

Sevington School Newsletter



Spring 2020

Dear Friends,

We are pleased to welcome Spring to Sevington after such a long, wet Winter. Our little school has continued to withstand torrential rain and blustery gales with only minimal damage. In February Storm Dennis left its mark, uprooting the sign by the entrance even though its legs were concreted into the ground and casting a roof tile on to the front lawn by the parlour window.

It is with a view to such contingencies, as well as other necessary running repairs, that our major objective for this year is the development of a long-term maintenance plan for the school buildings. We have organised a comprehensive property condition survey and on the basis of its findings will be in a much stronger position to prioritise which jobs need to be done urgently and which can be undertaken over the next few years and perhaps need further fundraising. Preserving a building in its original state is not as easy as it sounds!

You may remember from the last edition of the Newsletter that we have dedicated our newly planted garden to the memory of Don Williams, our former President, who was instrumental in opening up Sevington School as an educational charity. The two Madame Alfred Carrière roses planted in his honour are flourishing and we are in the process of setting up a permanent memorial to Don in the form of a page on our website.

There is a report in this Newsletter about the Big Castle Combe Jumble Sale which I hope some of you were able to get to in February. We owe a big vote of thanks to Janet Senneck, a very active and long-standing supporter of Sevington, whose suggestion it was that Sevington should be one of the three causes which benefitted from the proceeds. Thanks also go to Janet's daughter, Carley, who organised the jumble sale, and to Liz Taylor, our gardener, for her support. We are very fortunate to have such good friends.

The Sevington School 100 Club, sadly, is not living up to its name. At the last count there were only around 20 loyal members, whose subscriptions are a welcome contribution towards our fundraising, but whose winnings are now less than the subscription they paid. We have decided with regret that this is not in the spirit of a 100 Club, and the club will therefore cease to run at the end of August.

As a result of the fast-changing situation with the coronavirus, we have unfortunately had to cancel our planned Summer Sunday and Open Heritage Weekend events this year. The school is currently closed until further notice, but please do keep an eye on our website for information and updates.

With best wishes from us all at Sevington,

Isobel

Isobel Moore

Garden Update

It's more than a year since the garden was replanted and it's flourishing under the care of gardener Liz Taylor. The plants that were donated are now thriving and Liz has put in a couple of roses which should look spectacular in a year or two. They're Madame Alfred Carrière which is a good old Victorian variety.



Madame Alfred Carrière, a climbing rose first cultivated in 1879

Liz has started getting the vegetable patch ready for planting with wigwams set up for runner beans and sweet peas. She's planning to interplant with dahlias - apparently a Victorian method of pest control.

The currant bushes in the raised beds are doing well, and so is the rhubarb. Miss Squire would have turned them into wine, but we've decided reluctantly that, much as we prize authenticity, that would be a step too far.

Liz will be looking for vegetable plants in due course, so if you're planning to raise runner beans or sweet peas this year, or put in some courgettes, Sevington would be very grateful for any you have to spare.

Meanwhile the garden just gets better and better and it should be at its peak this year during the summer months.

Dinah Starkey

Spring comes to Wiltshire

Robin Tanner was born on Easter Sunday 1904. Robin was an artist and teacher who, together with his wife Heather, a writer, lived for many years in Kington Langley. They both had a close involvement with the re-opening of Sevington School in the 1990s.

The book *Wiltshire Village*, written by Heather and illustrated by Robin, was first published in 1939. The village in question is Kington Borel, situated in the North-West of Wiltshire, “a district not far-famed for its beauty .. seldom sung by poet or lauded by guide”. Kington Borel in fact has never existed, but is in the Tanners’ words “an epitome of some of the villages of North-West Wiltshire”.

In the chapter *The Village Year*, the arrival of Spring is described by Heather in charming and evocative detail. The transition from Winter to Spring is marked by the opening of the first celandine, then come primroses, dog’s mercury, wild strawberry, wood anemones and violets. Marsh marigolds, cuckoo flowers and purple bugle appear in the meadows. In the hedgerow can be seen white deadnettle and Jack-in-the-hedge, “showing daily more and more of their little Easter crosses”. Daisies make their appearance and, according to the inhabitants of Kington Borel, Spring has come when you can tread on nine daisies at once.

Birds too herald the arrival of Spring. The chiff-chaff is first heard in Kington Borel from the twentieth to the thirty-first of March, whereas the cuckoos seldom arrive before the seventeenth of April. Birdsong starts to fill the air and by May no one in Kington Borel is able to sleep after half-past four when the dawn chorus begins.



Wren and Primrose
by Robin Tanner

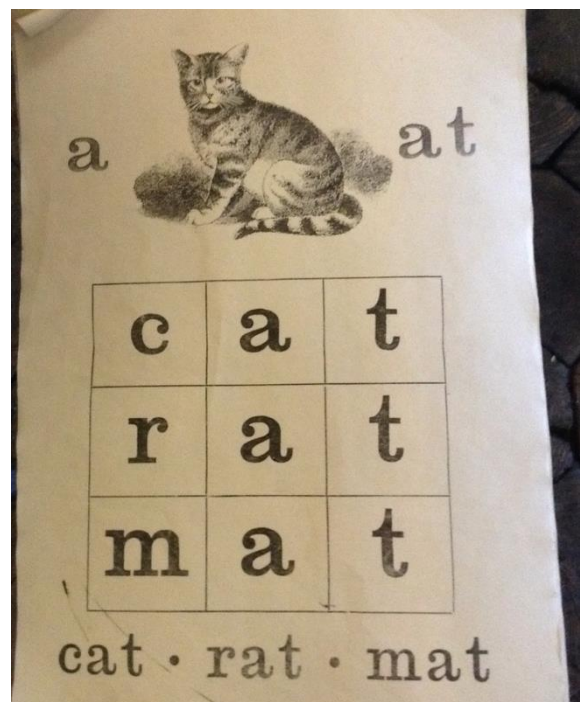
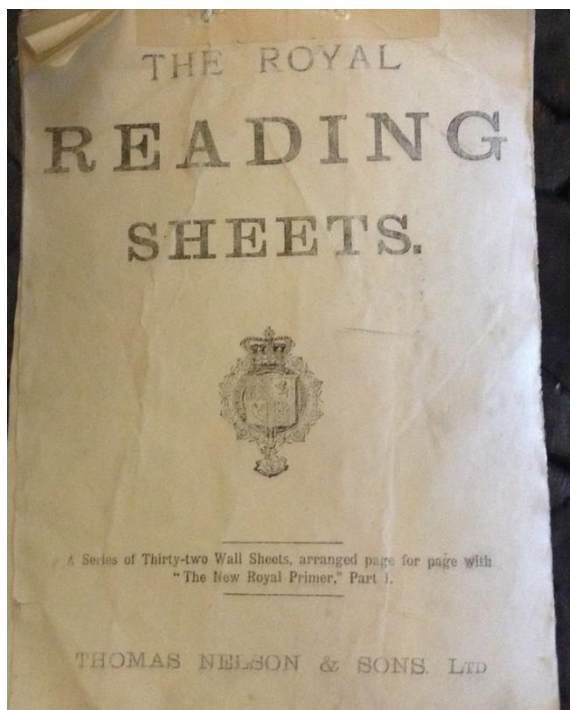
You may recognise the beautiful etching above. By kind permission of Robin Tanner, it was used to illustrate a card sold in aid of the original Sevington School Project, set up to preserve our school as a resource for children in the future.

Isobel Moore

Reading with Miss Squire

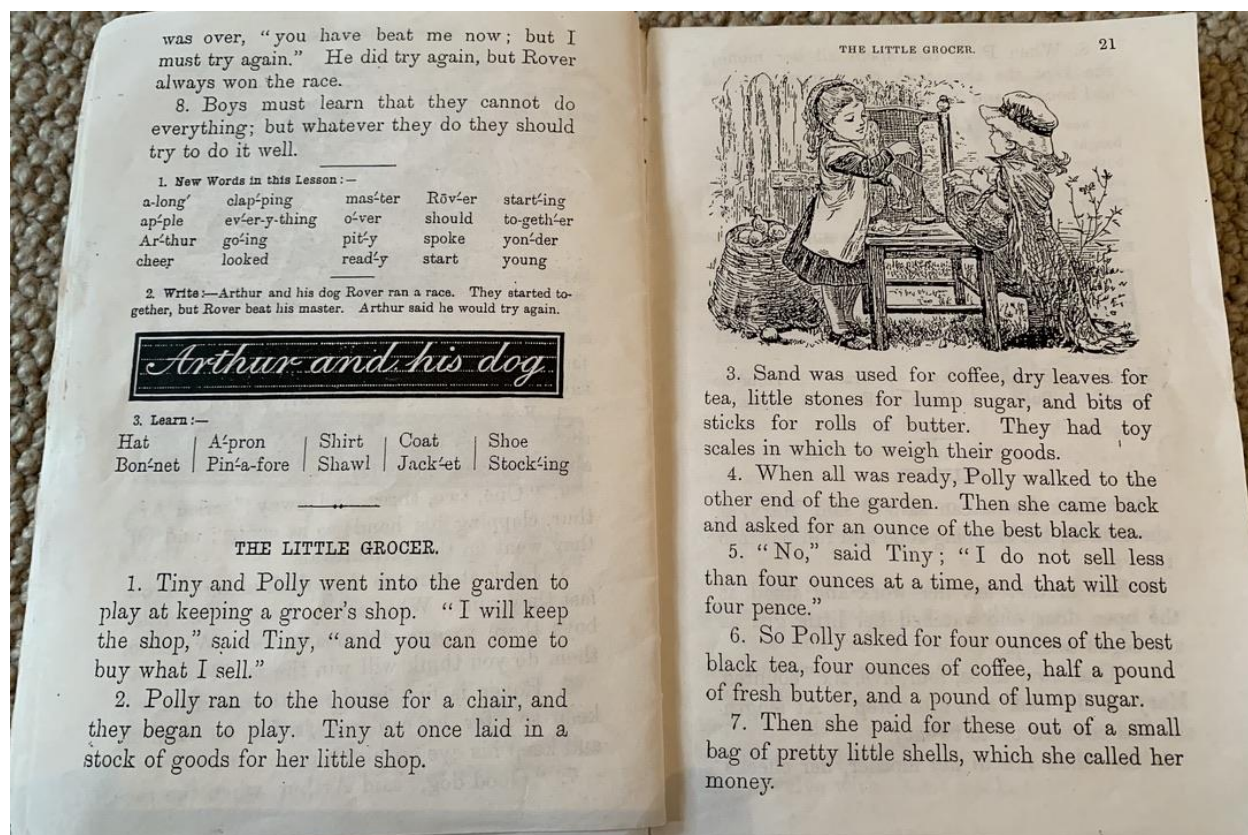
When Sevington School was founded in the middle of the nineteenth century, literacy rates were beginning to rise from the 60% of males and 50% of females who were able to read at the beginning of Victoria's reign. By the end of the century nearly 100% of both sexes were literate and much of this was because of the provision of schools such as ours and of course the Elementary Education Acts of 1870, 1880 and 1891. These provided primary education for all children up to the age of 13, compulsory up to the age of ten after 1880 and free from 1891 and also established a standard or level that children needed to reach for each year of their education before leaving school to become employed.

One of the key principles of these schools which still holds true today is the focus on teaching children to read. For the very youngest children in Standard One and also in Reception classes of contemporary schools the initial focus is on learning letter sounds, known as phonics today. Miss Squire would certainly recognise this chart from Sevington School (*below*) which we use with our younger visitors, saying each sound together and then reading a monosyllabic word.



In today's parlance, we are blending phonemes of consonant/vowel/consonant (CVC) words.

These younger children then are encouraged to read aloud from our Infant Reading Book, "The New Royal Reader," of 1891 (*below*). Most of the stories in this book are innocuous but usually have a moral aspect.



The book we use for Juniors is "The New Reading Easy: Or Child's First Book" printed by J. Rawling of Bradford on Avon (*below*). This book states that it is arranged "so as to blend entertainment with instruction" and much of the instruction is of an overtly Christian nature and of a very much harsher tone than contemporary children would expect.

One passage, taken from the Bible which we do not use with the children is this one:

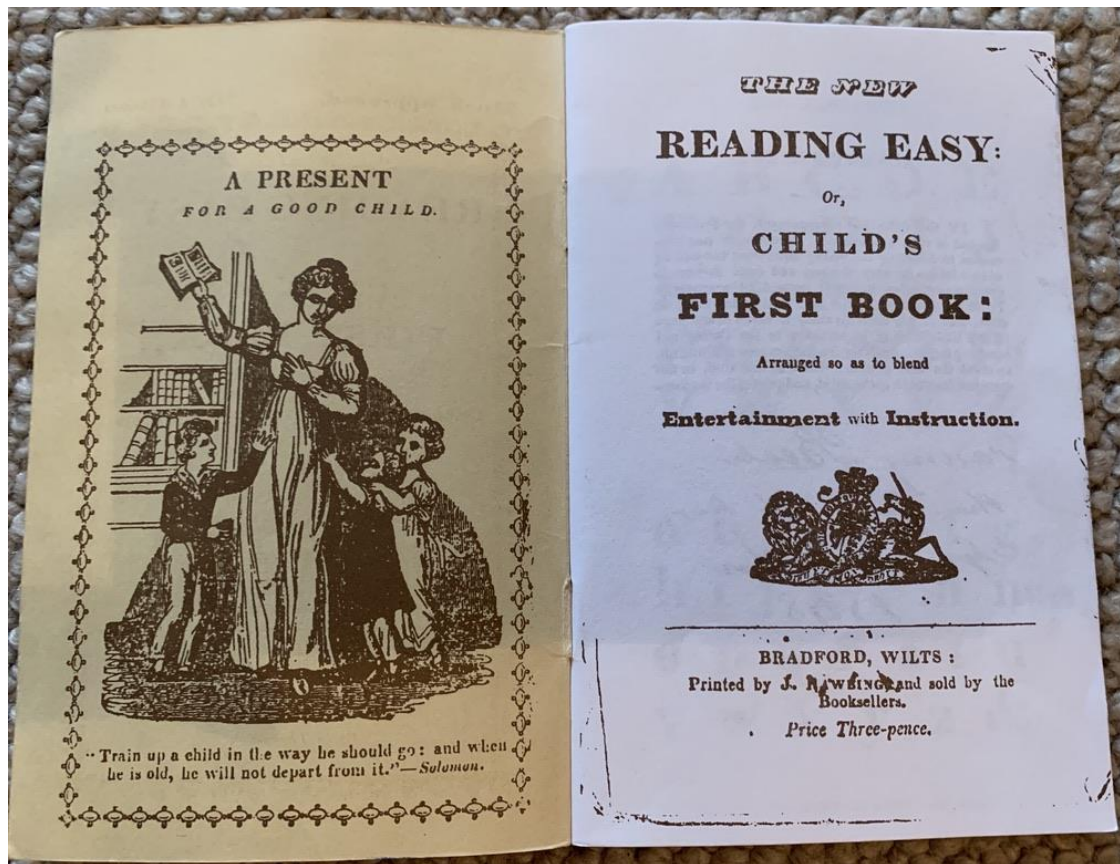
The Duty of Children to their Parents

Honour thy father and mother, that thy days may be long on the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.

Children obey your parents in all things for this is well pleasing to the Lord.

The eye that mocketh at his father and despiseth to obey his mother, the ravens of the valley shall pick it out and the young eagles shall eat it.

He that curseth father or mother, shall surely be put to death.



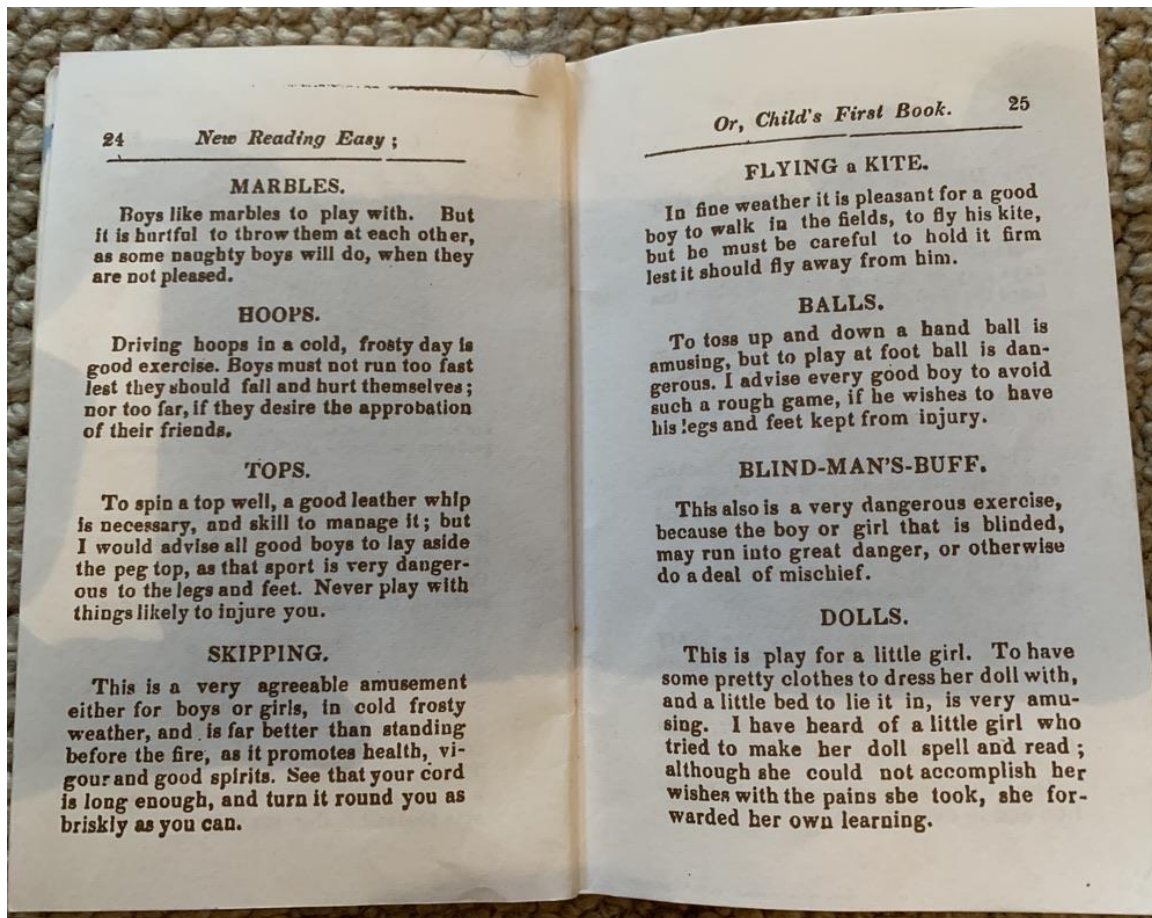
The mortality rates of children during the nineteenth century were high. At the beginning of Victoria's reign in 1837 as many as one in three infants might die before their fifth birthday from a variety of diseases such as smallpox, measles, whooping cough, diphtheria and dysentery. No family was immune – in 1856 the future Archbishop of Canterbury Archibald Tait lost five children over five weeks to scarlet fever. Charles Darwin lost his ten year old daughter Annie in 1851 to tuberculosis which accounted for around 60,000 children's deaths each year in that period. As a consequence, much literature of Victorian England covered the prevalence of children's deaths and our reading book is no different. We have two stories on this theme, one called Happy Death of a Little Girl and the other, A Pious Child.

Of course, the mortality rates for adults were also high and the following passage is also taken from our reading book:

The Child's Grief

A child was one day lamenting the death of a kind parent. Her companion endeavoured to comfort her by saying that she had always behaved to her parent with duty, tenderness and respect. "So I thought," replied the child, "while my parent was alive, but now she is dead I recollect many times when I was disobedient and now alas it is too late to ask for forgiveness!"

Needless to say, none of these are used by Miss Squire today. However, she may well ask scholars to read from the following pages describing suitable playtime activities:



Nikki Wright



*Miss Squire (aka Nikki)
enjoying one of her books*

The big Castle Combe Jumble Sale

Every year the inhabitants of Castle Combe hold a giant jumble sale and distribute the takings to local charities. This year Sevington was one of them, so all the trustees had a good root round in their attics and two of us went along on the day to lend a hand.



It was a huge affair with people turning up two hours ahead of time to join the queue.



There were lamps and kettles, a full Tudor costume and a set of drums - in short, the kind of high quality jumble you'd expect in Castle Combe. Visitors departed staggering under the weight of their booty while bewildered oriental tourists wandered in ("What is jumble sale?"), stared at the mountains of clothes and wandered out again.

The sale was a great success with takings of more than £1,800 to be distributed between the three designated charities. And it was a real pleasure to be involved in a community event.



Dinah Starkey

A Very Victorian Easter

Many of the Easter traditions upheld and celebrated by the Victorians would be fully recognisable to us today. They were widely reported in the Victorian press, with coverage in *The Illustrated London News* of 1844, for example, of Palm Sunday celebrations in Spitalfields and of the Pope washing the feet of poor priests on Maundy Thursday in Rome. Easter is, of course, primarily a religious celebration, but as the nineteenth century progressed, family life became more of a priority for the Victorian middle classes and as a result, Easter celebrations became more centred on family, home and the pleasures of children.

Even as a child growing up at Kensington Palace, Queen Victoria enjoyed egg hunts organised by her German-born mother. This custom was brought to England from Germany where it was said to date back to the late sixteenth century when Martin Luther, the Protestant reformer, organised egg hunts for his congregation. The men hid eggs for the women and children to find, a reference to the women who found the empty tomb in the story of the Resurrection. Victoria and Albert were keen to continue this custom with their own children, and so it was Albert who hid the eggs in little moss baskets around the palace. In 1848, when spending Easter at Osborne on the Isle of Wight, Victoria wrote in her journal: *"During our breakfast & after, the Children hunted for Easter eggs, it being Maundy Thursday, & they were in the greatest delight."*



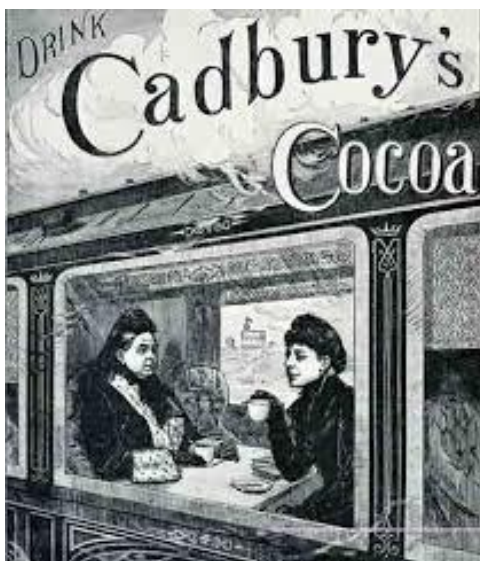
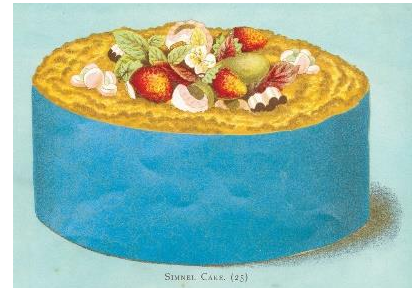
The eggs hidden in Victorian times were usually hard-boiled and decorated. Eggs were dyed by boiling them in onion skins, which gave a rich golden colour. Red was achieved with the use of beetroot and green with periwinkle leaves, and eggs could even be wrapped in gorse flowers before boiling to produce a delicate yellow and brown pattern.



The figure of the Easter Bunny would also have been familiar to Victoria and Albert who grew up with the tradition of the German *Osterhase*, the hare who brought the brightly coloured eggs to children who had behaved themselves during the year.

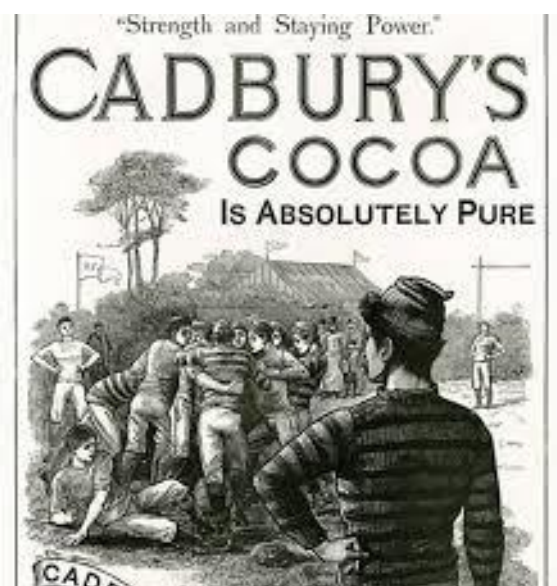
Thanks to the introduction of the Uniform Penny Post in 1840, the sending of Easter greeting cards and postcards became very popular among the Victorians, a tradition that has largely died out today.

So what of the sweet treats associated with Easter? Hot cross buns had been around for centuries and the Victorians enjoyed eating them on Good Friday. The sharing of a hot cross bun was thought to cement a friendship, as in the old rhyme: *Half for you, and half for me, between us two good luck shall be*. In the nineteenth century, simnel cake was eaten as a treat on Mothering Sunday in the middle of Lent. Originally it was more like a pudding, boiled and then baked, with saffron as its principal ingredient. Towards the end of the century, it became lighter and more cake-like (as in this picture from 1893) and was eaten at Easter.



Chocolate eggs first appeared in France and Germany in the early 19th century, but here in the UK it wasn't until 1873 that J.S. Fry and Sons, a Quaker family business in Bristol, produced the first chocolate Easter egg. Cadbury's first egg was produced two years later in 1875. John Cadbury, also a Quaker, began his business as a grocer's shop in Birmingham in 1824, selling, amongst other things, tea, coffee, cocoa and drinking chocolate. These drinks were seen as a healthy alternative to alcohol, which Quakers thought were bad for society. In 1831, John Cadbury opened a factory and the chocolate manufacturing business was born. By 1842 he was selling 16 varieties of drinking chocolate and 11 types of cocoa. Cadbury's was given a Royal Warrant by Queen Victoria in 1854. The rather cheeky advertisement from 1890 (above left) shows Queen Victoria on a train enjoying a warm cup of cocoa.

John Cadbury retired in 1861, handing over control of the business to his two sons, Richard and George, who were just 25 and 21 years old. After some initial hard times, the turning point came in 1866 when, with the introduction of a new processing technique, the business launched Cadbury's Cocoa Essence, the UK's first unadulterated cocoa. This no longer contained the high levels of cocoa butter, whose rather unpleasant taste and texture had to be masked by adding starches. Cocoa Essence was advertised as "Absolutely Pure. Therefore Best." alongside medical testimonials. Just as importantly, this smoother form of chocolate could be moulded into hollow egg shapes.





The earliest Cadbury chocolate eggs were made of dark chocolate with a plain smooth surface and they were filled with sugar coated chocolate drops known as “dragees” or with sugared almonds. The first decorated eggs were plain shells enhanced by chocolate piping and marzipan flowers. Other decorative eggs soon followed and by 1893 Cadbury’s had 19 different Easter lines, with designs often based on French and German originals and adapted to Victorian tastes.

So it only remains to wish you all a very Happy Easter in true Victorian style.



Isobel Moore

Recent 100 Club Winners

September: Rindy Runacres

October : Sylvia Townsend

November : Harriet Tupper

December : Isobel Moore

January : Carol Brewer

February: David Sealy

March : Jennifer Adams