Cocks's Reading Sauce

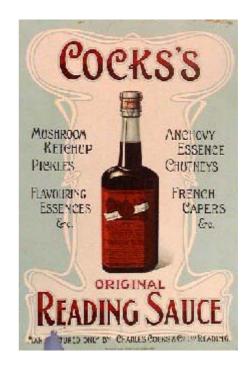
In 1789 James Cocks opened a fishmonger's shop on Butcher's Row (now part of Broad Street and King Street). Within a decade he had moved his shop to Duke Street and from 1802 was marketing a fish sauce that he had devised with his wife Ann. Sauces were important before refrigeration was available as they gave taste to salted and preserved foodstuffs.

Reading Sauce was destined to become a household favourite in England and overseas for more than a century. Cocks's sauce had obtained a national reputation long before Huntley & Palmers biscuits or Sutton Seeds became widely known. In Jules Verne's 1872 adventure novel Around the World in Eighty Days the hero Phileas Fogg breakfasts at London's Reform Club on 'broiled fish with Reading sauce'.

The main ingredients of the original sauce were walnut ketchup, mushroom ketchup, soy sauce, anchovies, chillies, spices, salt and garlic. Worcester Sauce is the nearest modern equivalent.

After James died his son Charles took over the business, opening a larger factory on the King's Road in the 1830s, now the site of Reading Central Library. The sauce stood for between three and five years in large wooden casks. It was then drawn off, bottled and labelled with Cocks's distinctive orange label.

Apart from Reading Sauce, the firm also manufactured a variety



Advertising Leaflet for Cocks's Reading Sauce, around 1900 (Museum object no: 2002.176.40)

of other sauces and pickles, which were much celebrated for their purity and flavour.

After the company's early promise its market share gradually declined, as it failed to keep up with the level of marketing of newer rivals such as Lea & Perrins. The company was sold by the Cocks family in 1901 and survived until 1962.

Reference:

T.A.B Corley, 'The celebrated Reading Sauce: Charles Cocks and Co. Ltd 1789-1962' in *Berkshire Archaeological Journal*, vol.70

© Reading Museum Service

www.readingmuseum.org.uk



