

# ELIZABETH CADBURY QUAKER REFORMER

Helen Maiden

Dame Elizabeth Cadbury (1858-1951) was the wife of Quaker businessman and housing reformer George Cadbury (1839-1922). She deserves recognition in her own right for her public service supporting the welfare and education of women and children in Bournville, the garden suburb created by George Cadbury next to his chocolate factory on the outskirts of Birmingham, and in the city itself.

**E**lizabeth Taylor was born into a London family of Quaker philanthropists in 1858. Her parents' religious faith expressed through service shaped her personal engagement with social reform. In 1888 she married George Cadbury and moved to Birmingham where she lived until her death in 1951. Her marriage located her within a network of wealthy, middle-class Nonconformist families, the women of which were at the forefront of public philanthropy in Birmingham. She was involved in numerous local initiatives promoting female and child welfare, including work supporting the Young Women's Christian Association in the Midlands.

## Education

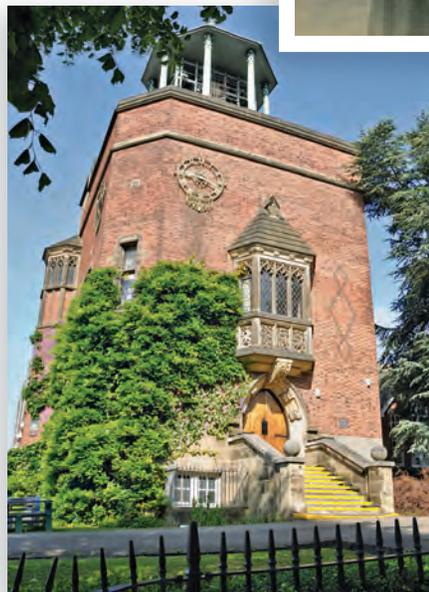
Amongst Elizabeth Cadbury's most significant contributions in Birmingham during the early twentieth century was her development of school facilities in Bournville village and her work on Birmingham Education Committee. Her success depended on her expertise and skills as a policy-maker as well as her social status as a Cadbury.

Alongside activities supporting housing reform in Bournville, Elizabeth Cadbury played a leading role in negotiations with local and national education authorities to develop infant and elementary schools in the village. She secured approval from the Board of Education to build an elementary school in Bournville which incorporated smaller class sizes than usual with the aim of improving education provision. As Chairman of the Bournville Village Schools Management Committee, she was involved in educational policy-making and school management, from overseeing staffing to organising annual Christmas parties.



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Elizabeth Cadbury's contribution to public service spanned welfare and education in Birmingham. *Portrait photograph of Dame Elizabeth Cadbury, c. 1920s by Vandyk.*



Bournville Junior School. The development of schools in the suburb stands as one of Elizabeth Cadbury's most significant contributions.

Photo kindly supplied by Bournville Village Trust

## Medical Services

In 1911 Elizabeth Cadbury was co-opted onto Birmingham Education Committee and elected Chairman of the Committee's Hygiene Subcommittee. Through this role she became instrumental in devising and implementing effective school medical treatment services in the city. She led policy negotiations with medical authorities to introduce school dental treatment, championed access to treatment schemes for Birmingham families and battled municipal opposition to develop Birmingham's Central School Clinic. During her time as Chairman she oversaw the delivery of school medical treatment services which provided an example of good practice for other cities.

## Achievements

Elizabeth Cadbury's public service encompassed a vast array of activities within and beyond Birmingham, from being a foundation member of the University of Birmingham's Board of Governors in 1900 to representing Britain at the 1936 World Congress of the International Council of Women in India.

Whilst she received recognition in her lifetime through an OBE in 1918 and a DBE in 1934, like many of her female contemporaries, Dame Elizabeth Cadbury's achievements remain largely overlooked today. By

uncovering her contribution to reform in Birmingham, we are able to understand the importance of women and their social action in the history of the West Midlands. ●

**Dr Helen Maiden's** University of Birmingham PhD examined the life and work of Dame Elizabeth Cadbury between 1888 and 1914.

## Further Reading

Sara Delamont, 'Cadbury (née Taylor), Dame Elizabeth Mary' in *Oxford DNB*. Freely available online with your public library card at [www.oxforddnb.com](http://www.oxforddnb.com)