World War, when vegetable growing was a vital part of the 'Dig for Victory' campaign. Later the market gardens would be sacrificed for car parking spaces as more employees were able to afford cars in which to drive to work.

**1951** Three new conches for chocolate-making were installed and proved successful, so that the company then made a major investment on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor of A Block, with two large banks of new conches (a conche is a machine used in fine grinding of chocolate material). These, together

with new Buhler refiner rollers, gave a large increase in chocolate-making capacity at Somerdale by 1956.

Aside from post-war developments in the factory, social activities for employees also enjoyed a revival. The Amateur Dramatic Section of Fry Club reformed, after being dormant throughout the Second World War. They used the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor of the canteen, with a temporary stage made up of dining tables. Aladdin was the first pantomime produced since the war. A photograph of a scene from the 1952 production of Cinderella shows (from left to right) Eric Miles, Robert Price and John Scully. Many years later John Scully was awarded the MBE for services to Amateur Dramatics.

**1952** At last! The end of sweet rationing!

As production increased to meet the upsurge in demand, more boxes were needed. New box-making machines had been introduced by 1956. The new boxes were made in flat-packs so that they could be stored flat until the girls on the production lines needed one, and would fold it when required. The space made free from box storage on the 1<sup>st</sup> floor of O Block was used to set up extra crunch-making equipment. Eventually the production of Crunchie was transferred to the new D Block.

**1953** Coronation Year.

Fry's Chocolate Selection Boxes were being produced on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor of C Block. The boxes were large and had a board game on the cover. The game resembled Snakes and Ladders and was based on the Round Britain Cycle Race. In the Fry's version the race started in Bristol and finished at Somerdale.

As the 1950's progressed there was a major investment with the installation of new Aasted plant from Denmark. This changed the whole method of producing cream tablet bars. Old mogul starch moulding machines in which the cream centres were made became redundant. The new Aasted machine produced a chocolate shell, poured the cream centre into it and then put a layer of chocolate across the bottom. Significantly, far fewer employees were needed to produce the cream tablet bars on the new machine. The Aasted was so successful that a second one was soon purchased.

**1956** Alongside the modernisation of factory machinery there were substantial improvements in other areas. The main workshops in P Block where the factory's tradesmen were based received new lathes and milling, shaper and slotting machines to replace the pre-war line-driven machinery.

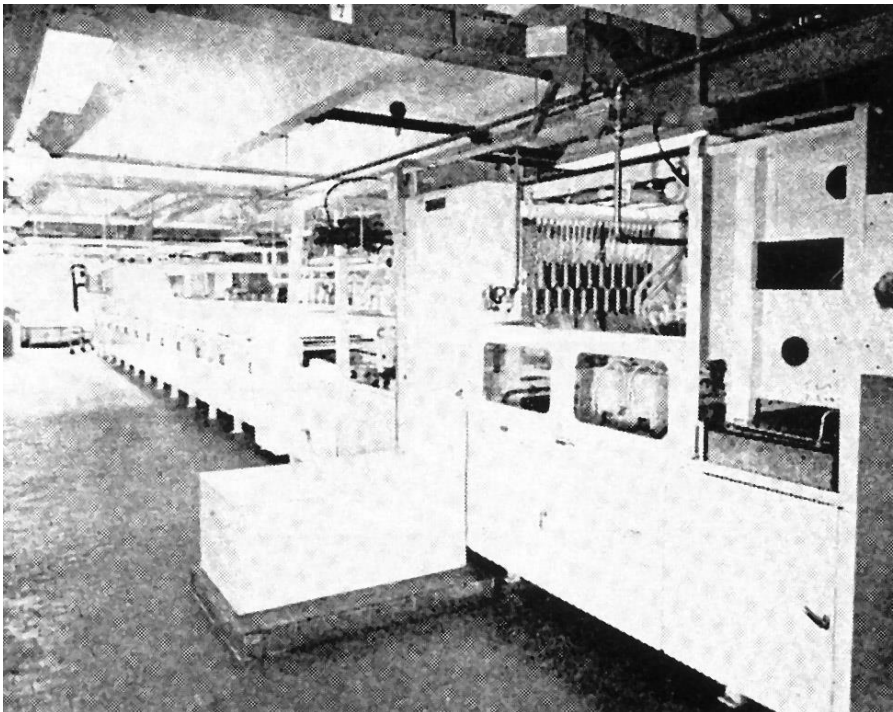
The Sentinel steam shunting engine, dating from 1928 and used to move railway vans around the rail sidings, was replaced by a new Hunslet

diesel-driven shunter. The Sentinel engine was kept for eight more years and then sold for scrap. However it was not scrapped, and passed subsequently through several hands. It is still preserved, in Essex, and hopefully it will be returned eventually to the Keynsham area for restoration by the Avon Valley Railway, at Bitton.

Within the factory, Crunchie production continued on the 5<sup>th</sup> floor of C Block. Cocoa packing and Chocolate Spread pouring were on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor of B Block, but the cocoa tins were no longer made at Somerdale. They were bought from an outside supplier. The production of cocoa and Chocolate Spread was transferred to the Midlands before the end of the 1950's.

**1957** The total number of employees at Somerdale was 5,120, compared with 4,200 in 1947, a 22% increase. Some production departments worked day and night shifts. There had been 3,500 employees in 1936.

By the 1950's Fry's export trade had ceased, as there were now several overseas factories to meet the demand for the company's products outside the U.K.





Modernisation of production methods within the Somerdale factory continued. For example new wrapping machines for the ever-popular cream tablet bars wrapped 112 to 120 units a minute, twice as many as the pre-war machines did.

**1958** With the ever-increasing demand for the company's products, the management decided to invest heavily in a large new three-storey production building, to be known as D Block. This would be the first new production building for Somerdale since the completion of C Block in the early 1930's. By September 1958 excavations for the foundations of D Block were in progress and a Roman well was discovered on the site. The well had to be drained and sealed.



**Fry products of the 1950's**

Chocolate Assortment Box.  
 Chocolate Spread.  
 Cream Eggs. Crunchie Bars.  
 Medley Bars.  
 Milk Chocolate Crunch Bars.  
 Milk Chocolate Sandwich Bars.  
 Quartet Chocolate Mint Creams.

Chocolate Selection Box.  
 Cocoa. Chocolate Cream bars.  
 Five Boys Milk Chocolate Bars.  
 Milk Chocolate Coated Assorted Nuts.  
 Milk Chocolate Hazel Nut Bars.  
 Picnic Bars. Punch Bars.  
 Tiffin. Turkish Delight.



Part of the chocolate production line



## **19. THE 1970'S**

During the 1970's a number of departments were moved from Somerdale to Bourneville:- Finance, including the Wages Office; Advertising and Displays.

Most production material was now delivered to Somerdale in bulk by road transport. Sugar came from Tate & Lyle in fourteen-ton loads and was piped from the road tanker into a bulk storage container. No longer was sugar delivered in sacks to M Block. Chocolate crumb also came in road tankers from Cadbury's factories at Marlbrook and Frampton on Severn.



The Somerdale Post Office closed and a new computer department took its place.

Fry's Fire Brigade was disbanded after a long history. A new fire engine had been acquired in 1965. With this came the enlargement of the fire station within No. 3 Lodge. The Lodge was the nerve centre of security services for the Somerdale site and had undergone a major refurbishment in 1968.

Other significant events:-

**1970** Production of the James Pascall range of boiled sweets was transferred to Somerdale, following closure of Pascall's factory at Mitcham, near London. Pascall's had been taken over by Cadbury's in 1965. Among well-known Pascall lines were Murraymints (the 'too good to hurry' mints) and Fruit Bonbons.

Second floor of C Block empty following transfer of small chocolate units' production to Bournville. New Turkish Delight plant installed instead.

The end of coal-fired boilers in the factory. All changed to oil-firing.

A new product – Super Mousse – price 6d (2½p) was introduced.

**1972** Cadbury-Schweppes took over Jeyes Group Ltd. The total number of employees at Somerdale was 3,120.

**1977** The total number of employees at Somerdale was 2,647.

**1978** All rail transport ceased at Somerdale and the rail track was lifted.

**1979** The Hunslet diesel shunting engine was sold for scrap.

By the end of the 1970's the total number of employees at Somerdale was down to 2,600. The world-wide total of employees within Cadbury's and other group companies was 46,000.

## **2010**

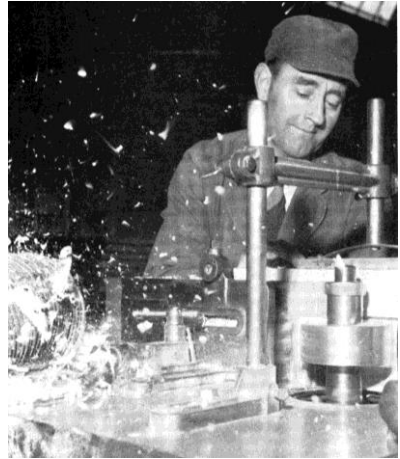
Three famous lines introduced by Fry's many years ago remain in production. Chocolate Cream and Turkish Delight still carry the Fry's name, although Crunchie, first produced in 1929, now carries the Cadbury logo. What does the future hold for these favourite brands?



## 20. SOMERDALE TRADES

In his book ‘Somerdale Story 1921 to 2009’, Eric Miles tells of the very important part played by the Somerdale trades. The policy of Fry’s and Cadbury’s over many decades up to and including the 1970’s and even into the 1980’s was to use their own tradesmen wherever possible in the development and maintenance of the Somerdale site.

There was an engineers’ office with design staff for the electrical, mechanical, carpentry, sheet metal and building trades.



P Block was the centre of the trades department, housing a carpenters’ and plumbers’ shop on the second floor. The ground floor contained the electrical workshop, trades’ stores, engineering machine shop, fitting shop and sheet metal shop. P Block was also the control centre for masons, painters and their ancillary staff.