

90 days of Sweet FA?

When [Ron Noon](#) started his research about Liverpool's sugar refinery workers, the only thing that mattered about sugar was that it was sweet. But that is the last thing to be said about the history of the 'white stuff'.

At the beginning of this year, a history teacher sent Tate & Lyle a 90-day redundancy party letter! It noted that 'next Sunday, January 22nd, will be the 25th anniversary of the issuing of 90 day redundancy notices to 1500 refinery workers at Henry Tate's mother plant in Liverpool's Love Lane'.

The teacher claimed that his brief went 'beyond historical themes' and made 'a request on behalf of the Tate's Liverpool pensioners, the late Peter Leacy, Tony McGann of the Eldonians, Alan Bleasdale, Jimmy McGovern, Brian Reade, Jack Jones, and Tony Benn, that Tate & Lyle plc finance a reunion of the former Love Lane employees, either on or close to April 22nd, the fateful day a quarter of a century ago when after 109 years of operation on the romantically named site, sugar cane time came to an abrupt end in Liverpool'.

Some big names were on that letter, but how many of them were aware that this simple taken for granted everyday commodity was, according to Cuban anthropologist, Fernando Ortiz, "capitalism's favoured child"?

Sugar has a long and terrible history, including the striking chapter in which an insignificant fishing village - eclipsed for centuries by neighbouring Chester - was dramatically re-awakened by 'sugar and slaves': by exotic tropical cane from Barbados and the African slaves used to supply Europe's seemingly insatiable appetite for sweetness.

Mankind did without it for millennia because there is no biological need for an achingly addictive fix in pure sucrose form. Market driven societies nurture want rather than need and wealth not health has been the driver behind the story of Capitalism and its sweet-toothed child.

Sugar is now into its sixth century of global expansion, and on the threshold of new millennium non-food uses such as bio-fuel, the 'energy cane' or ethanol used to drive cars in Brazil. It makes the products of Bill Gates seem pre-pubescent.

The letter did not go into detail about that infamous trade, emphasising only how 'our famous port city's history is inextricably linked with the politics and power of sugar, and of a once prominent landmark just north of the city centre, where the world's biggest sugar dynasty was established in 1872'. Whatever the reasons for the act of matricide in 1981, when the spate of rationalisations and unemployment had Liverpool

tagged as the 'Bermuda Triangle of British Capitalism', there was no discernible sentiment about leaving a big hole in the Vauxhall community, because there was neither a Tate nor a Lyle left on the board of what had once been a 'family firm'!

So was it sentiment or sensitivity to bad PR that prompted the Director of Corporate Communications and Deputy Company Secretary, to write back and inform me that the company were prepared 'to make a significant contribution towards the holding of a party'? They did commit financially, and on Friday April 28th at the Eldonian Village Hall, 250 boys and girls from the white stuff had a brilliant reunion party. Many more would have attended if they could have secured a ticket, but the man from Tate & Lyle is kindly prepared to allow monies over from the first bash to be targeted for pensioners who could not get beyond the bouncers on the 28th!

For those who did manage to get scarce tickets, the event was like Uncle Sugar coming "home" to the now world famous Eldonian site, the community housing phoenix that has risen from the ashes of the now not so comically misnamed, Love Lane.

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