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# THE CELEBRATED READING SAUCE: CHARLES COCKS & CO. LTD. 1789—1962

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When we look at Reading's nineteenth-century firms, we see that an unusual number of their founders had first-hand experience of bankruptcy or other grave financial difficulties. The Huntley brothers of Huntley & Palmers and Huntley Boorne & Stevens respectively, the original Suttons and the Perry brothers who established the Reading Iron Works all tasted the bitter fruit of insolvency. Maybe that was the lot to be expected for people of modest means in an era of unlimited liability, low expectation of life and only the prospect of poor relief in the absence of private resources in old age.

It now seems as if the Cocks family, of Reading sauce fame, had similarly chequered origins. Their experience of misfortune did not end with the consolidation of their enterprise. Like the other principal firms in the town, it achieved national and international fame — somewhat earlier than the others — but then a double misfortune during 1864 in a matter of weeks wiped out the male line. Although Cocks's survived for almost exactly a century more, it never regained its early lead in the trade. The present article seeks to trace the successive phases of the firm's existence.

## I

The founder was James Cocks (1766-1827). His antecedents have not yet been traced, but he was not a native of Reading. As a number of Cockses were then living in Berkshire — at Aldworth, Binfield, Inkpen and West Hannay among other places — he could well have been born in the county and then moved to Reading as its most considerable town. He had been apprenticed to the trade of fishmonger; not being a Londoner, he was not entered in the records of the Fishmongers Company.

As a journeyman, in 1789 he set up shop in Reading's Butcher Row: one of two parallel roads that then ran east from King Street about a third of the way along the present Broad Street, the other being Fisher Row. Those alleys were of medieval narrowness, so that carriages could not pass one another and people in the overhanging bow windows could shake hands with neighbours on the opposite side. Butcher Row was appropriately full of butchers' and poulterers' shops, with at least one slaughterhouse. Why he should have plied his trade there and not in Fisher Row is far from clear, but they were equally smelly for both the inhabitants and pedestrians.

Then in 1794 he married Ann Cooper (1763-1832) of Caversham. She was the youngest of seven children to John and Grace Cooper; whatever the father's previous occupation, for nearly twenty years he had been regularly supported by parish relief. When he died in 1793 his pauper's funeral cost £1.1s.0d. Grace survived until 1800. Her funeral fell to the parish (£1.7s.7d.) too, although by then Ann and her husband were on their way up in the world. The full story behind their brush with degrading poverty will never be known, but Ann was apparently unable to escape from her domestic bondage until she was over thirty, and her marriage to a younger man

may well have caused a breach with both mother and older brothers and sisters. Nor can a second intriguing question be answered. Did Grace Cooper from her earlier affluent days possess an old recipe book, on which the new sauce was based?

Whatever the story, in 1797 John Cocks leased a property in Duke Street, from the great landlords of the town, the Blagraves. The street runs south from the Market Place to the High Bridge that spans the river Kennet, and his premises were at the southern corner of what is now Thorn Lane. In those more salubrious surroundings the pair devised their fish sauce, which was first marketed in 1802. Their son's later evidence makes it clear that they were jointly responsible for the sauce.

The second half of the eighteenth century had been a very busy time for the development of proprietary sauces. They were descended from household recipes of chutney-like relishes to give zest to the salt meat and other preserved foodstuffs during the long winter in the pre-refrigeration era. Thus the real inventor probably lived well back in the middle ages. The earliest recorded commercial sauce-maker seems to have been John Burgess whose Devonshire Sauce dates from 1760.[1] Then in the middle of the following decade Elizabeth Lazenby began to make Harvey's sauce near Portman Square in London; the recipe came from her brother Peter Harvey, landlord of the Black Dog inn at East Bedfont, Middlesex. Both sauces were widely advertised in the press as suitable for fish and game or beefsteaks. Thus the Cockses had a good reason for diversifying from fishmongering into fish sauce.

It was possibly Ann Cocks through her mother who had a very good knowledge of the spices that were increasingly coming from the east and from the West Indies as transport improved. Many goods were imported through London, and after the Kennet and Avon canal was completed in 1810, far more cheaply *via* Bristol. Between about 1800 and 1825 the Cockses built themselves up into the leading suppliers of fish and other luxury foods, for the affluent public who did well out of the agricultural and general boom conditions during the Napoleonic wars and largely escaped the post-war recession.

As early as 1810 Cocks's were receiving regular supplies of sea fish from Billingsgate each morning, and guaranteed their oysters to keep for six days. They also sold 'genuine essence of anchovies, Indian soy, lemon pickle, walnut and mushroom ketchup, cayenne pepper' — all ingredients in the sauce — as well as 'Bengal curry powder, fine capers, French olives, West Indian pickle, very find salad oil, best mustard, vinegar etc.' By 1827 they had added products from Italy such as Lucca oil for salads 'and every article in the Italian line of the best quality'. For devotees of cured meat they stocked York hams, tongues and hung beef.[2]

As delicatessen merchants, perhaps their finest hour occurred at the time of the Grand Musical Festival in Reading of 15th-17th September 1819: a cleverly worded advertisement in the local press announced that Cocks's anticipated an unusually high demand for turtle, fish and venison, and to avoid disappointment, respectfully suggested placing orders one day in advance.[3] Turtles, after being caught in distant parts, were cured alive on shipboard as a source of fresh meat. No doubt Cocks's acquired one on the hoof, so to speak, whenever available, to be cut up into dried strips of flesh as a base of the rich turtle soup so beloved of our ancestors.

Even if it was no fun being a captive turtle in those inhumane times, mankind was not above extracting humour from the situation. When the Reading Paving Act was passed in

[1] *The Times* 1 Jan. 1788

[2] *Reading Mercury* (henceforward R.M.) 28 May 1827

[3] R.M. 13 Sept. 1819

1826, it contained a clause providing for all horses in the town streets to be muzzled. Never slow to mock the promoter of the act, the self-important town clerk John Jackson Blandy, the local paper surmised that he had been converted to the necessity of the clause by his horse having some time since bitten him in the neck 'so severely that he will carry the mark to his grave'. It then went on dryly to record that Messrs. Cocks had been of late served with a writ for allowing a wild animal, commonly called a turtle, to be at large contrary to the act. The beauty of this spoof was that some took the report to be true.[4]

The fame of the luxury foods was strictly local, but the sauce did travel far and wide. The adjacent wharf at High Bridge connected with the extensive canal system of the day. The Kennet and Avon canal, covering the whole distance to the south-west and the considerable port of Bristol, has already been mentioned, but not far away the Thames Navigation gave access both to London and to the Oxford canal, which itself opened up Berkshire to the midlands and the north of England.

Although proprietary foodstuffs are commonly assumed to have grown up after 1850, in fact by the first decade of the century the popularity of bottled sauces was already firmly established. By 1807 Elizabeth Lazenby was selling her product in 'one or more respectable houses in all the principal towns of the United Kingdom', including Edinburgh. Three years later James Cocks put forward the unverifiable claim that the superior quality of his Reading sauce had 'met with the approbation and recommendation of most of the first families of the kingdom': more precisely, in 1812 he professed to be selling in more than 70 of the principal oilmen's and fishmongers' shops in London as well as in most cities and market towns of Britain. By 1816 the numbers had risen to 150 in London and 30 in Bath, and by 1819 to 250 in London, 30 in Bath, 20 in Bristol and 30 in Edinburgh and Glasgow.[5]

He was helped by two well-publicised cases before the Court of Exchequer in 1814-5, which awarded him damages against two London oilmen convicted of selling spurious products as genuine Reading sauce. In evidence he stated that his sauce was sold as far afield as Dublin and other parts of Ireland and in considerable towns in Europe; that was only a month or two after the fall of Paris heralded Napoleon's downfall. The sauce bottles bore a striking orange label, printed by Cowslades of Reading, and one on the back gave warnings against imitators.[6] He may have passed on tips about publicity to another vendor of proprietary foods in the town. The Huntley father and son set up their London Street biscuit shop in 1822: he was their next door neighbour and could well have introduced them to distinctive labelling as a sure means of point-of-sale publicity.[7]

James Cocks made such dramatic progress with both fresh and bottled wares that in about 1821 he had extensive new premises built at Duke Street. The architect was Mr. Bailey of London, who was at the same time making alterations to the nearby stately home of Caversham Park; that was probably James Bailey (d. 1850).[8] The work in Duke Street cost him dear, as its proximity to the river required the sinking of oak piles. The original frontage of four stories can be clearly seen in Timms' view of 'Duke Street from the (High) Bridge', dated 1823. Apart from a new facade built perhaps 80-90 years

[4] 'Octogenarian' (W.S. Darter) *Reminiscences of Reading* (1888) p. 146

[5] *The Star* 26 Sept. 1812, 3 July 1816, *The Morning Chronicle* 2 July 1819

[6] R.M. 30 May 1814, 22 May 1815

[7] T. A. B. Corley, *Quaker Enterprise in Biscuits: Huntley & Palmers of Reading 1822-1972* (1972) p. 19

[8] Octogenarian, *Reminiscences* p. 95, H. Colvin, *A Biographical Dictionary of British Architects 1600-1840* (1978) pp. 80-1

later, the original structure, with the sauce warehouse at the rear, remained externally as it was until c.1980.

II

The birth of three sons between 1795 and 1805 seemed to ensure an indefinite future for the increasingly lucrative business. James Cocks died in 1827, aged 61. His friend the builder, and later antiquary, William Darter remembered him as one of the most respected tradesmen in Reading. Even allowing for some journalistic licence, the eulogy in the Reading Mercury confirms that judgment: it described St. Lawrence's church as packed to the doors for the funeral, and the grief for him as so intense that there was scarcely a dry eye in the congregation. Unlike most Reading entrepreneurs in that century, he was a member of the Church of England.[9]

His fortune was valued at £14,000, a fair amount considering that he must have started in 1789 from little or nothing. Financially, the two sides of his business neatly complemented each other. The retail (fish and delicatessen) department ensured a good cash flow, while the wholesale bottled sauce department was probably more profitable but with slower returns. As he had already given two of his children 'considerable sums' on their marriage, he would have been augmenting his wealth by at least £600 a year on average since 1802, net of household expenses and the substantial cost of the new warehouse. By contrast, until the early 1840s many Reading businesses, such as Sutton's and Huntley's, did little more than provide a living for the proprietors and their families, and certainly generated no cash for any future expansion.

Ann Cocks was left a two-fifths share and the three sons one-fifth each. She died in 1832, leaving £3000. Then the eldest son James (1795-1836) died four years later; he was only 40. As his wife had predeceased him, John and Charles Cocks jointly became trustees of the children and bought out their share of the business. As late as 1901 the company was still paying a £1 per week allowance to one of those sons.

The reign of 'J. & C. Cocks', as they called themselves, lasted for almost 25 years, from 1836 to 1860. The elder, John (1797-1860), was the self-indulgent bachelor, with housekeeper, full cellar and circle of drinking cronies who later inherited all his wines and spirits: William Brown the surveyor, James Phillips the engineer and William Hodges the auctioneer. The bowling green in Crown Street, to which he would stroll of a summer evening after a day's work in the warehouse, had formerly belonged to the Crown Inn, and he must have bought it when the famous posting inn declined with the coming of the railways. Not surprisingly, his fondness for liquor at length caught up with him, and he was carried off by cirrhosis of the liver at 63.

The real driving force of the second generation, and long remembered as such, was Charles Cocks (1805-64). No doubt it was he who in the late 1830s leased some land for an additional warehouse next to the Baptist chapel in Kings Road; by then the steady increase in trade and in stocks held was making the Duke Street premises rather cramped. Above all, space was badly needed for storing the sauce itself, with the discovery that flavour was greatly enhanced by keeping for years rather than months.

According to the 1851 census, employees were no more than 5 men, 4 women and 2 boys, but there must have been many more bottlers, labellers and packers. If the proprietors were sadly short livers, some of the hands stayed with the firm for very long periods. George Button joined in 1828 at the age of 14; he and two others were left nineteen guineas (£19.95) each in John Cocks's will, and he died in harness in 1888 after 60 years' service. Thomas Bartholomew, born in 1828, must have joined in the early 1840s

[9] Octogenarian, *Reminiscences* p. 50, R.M. 7 May 1827

and in 1901 eventually became head cooper. In 1901 he was receiving a pension of 12s. (60p) a week and continued to do so until his death in 1920 at 92. James White, first employed in 1861, served for 46 years and lived to enjoy a 12s. pension. Their noses must have taken some time to get used to the pungent aromas, but the latter almost certainly kept them free from infection and contributed to their longevity.

Although their working lives were not dominated by the machine, as in the Huntley & Palmer factory after 1846, the work was laborious enough, buckets had to be humped by hand, and even in the new building the layout was not exactly designed to save labour or physical toil. No doubt the employees were taken up to the Great Exhibition of 1851 and again in 1862, for the firm exhibited some of its sauces, without attracting any great attention. The only other occasion on which the firm is known to have been an exhibitor was at the Cape Town exhibition in the early 1900s.

Unlike the heads of other Reading enterprises, none of the Cocks family served on Reading borough council; Charles Cocks was a very committed Liberal, campaigning vigorously in general and local elections with his friend William Darter. Instead, the brothers stuck closely to their firm. They had three main preoccupations at that time, caused by various new developments.

First, the coming of the railways and the springing up of rival fishmongers and high-class purveyors in Reading ended the 'turtle era' when Cocks's held the monopoly of the town's luxury food trade. Second, the tastes of people were changing and packaged as well as bottled goods were coming into favour: that aspect will be considered in Section IV below. Third, the sauce business itself was undergoing radical change. By 1828 the number of Cocks's outlets was no greater than in 1819, perhaps because of competition. Then in 1837 Lea & Perrins of Worcester began to make its 'original and genuine Worcestershire sauce'.

That new variety was hotter than the bland Harvey or Reading sauces, judging by the recipes later used by Cocks's to make their own versions. It contained shallots, mace, cinnamon, Cayenne pepper and acetic acid, none of which were in the Reading sauce. By 1864 Lea & Perrins were making the equivalent of 300,000 pint bottles a year. In the 1850s there must have been interminable discussions between the brothers about the threat to their sauce trade from Worcester. Like Huntley & Palmers and Suttons, they relied on the goodwill at the top end of the market and did little to satisfy the demand from the less well off, whose rising incomes were just bringing them within reach of convenience foods.

III

What was the composition of the sauce? The original recipe, handed down to their sons by the founders, prescribed 110 gallons of walnut ketchup, 25 gallons of mushroom ketchup, 12 gallons of Indian soy, 2½ gallons of chilis, 1 gallon of salt and 1 gallon of garlic. The walnut ketchup was made by soaking the green walnuts with imported ingredients such as pimento, ginger, cloves, chilis and soy sauce, in vinegar for at least 12 months. The mixture was then boiled, with the addition (among other things) of a barrel of anchovies. The Cockses did not invent the sauce as such. They seem to have combined several well-known ketchups, probably from household recipes, and added soy sauce from China, anchovies from the Black Sea and spices from the West Indies or the east.

Nearer home, the mushrooms for the ketchup were not the cultivated ones of today, but were field mushrooms, preferably from the Market Harborough area of Leicestershire; until a railway connection was made, they must have been conveyed along the Grand Union canal and the Oxford canal. Alternative sources were Cheshire, Lincolnshire and Yorkshire. Mushrooms did not need to be soaked as walnuts were, but were at once cooked with a similar range of

imported ingredients. The sauce itself was boiled for one hour and then strained through a sieve. After being stored for maturing, it was re-strained through a flannel bag, being then ready for bottling.

It was Charles Cocks who became dissatisfied with the cottage industry methods of soaking and then bottling up in a copper. Without altering the recipes, he introduced something more akin to factory production. That involved installing a wooden square or rectangular tray above the copper, in which walnut and mushroom ketchup were left to soak overnight. The mixture was then poured into the copper for boiling up with garlic, chilis and salt, the square being at once replenished. The contents of the copper were heated by a pewter steam coil for an hour, after which half was run off into a wooden square below. The spent residue was used over and over again, the copper being filled up as necessary from the already soaked ingredients in the square above. The sauce was never allowed to come into contact with any metal object.

It stood in 75-gallon wooden casks (from Simonds' Reading brewery) for 3-5 years. It was then drawn off and taken to the bottling department, where a single bottle went through sixteen hands before being sealed and labelled.

Pickles, a sideline for Cocks's since 1810 or so, were by the 1860s growing in popularity, and the firm's brands had a high reputation because the vegetables, being grown on the outskirts of the town, kept their flavour as they could be put into the pickling vat on the day they were gathered. London-made pickles, on the other hand, used vegetables imported from Holland and therefore never had quite the same taste.[10]

IV

On John Cocks's death in 1860, Charles Cocks became the sole proprietor; his only son Charles Cooper Cocks (1841-64) had already joined him. Then at the turn of the year 1863-4 a double tragedy struck the firm. Charles Cocks suffered a severe injury to his right leg, in some kind of factory accident; whether he was scalded by the copper or had it crushed is not known. His heart was already diseased, and after some weeks' illness he died in February 1864, aged 58. Twelve days later the son, described as an 'amiable and promising' young man, also died. The causes were the severe shock to his system from his father's death and nervous exhaustion.[11] He was the last male Cocks involved in the firm.

A noteworthy characteristic of most successful entrepreneurs in Britain's industrial revolution, it has been remarked, was their longevity. What was true for the great cotton mills and iron works of the north applied also in the growing enterprises of Reading. George Palmer died at nearly 80 and Martin Hope Sutton at 82, with the next generation of sons in full control, while in the prolific Simonds brewing dynasty the experience of the semi-retired elders was constructively linked to the energy of the young partners who did the day-to-day work. Yet of the four Cocks men who successively ran their firm, the average age of death was 55. Possibly there was a congenital heart weakness that manifested itself in the strain of those days.

The widow Elizabeth Cocks (1811-94) carried on the business, with a manager in charge. That was William Biggs, a Devizes man who had possibly been making sauce in Kennington, south London. He occupied the Duke Street quarters, while Elizabeth and her daughters Ellen and Jessie Ann moved to the leafy suburban area of Kendrick Road. There they were neighbours of Mary Palmer and her son William Isaac, of the biscuit firm, and Joseph Huntley and his wife, of Huntley Boorne & Stevens. It is not generally appreciated how traumatic the arrival of

[10] J. B. Jones, *Sketches of Reading* (1870) pp. 74-5

[11] R.M. 8 and 22 Feb. 1864, and details on their death certificates

affluence must have been for the wives, widows and daughters who had worked until all hours in the critical first years of their enterprises and now found themselves condemned to genteel idleness. Whether Elizabeth visited her Quaker neighbours is not known.

Then in 1873 the younger daughter Jessie Ann married at the age of 19. Her husband was the 38 year-old Charles, son of Thomas Morris, tailor and woollen draper of the Market Place and one of the 'good friends and trustees' mentioned in Charles Cocks's will. Morris was the youngest but two of nine children, and had little prospect of setting himself up in business, even with the small share of his fathers £6000 he inherited in 1867. To him the chance of marrying into the Cocks family must have been providential. He was not gallant enough to claim the hand of the elder daughter Ellen, who was the same age as himself, but although twice as old as his bride, he may have felt that she stood more chance of giving him the children to found a new Reading dynasty. At any rate, the bargain was struck. Voluntarily or not, the 60-year-old Biggs departed from Reading. Jessie Ann set up an establishment in the home of her childhood, while Morris took over the business, paying £8450, plus an annuity to Elizabeth of £400 a year during their joint lives. Thus the firm must have been valued at about £16,000.

Charles Morris proved to be a competent if uninspired proprietor. He erected a new factory on the Kings Road site in 1878, thereby giving the firm improved production facilities and more room for bottling and storage. The main block, four stories high, had a total floor space of about 15,000 square yards. He continued to rent the Duke Street premises until 1892.

His main initiative was to diversify into new products, to take care of developments in consumer tastes and the growth of powerful competitors in thick as well as thin sauces. By 1872 the first modern convenience foods, such as salad cream, bloater and anchovy paste and potted ham, tongue and beef, were entering its price lists, and a few years later Liebig's meat extract, lemon and vanilla and other essences, yeast powder, rennet and Smith's essence of coffee. Then in 1880 he launched into a whole range of sweet goods: 27 different varieties of crystallised fruits in 7 lb. boxes, jellies, compotes of fruit in apple jelly, fruit syrups, Persian sherbets among others. The last three all proved a flop and were discontinued within a decade. There were also French goods, ranging from *petits pois* and truffles to *paté de foie gras* and asparagus, all in tins or bottles.

By 1889 he had added marmalade and jams made by the now forgotten Castell & Brown. He also extended the range of pickles, making second quality ones disarmingly 'labelled in the name of Charles Morris'. A Morris's Eclipse sauce, at half the price of the Reading brand, at last sought to meet the lower end of the market, but disproved the proverb about the racehorse by itself being nowhere. Ten years later the list of chutneys had been lengthened and lemonade powder, lemon squash and lime juice added. Thus the firm combined a wide range of wholesaling with the manufacture of goods that seem to have been mainly, though not exclusively, sauces, pickles and chutneys.

From an early date there must have been travellers or commission agents to cover the hundreds of outlets, but nothing is known of them until in the 1860s-70s Crosse & Blackwell were appointed as agents. That was an unsatisfactory move, as other sauce manufacturers, including Lea & Perrins, were also using Crosse & Blackwell, which had no particular incentive to push one sauce rather than another. Thus if it were to keep its name before the public, Cocks's needed to advertise. Lea & Perrins spent £7400 a year on advertising, £3000 each in Britain and the United States and £1400 in the colonies. Goodall Backhouse & Co. of Leeds, makers of Yorkshire Relish and founded in

1837, also advertised widely. In 1872 it was claiming to sell 100,000 bottles monthly and thus successfully challenging the Worcestershire sauce.

In this war of the giants Cocks's was completely outclassed, although a view of Paddington station in 1874 shows one of its small posters tightly wedged in between Dr. J. Collis Brown's Chlorodyne and the North Woolwich Garden Barmaid Contest, with the Yorkshire Relish more amply displayed a couple of panels away.[12] Yet, uniquely among its rivals, Reading sauce was finding its way into literature. Despite a widespread belief to the contrary within the firm, it had been unaccountably overlooked by Charles Dickens. However, in a squib of the early 1860s, on the theme that poets are made and not born, Lewis Carroll wrote of Harvey's Reading sauce, perhaps a comic deliberate mistake. But when in 1872 a French author was seeking to depict an English gentleman following a hidebound daily routine, he had to look no further than Reading for a convincing stage prop. Jules Verne, in *Around the World in Eighty Days*, described Phineas Fogg's invariable breakfast at the Reform Club as including a broiled fish with Reading sauce.[13]

Of the firm's internal affairs at that time, only one fragment has survived. In August 1889 to celebrate its centenary, the firm gave a special river outing to its employees, by steam launch to the Duke of Westminster's residence at Cliveden, near Maidenhead. Regrettably, the numbers were not stated.[14]

V

Charles Morris died of a heart complaint in December 1899, a few days short of his 65th birthday. Like his predecessors in the firm, he had played little part in outside affairs, apart from serving on the bench and as a director of the Reading Gas Co. He contributed generously to various local good causes, including athletic and aquatic clubs.[15] He left nearly £27,000, of which his ownership of the firm represented only a fraction. His policy of diversification had involved maintaining large stocks of often slow-moving goods, and kept the firm short of working capital, thereby helping to diminish its value.

He did have sons, but they had no interest in taking over. A year later, therefore, his widow sold out to Frank Winter, then aged 32. Winter had been a clerk with the firm since 1864 and latterly manager, so that he was well acquainted with the business. He paid just under £5200 for the assets, including the Kings Road site that was on a 21-year lease at an annual rental of £226.

Winter was a local builder's son and lacked means, so that he may have been offered especially favourable terms to ensure the firm's survival. He had the advantage of being married to a daughter of Arthur Maslen, High Bailiff of Reading County Court; his brother-in-law Walter A. Maslen had industrial experience as solicitor to J. Dymore Brown & Son, brewers of Queens Road. Probably on their advice, he had Charles Cocks & Co. Ltd. registered as a limited company in June 1901; he became the managing director. The company purchased from him the assets for £6000, £5500 in cash (for repayment to Mrs Morris) and £500 as fully paid-up ordinary shares. The nominal capital was £12,000, but in fact only enough shares were issued to cover the consideration money.

The Maslens were not the only important family to buy shares and provide directors, for Arthur Maslen was on the board. The other initial director was Herbert Sutton; then 47, he was a son of Alfred Sutton and had lately resigned from a partnership in the

[12] Henry Sampson, *History of Advertising* (1874) frontispiece

[13] Lewis Carroll, *Collected Works* (1939) p. 791, Jules Verne, *Around the World in Eighty Days* (1872) Chapter III

[14] *Reading Observer* 17 Aug 1889

[15] *Berkshire Chronicle* 9 and 16 Dec. 1899

he could still detect the aroma of the spices and other pungent ingredients that James and Ann Cocks had first incorporated into their sauce 160 years previously.

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seed firm, on the grounds of ill-health. When he retired from Cocks's in 1902 his son Hugh Reginald succeeded him as director until 1909.

Compared with earlier periods, the next twenty-five years were undoubtedly lacking in incident. For the first ten years Winter gave his undivided attention to the company, striving to encourage business with the multiple grocers after their phenomenal growth of recent decades. From 1904 onwards he did his own travelling, and may have gone round the multiples. He already gave special discount to one of those, Hudson Bros., and besides was willing to provide 'own brand' labels on a number of products, but not on the Reading sauce itself. He also experimented with new products. In 1900 he began to make tomato ketchup and in 1902 his own mushroom juice. As the twentieth century wore on and convenience foods bit deeper into middle-class diets, he did his small part in meeting the demand. Commercially made Christmas puddings and mincemeat, frying oil for the increasingly popular fried food, and jelly crystals appeared in the firm's lists. Yet more powerful firms sold the same range of goods, and specialities such as the Reading sauce were not pushed as they might have been.

He was a great churchman, serving as an Oxford diocesan representative on the House of Laity and as a local secretary of the Church Missionary Society. In 1912 he was elected to Reading borough council, where he chaired one of the committees among other duties. Then in 1925 his health broke down and he died in September 1928, aged only 59[16]. Like Charles Morris he had male heirs, but they had no wish to follow him into the business, and that must have cast a shadow over his last years.

Within six months it had been sold to Colebrooks, the local butchers. William Colebrook was a friend of the Maslen and Winter families and seems to have bought the business as a speculation rather than to ensure continuity. Almost immediately he sold it again. The new buyer was Frederick Tibble, baker and confectioner of Oxford Road, Reading. His son L. F. Tibble took over the direction; the manager and later managing director was Ernest E. Pyle, who had joined the office staff in the early 1920s. There were then only 5 hands.

L. F. Tibble was a professional engineer and by his own admission had little interest in the backward technology of sauce manufacture or in the marketing of the perhaps too wide variety of foodstuffs. Yet he loyally kept the business going for over thirty years, with the aid of mortgage loans. By then the Reading sauce had only a small sale, and was kept on for goodwill reasons alone. Cocks's did make other foods, and its custard powder, tomato ketchup, Christmas puddings and mincemeat were considered to be some of the best on the market. In 1931 it acquired Dakona Dainties Ltd. of London Street, Reading, and the Easterleigh Co. of Newbury, which made custard powders and other foodstuffs.

It may have been a food contractor in the first world war, but from 1940 to 1945 it was busy fulfilling service contracts such as one for sweetened and unsweetened Piccalilli for the Royal Navy. After 1945 it acquired its first canning plant. By then very little of the sauce went for export. One of the few overseas markets was Uganda, through the British missionaries there; for protection, the bottles were stowed in water tanks surrounded by packets of Huntley & Palmers' biscuits. In the 1950s, on the brink of the 'retailing revolution' when the demands of the supermarkets were to dominate the foodstuffs business, it became a subcontractor of Frank Cooper's at Oxford. Yet that link was not enough to save the Reading firm, which is believed to have closed its doors in 1962, the factory being turned over to other purposes. When eighteen months later a surveyor had to visit the old factory,

[16] *Berkshire Chronicle* 21 Sept. 1928