

Weekend Wonder: The Importance of Tea Saturday 30 and Sunday 31 May 2020

Welcome to Weekend Wonder: The Importance of Tea - sharing our heritage from Bruce Castle Museum & Archive.

We hope this post sounds like your cup of tea to set you up for the week As a perpetual tea drinker myself, my colleagues, family and friends will know how important having a cup of tea is for me – not often do I turn down the chance of a cuppa. We need not look far to meet others who share that view - tea has traditionally been our beverage of choice. If you do a search on the internet for sayings that feature the word 'tea', we can see all around the world how many different cultures reflect the drinking of tea - in the way we structure our day or use tea-making to lift our mood or to welcome people, with phrases about tea appearing in our everyday speech or literature. The science also seems to back up the number of [benefits to our health and well-being](#) for drinking tea too. As a Chinese proverb says '*Drinking a **daily cup of tea** will surely starve the [apothecary](#).*' And indeed the politician [William Gladstone](#) also sums it up nicely: '*If you are cold, tea will **warm** you; if you are too heated, it will **cool** you; if you are depressed, it will **cheer** you; if you are excited, it will **calm** you.*'

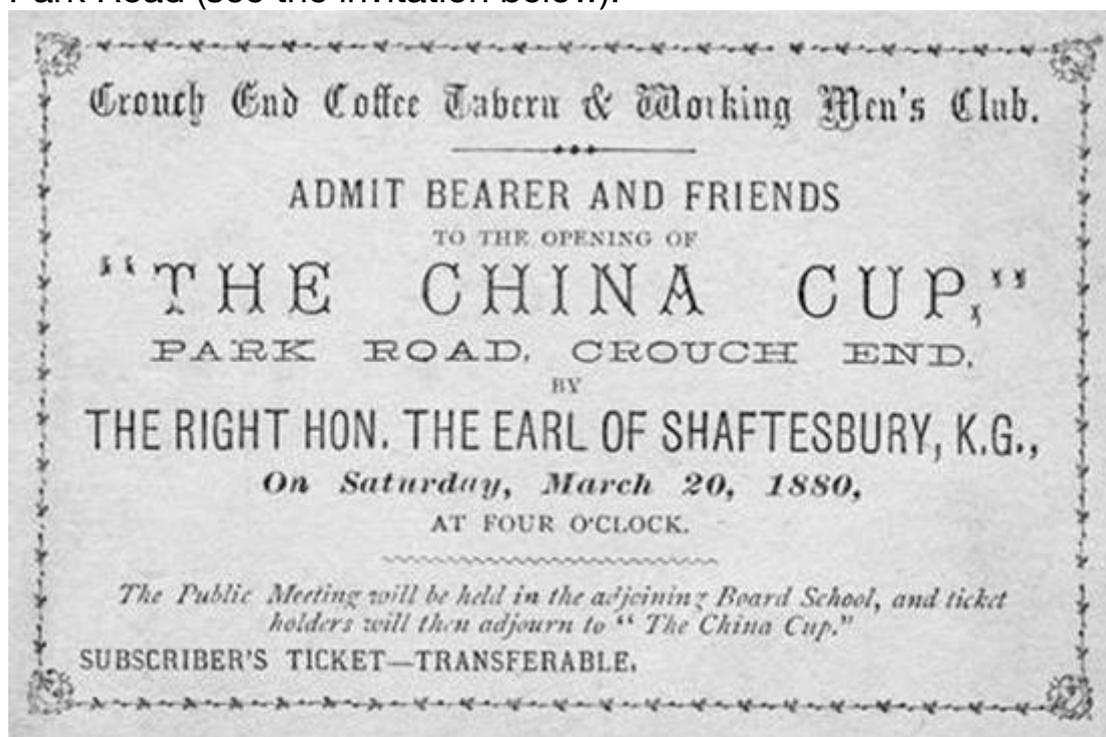


This is one of our favourite photographs from the collections at Bruce Castle, taken by Henry Jacobs for his photographic exhibition and project '*People & Places: a Portrait of a Community - Northumberland Park*' and exhibited at Bruce Castle in 2004. Here the Over 55s Club in Northumberland Park (who met at Kenneth Robbins House), pose for Henry whilst making tea and having a chat together. The group includes (from left to right): Maureen Dewar (former Haringey councillor), un-named lady (in hat), Shirley Perlman, Olive Rainbird (pouring the tea), John Catling, Joan and Benjamin.

From the collections of Bruce Castle Museum & Archive. © The photographer: Henry Jacobs

By the time Gladstone had become Prime Minister, the 18th century [Tea Act](#) – which had been introduced to tax and try to control the sale of tea - had already been repealed in 1861. The demand and popularity of tea drinking in Britain has had of course a long and [world-changing history](#) with major implications on how our society, politics and the economy for Britain has evolved. It has shaped and supported the dominance and power of the British Empire and its exploitation in its colonies, as well as contributed to the rise of the [Industrial Revolution](#) to boost productivity.

The origins of the tea break has been essential for the welfare and safety of the British workforce, and remains an important part of working life. From the early 19th century, workers would typically start their day at around 5 or 6 AM so employers would let them have a break in the morning to eat and to drink tea. It was also an encouragement to not drink alcohol whilst at work (beer being a calorie-laden beverage that pulled double-duty with thirsty workers and farmers in need of energy). During the late 19th century, the rise of the Temperance movement supported providing non-alcoholic alternatives for workers, with plenty of examples of its work in Haringey – establishing water drinking fountains, coffee stalls and coffee taverns that also served tea! In 1880, the Earl of Shaftesbury felt so strongly about controlling the sale of liquor that he travelled to open ‘*The China Cup*’, the new Crouch End Coffee Tavern and Working Men’s Club in Park Road (see the invitation below).



From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum & Archive.

During the Second World War, a young Daphne Bradley remembers the importance of tea and the camaraderie of tea breaks whilst she worked at the Harris Lebus factory in Tottenham doing important war work, when food - as well as tea - was crucial to keep energy levels up, all at a time when rationing was at its height:

“Also every morning and every afternoon the tea trolley would come round and sometimes if we were lucky the tea lady would have thick slices of bread and

dripping in the mornings at 1d (old money) per slice. That was a real luxury in those days of rationing. In the afternoon we could buy a cake with our cup of tea or maybe a slice of bread pudding. We had 10 minutes break both morning and afternoon.”

Another reminiscence comes from a worker in a laundry:

“It was very hot and stifling in the Laundry in any area except for the Sorting and Packing Rooms. Most laundries provided jugs of salty lemonade for workers in summer. Tea at the ‘Oceana’ [laundry in Tottenham] was brought round by trolley for a ten-minute break morning and afternoon. It was in ordinary glass jamjars, some people brought their own, and cost a halfpenny a cup. There was a canteen-room for the lunch hour, for people to eat their sandwiches.”

During lockdown, having a cup of tea with friends is perhaps not quite the same over Zoom as drinking tea in the same place together and socialising. We must still persevere like this to observe social distancing in this crucial time, but at least having a cup of tea does seem to help us through the day at the moment, with the health benefits that come with it. This very topic was indeed the subject of our lovely Reminiscence Café at the Castle (usually held once a month – as seen in the photograph below). Led by local historian Christine Protz, tea and its importance to us was what brought people together only a couple of months ago back in February 2020, to reminisce, chat and have a nice afternoon – over a cuppa. This was the advert for the topic:

‘Tea - what we drink and how we make it has changed over time. We used to make it using tea leaves in a teapot and brewed to our satisfaction. Then tea bags started to appear and we discovered ‘instant’ tea, sometimes still using a teapot but increasingly straight to the cup. Those tea bags also made changes, bringing in different teas such as Earl Grey or herbal. Whatever the choice, tea has usually been our comfort of choice – but let’s not forget coffee, or bedtime cocoa or even Bovril on winter days. Join us for a cuppa and biscuits to talk about how we used to enjoy our favourite beverages, how we made it and when we drunk it. And of course – milk first or last?’



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Another extremely popular and fascinating event at Bruce Castle was when we welcomed [Ming-Ai from Bounds Green](#) to the Museum, during a [special weekend of cultural activities](#) back in 2012, which included a Chinese tea-making ceremony. Thoroughly refreshing!

While we may miss meeting up at our favourite tea room or café or drinking tea at our club at the moment, here are a few local views from our collections to keep us all going in the meantime, whilst we have a cup of tea at home. For starters here's a photograph of the Lyons' tea shop in Muswell Hill in 1962. Some of you may recall it as [one local does here](#), or know of the Lyons' Corner Shops (1909 - 1977) centrally in The Strand, Tottenham Court Road or Covent Garden:



From the collections of Bruce Castle Museum & Archive

Or let's be reminded of this very inviting Turkish tea (below) that you can get from the many different cafés and restaurants like [Diyarbakir in Green Lanes](#) in Haringay:



One of the oldest shops in our borough selling tea (and coffee!), with its own blend, is Martyn's in the Broadway, Muswell Hill. Martyn's has also blended 'Tottenham Tea' for ['T On the Green'](#).



Stepping into Martyn's is like stepping back in time. Visitors from far and wide have always sought it out for its uniqueness, as little seems to have changed since it first opened in 1897.



The shop and part of its interior is [Grade II listed by Historic England](#). You can find out more about its history [here, by William Martyn](#), the fourth generation of the family to be running the business - and still providing for us today.



From the collections of Bruce Castle Museum & Archive

With lots of different types of tea available for us to choose from and enjoy nowadays – whatever your taste in tea - and with herbal and fruit teas produced and sold locally, we do wonder what the more historical ‘Bruce Castle’ Blend of tea would have been like. You could buy it from Drawmer’s Tea Warehouse at 456 Tottenham High Road, just by Albert Place (the little alley-way to the right of the shop), seen here (below) in c.1910.



From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum & Archive

With so many cafés, restaurants and stalls selling tea around our borough, there are those who still have fond memories of cafés long-since gone – such as the

'Empire Tea Rooms' on Broad Lane in Tottenham. From people's (vague) descriptions of what it was like, it sounds as if it could have been a late 1980s/ early 1990s 'deconstruction' and 'reclaiming' of a traditional tea room. Many of the other eateries and drinking places in that immediate area were quite male-dominated, and here was a tea room that arrived, was popular and attracted a great range of people. The style of this café could have been inspired by the early 20th century vanguard of women who decided to run a tea room, have financial autonomy and exercise independence at a time when it was hard for women to be quite so entrepreneurial. The tea room back then could be a meeting place for 'change' during women's suffrage. But then again, maybe this restyled retro tea room in Broad Lane was just cool and different, and hit the right vibe at the time. There are sadly few known images of it (you can see [this one here](#)). This café certainly hit the right notes for offering something that had "great food at the right price with friendly service and fun décor – what's not to like?" When local art organisation *Make-Room* took over an empty shop in Broad Lane in 2012-13 to create a Living Archive, many residents asked for a reconstructed 'tea room' for memories, some mindful of the Empire tea room that had once been nearby. The results of that makeover can be [seen here](#).

In August 1919, like many parts of London, residents in Tottenham took part in a friendly competition to see who could put on the best shindig for a Peace street tea party. You can see a film from the [BFI here](#) all about it.

In 1911, Alexandra Palace was the venue for one of the largest tea parties (below).



From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum & Archive

Alexandra Palace was again the venue in July 2018 for the [Cath Kidston Largest Cream Tea Party](#), with the Guinness Book of Records checking it out.

Another big tea party – this time all around the country – saw Bruce Castle Museum taking part in the [LiberTeas event in 2015](#), to mark the 800th anniversary of the signing of the Magna Carta. Parliament had asked ‘communities across the UK to take a moment to celebrate, debate or reflect on those rights which very often are taken for granted but which people throughout history have campaigned to make happen or fought to preserve’.



SUNDAY 14 JUNE 2015

Amongst our activities that day, we had our own (and very popular) Vintage Fair with an emphasis on drinking tea and its associated accessories, like the terrific 1950s Midwinter tea cup and saucer shown below.



Thinking about having a good cup of Rosie Lea, you might of course know this song from the famous *Muswell Hillbillies* LP by the Kinks, written by Ray Davies – [Have a Cuppa Tea](#) (listen to it via the link – and whilst listening you can also read and take note of the great lyrics in celebration of tea!)

And no mention of our Vintage Fairs or our Reminiscence Cafés or drinking of tea can pass without remembering our museum volunteer and [Friend of Bruce](#)

[Castle](#), Ray Swain – much missed and treasured as someone in the community for always volunteering to help deliver many of the activities in parks and in his neighbourhood in Tottenham, as well as at Bruce Castle - just as long as he had his beloved cup (or mug) of tea in his hand, as he does below!



From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum & Archive

And on that fond note – cheers!
Take care, keep well and enjoy a cup of tea.

Best wishes from us all at Bruce Castle

Deborah Hedgecock
Curator

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