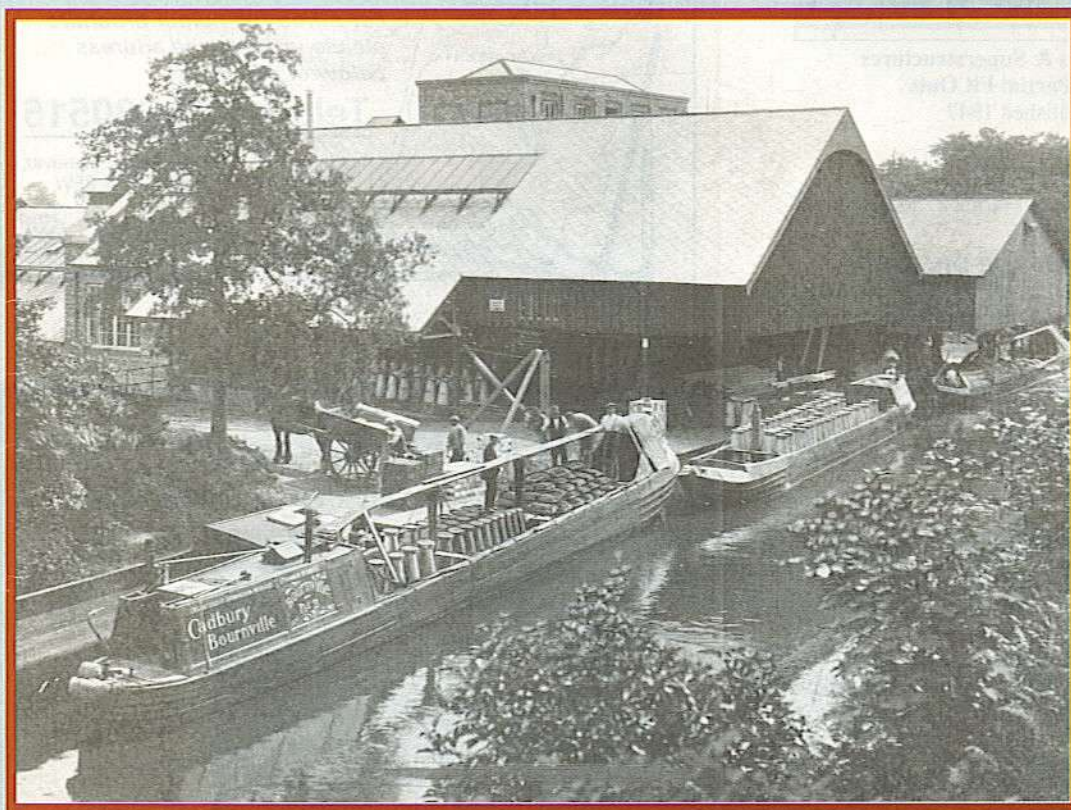


Chocolate on

RICHARD HILL tells the story of his Grandfather George Wiseman, whose job was operating the horse drawn boat Bourneville 5 carrying milk to the busy Cadbury processing plant at Knighton, on the Shropshire Union Canal in the 1920's.



ANYONE who has cruised the Shroppie between bridge 45 and the Shebdon Embankment through Staffordshire will have come across a deserted canopy, its' castellated fringe reaching out of the trees on the north bank. Approaching from the east, boat owners will have noticed a large glazed industrial plant concealed behind, approached from the west and the canopy remains hidden by trees until reached, but the rise in industrial noise may give a hint of something up ahead. This is part of the Premier Beverage plant, accessible only by road. In the 1920's however, this was the busy processing plant of Cadbury Limited. Milk was collected from local farms along the Shroppie and brought to this plant for processing into crumb chocolate which was then taken by canal to the Cadbury Bourneville factory for further refinement into the world famous Cadbury's Chocolate.

One of the boatmen working on the canal from here was my Grandfather, George Wiseman. After serving in WW1, he went

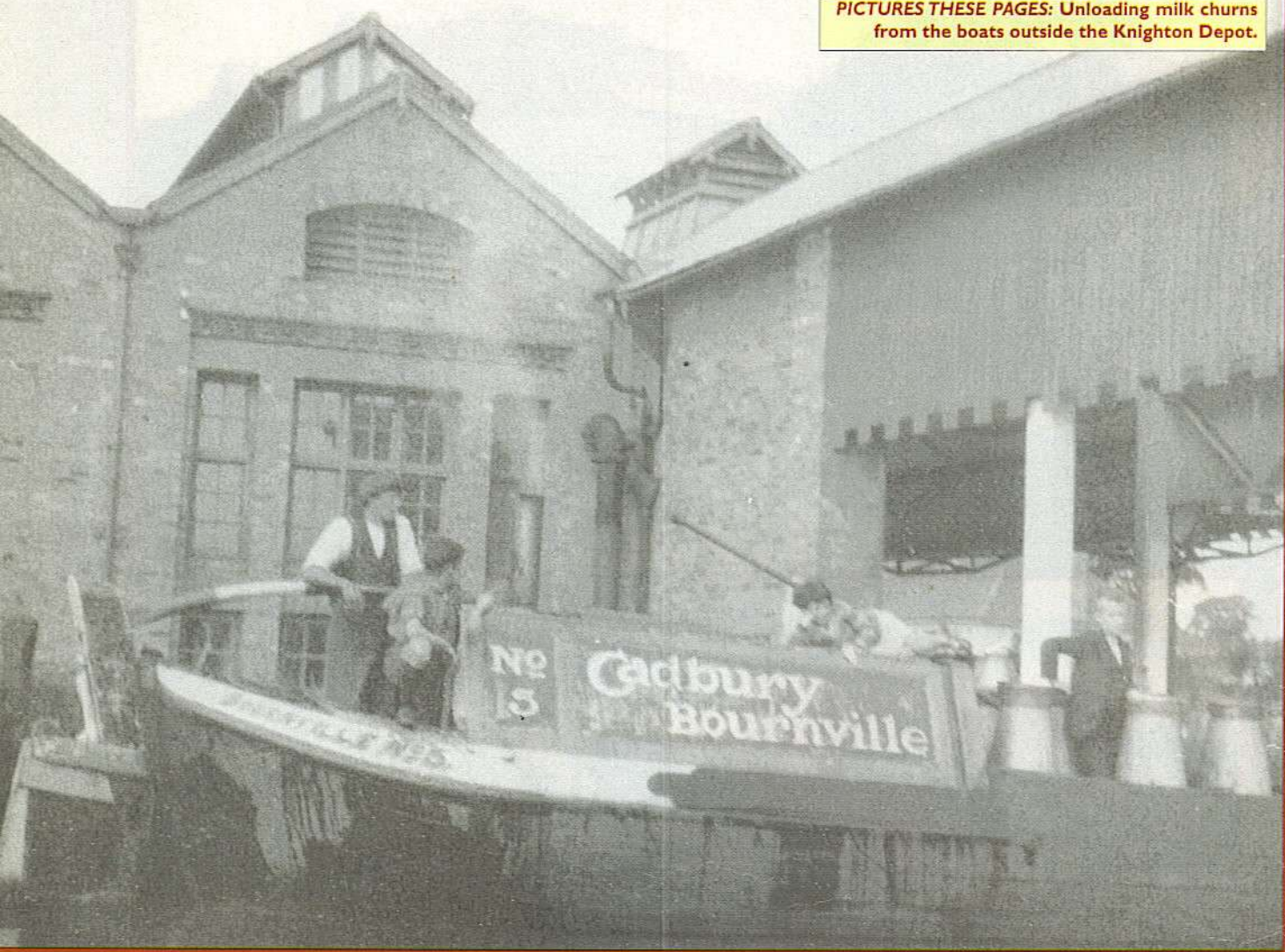
back to his old job collecting milk for a cheese processing plant from local farms by horse-drawn narrowboat. The wages were not good. When an opening for similar work became available at the Cadbury Knighton factory, George applied. The terms offered by Cadbury were much better, and George was taken on.

George and his wife Evelyn lived at Norbury with their family - two sons Henry and Bernard and daughters Joyce, Dorothy, Janet and Elizabeth. A short walk across the fields started George's working day at Norbury Junction where the horse was stabled, and the boat *Bourneville 5* moored. Work started at 6am. The horse was groomed, tackled and prepared to haul the boatload of 150 empty milk churns to the start of the collection at High Onn (Bridge 25). Churns full of milk were left at collecting points along the canal. Gradually as the boat made progress towards Knighton, churns, each one labelled by the farmer, were loaded onto the boat, and empty churns deposited for the following days' collection.

Once the boat arrived at the Cadbury Knighton plant the full churns were unloaded, the quantity and quality of each checked before

the Shroppie

PICTURES THESE PAGES: Unloading milk churns from the boats outside the Knighton Depot.



MRS D M HILL (nee WISEMAN)

being emptied and processed. It was these checks that would determine the payment to be made to each farmer each month. The empty churns remained inverted for cleaning before passing onto a conveyor that would carry them to the top of a storage tower. The churns were stacked on a helical track, gravity carrying them back down to the bottom for redistribution, a sort of giant 'helter skelter' for empty milk churns.

Once empty, the boat was reloaded with empty churns from the bottom of the tower in preparation for the following days' collection. One oddity of the plant was that no facility was provided for turning the boat.

For the first part of the journey back to Norbury Junction at the end of the day, *Bourneville 5* was unceremoniously hauled backwards as far as the winding hole at Shebdon. Once turned, George, the boat and horse returned to Norbury Junction. The horse was stabled, the boat moored and George finished for the day usually around 3 - 4pm.

In 1925, at the age of six, George's eldest daughter, Joyce had

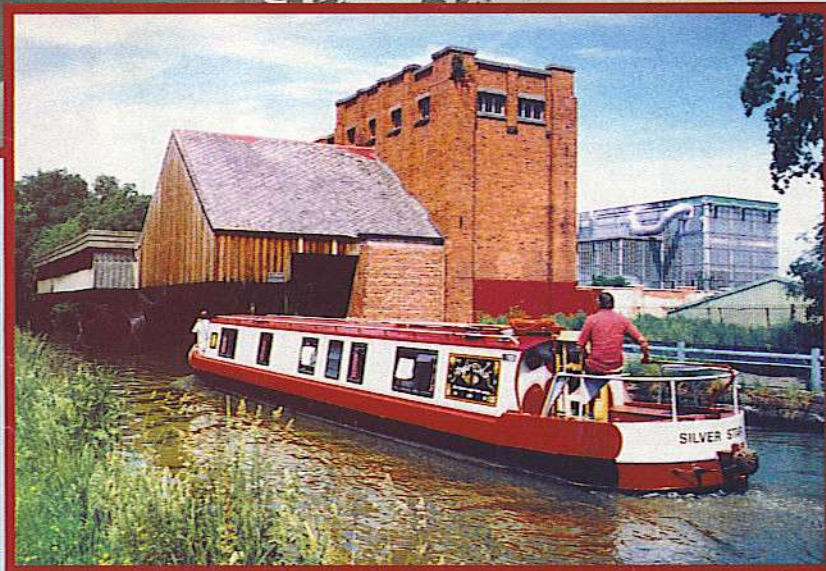
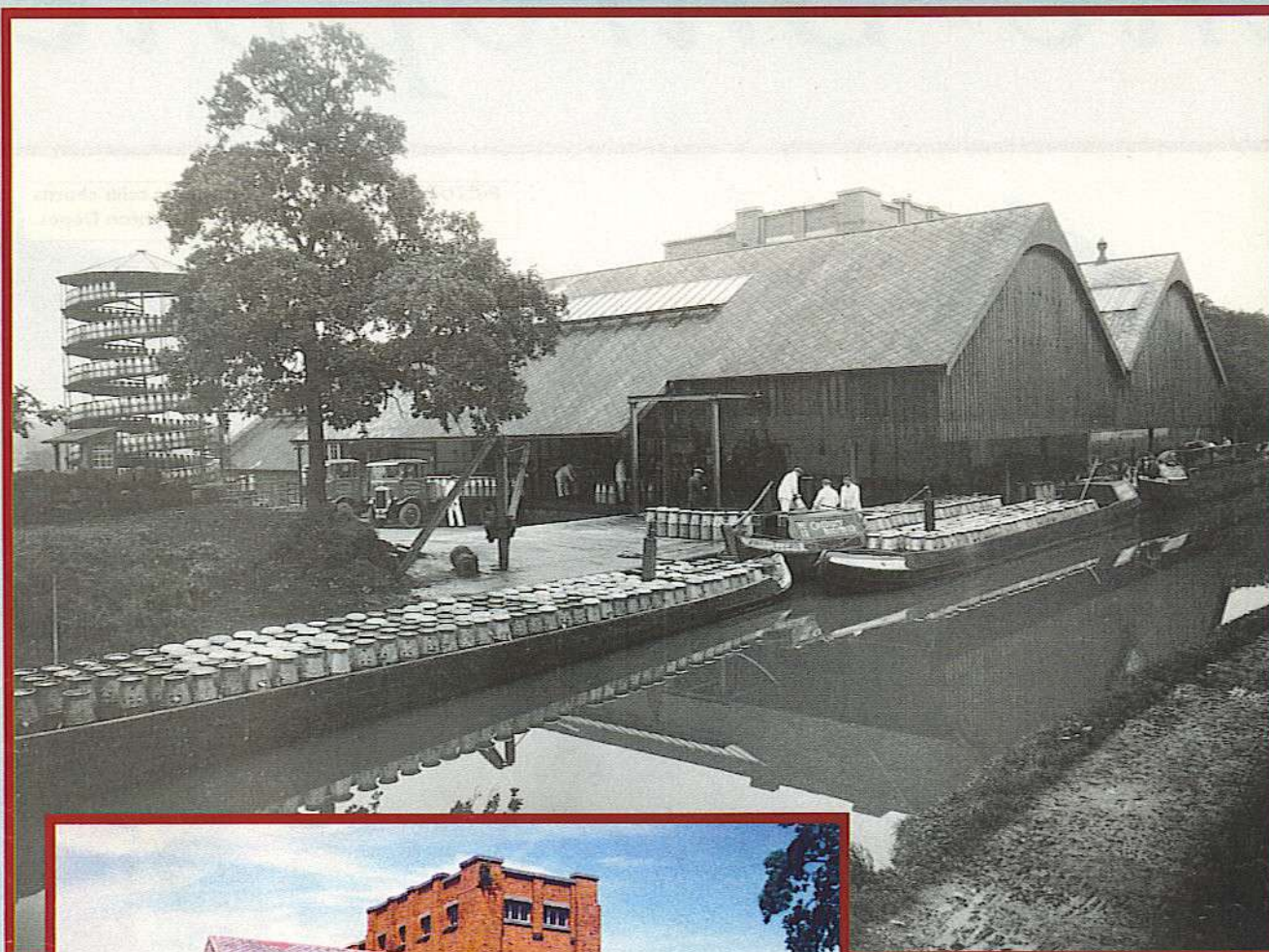
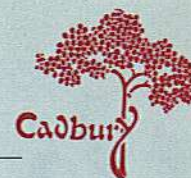
scarlet fever. George could not live at home for the period while the virus was contagious for fear of carrying it to other families. He went to live at *The Junction* pub at Norbury Junction which was run by his father and mother Henry and Mary Wiseman. Today this is a busy pub and restaurant, but then it was a small pub and small farm holding of 14 acres. The farm buildings being sited on what has since become the car park.

One of the 'perks' of Cadbury employees was being able to buy cheap chocolate, particularly when it was rationed during the second world war. Employees could make a monthly purchase of three or four 21b bags of misshapen chocolate, each bag marked NOT FOR RESALE and costing George about one shilling a bag. Another purchasable product was crumb chocolate, the product of the factory. Made from Cocoa beans, sugar and milk, this was sent to the Bourneville factory for final processing into chocolate bars. George's son Bernard recalls the crumb chocolate as an occasional treat, "It looked like sandstone, but tasted lovely."

Each summer, Cadbury would host a summer fete for the chil-

CANAL CARRYING

Chocolate on the Shroppie



ABOVE: The Knighton depot in full swing. Note the spiral 'churn tower' which kept empty churns stored ready to reload onto the boats.

LEFT: The Knighton 'canopy' as it is today.

➤ dren of their employees. From the field high on the bank opposite the factory, between egg and spoon or sack races, the children would look down and wave to their fathers working at the plant. The highlight of the day was a trip on the canal in one of the horse-drawn boats.

The milk collecting routine continued daily through each season. The canal was a vital part of the dairyland community. In winter, an ice-breaking boat would clear the canal for the daily working traffic. But in the winter of 1929, even the ice-breaker was outdone by the weather. The milk had to be collected by road. Perhaps Cadburys recognised this opportunity as a more efficient form of transport, or perhaps for other reasons the milk collection was slowly transferred from water to road.

Following *Bourneville 5's* final collection, George was transferred to work at the plant itself, loading and unloading lorries with milk, chocolate crumb and other imports and exports from the factory. By now George lived in Knightley some 8 miles from the factory. In the thirty or so years of working for Cadbury he was late for work only once and on the 12th February 1955, while cycling to work he collapsed and died having suffered a heart attack.

George enjoyed his work, and died probably the way he would have wanted. His children remember him as a fine man, Cadbury as a fine employer, and a manufacturer of fine chocolate. So much so, that my mother, Dorothy, now aged 75, has never bought chocolate other than that made by Cadbury. ♪