

Chocolate Drop Visit – 29th March 2018

21 members received a warm welcome from Rosanne Benn and Alan Dixon at the Chocolate Drop Shop – the home of Special Edition Chocolate. We were supplied with disposable plastic aprons, together with the obligatory and very unflattering paper mesh hairnets. We now satisfied the Hygiene/Health & Safety regulations and were led to the kitchen area, to witness the serious business of chocolate production.

Most of the members had attended the January General Meeting and had heard Alan's talk on the history, origins and process of chocolate making. (This has since been reported in April's Newsletter.) After a brief re-cap, Alan introduced us to the lady in charge of a large vat of hot and delicious-smelling tempered chocolate, ready for filling moulds. He passed round samples of the latest of 40 or more unusual flavours, just to get us in the tasting mood! We were then shown how hand painted novelties, ranging from animals, tractors, cars and bikes, are made using plastic moulds. These moulds are in two halves and the features are painted with melted chocolate on the inside and allowed to set before being clamped together. Hot chocolate is expertly poured into the moulds, levelled, gently tapped to remove any air bubbles and left to dry.

The tables in the café area had been laid out with smaller moulds, brushes and a selection of coloured melted chocolate. It was time for us to try painting into the moulds to make our own chocolate novelties. Most of the members met the challenge and others were content to watch their friends struggle!! It wasn't easy and was a race against time, as the melted chocolate started to solidify!! However, it was satisfying and great fun. Whilst we worked the staff provided us with coffee, tea and biscuits and also the speciality hot Spanish drinking chocolate. I've never been keen on drinking cocoa, but decided "when in Rome" and tried the hot Spanish chocolate. It tastes divine and has changed my opinion! Alan wandered around, tempting us with samples from trays of various different flavours of Special Edition Chocolates and also answering questions and telling us more about sourcing the natural ingredients and the health benefits of cocoa butter and dark chocolate.

Our painted moulds were gradually collected, taken to be filled and left to harden. This gave us the opportunity to visit the shop area (some still in aprons and hairnets) and browse along the displays of bars, buttons, moulded shapes, truffles and much more, before making our purchases. Samples were available, if help was needed. Easter was almost upon us and I believe some members were able to find suitable gifts for their families. Shortly, the results of our efforts were brought back to us, carefully wrapped in cellophane. There were some surprises and amusement. Clearly, there is a high degree of skill involved in producing these novelty items!! Having finally abandoned the protective clothing, replete from a possible excess of chocolate and clutching bags of goodies, we thanked our very knowledgeable and generous hosts for a fascinating, enlightening and enjoyable morning. Rosanne, Alan and their staff share a passion and enthusiasm for the art of making fine chocolate and are rightly proud of their products. The Chocolate Drop Shop is a special place to visit.

Jenny Porter

