



Coffee Shop Society in 17th Century London

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25 October 2004

I wanted to do this because Robert Hooke lectured at Gresham College and I thought that was a nice sort of thing to do the same. I wasn't sure whether you wanted the English or the Latin, so I've got them both ready! I'll do the English just for today. In a way, the only thing that's wrong is there are too many people here. When you read Hooke's diary, nobody ever turned up, or just one or two people. He wrote "None came for past three for my lecture, then two which grumbled." Another diary entry reads, "Nobody came except a rusty old fellow, walked in the hall from two till almost three". Often he thought the people coming were spies. He said "A fellow with a blue apron laid asleep all the time there should have been a lecture, I suppose a spy," and two weeks later, "Only one came, peeked into the hall, but stayed not." Gresham's doing very well; it's got much better attended.

I mention Hooke because I know about Hooke, but also because he was really a great coffee house fan. He's one of the best. I'm sure other people liked coffee as much as him, but he kept a diary. We actually know, to an extent, what he said to his friends in coffee houses, this famous coffee house conversation you hear so much about. Often you don't really hear it, you don't have evidence of what it was, but you do in the case of Robert Hooke. He kept a diary and to some extent recorded what he said and what he learnt in coffee houses. His diary covers the 1670s and also the time of the glorious revolution, 1688 to 1693, and so this famous coffee house conversation you hear from Hooke's diary and not that many other places. Incidentally, there's a massive book on coffee houses by Brian Lillywhite – he lists I think 2,000 coffee houses. It was obviously his life's work, London coffee houses only, 850 pages. It was published I think in the 1960s, but for some reason he didn't read Hooke's diary. Hooke's diary was published in the 1930s, and there was quite a lot of information. Brian Lillywhite's book is exhaustive. It's got everything you could possibly want to know about each and every coffee house, and it's quite an endearing book because now and then he says, "I've mislaid my notes on this coffee house," which I thought was rather nice, that he put that in, you know, which sounded like it's a real person. You can correct Lillywhite if you really wanted to from Hooke's diary to a certain extent, like for instance the famous Jonathan's Coffee House in Exchange Alley. Lillywhite's first entry for that is 1680. The plaque in Exchange Alley I think says 1680 as well, but Hooke went there on the 9th of July 1677, the opening night. He left something there and had to go back, and from that day onwards, Jonathan's Coffee House was one of his favourites, with Garaways or Garways, which is the other one he went to a lot as well, and so instead of saying every night at Garways, he'd say, one night at Jonathan's or at Jon's, another at Garways, and sometimes both of them; he did little coffee house crawls.

There's an entry here, Sunday October 21st, "At Jonathan's, tickled Aubrey." What does that mean? Whether he literally tickled him? He hardly ever says he went to church, does Hooke, but he went to coffee houses absolutely all the time!

Another diary entry said that he went to the Grecian Coffee House in January 1677. I took a walk with some people and we saw the Devora Tavern, which was the Grecian Coffee House, which was a Royal Society favourite he records. On his way there, he saw the heretic and visionary Ludiwick Muddleton pelted with eggs at the Temple Bar pillory and then he talked about that no doubt in the coffee house afterwards.

Lillywhite doesn't have a record for that until after 1700, so it's a long time before, and sometimes Hooke went to coffee houses that poor old Lillywhite didn't know existed at all. He often went, Hooke, to one called the Spanish Coffee House. He was working in the early 1670s with a famous cartographer, John Ogilby, and they went to the Spanish Coffee House to discuss the map that Ogilby was making, the wonderful map that he made of London after the fire, after the rebuilding – the map I think was 1673. These meetings with Ogilby and also with a wonderful engraver called Wenceslas Holler, the Bohemian engraver, Holler, whose work you probably have seen here and there, a really good example of the way that people used coffee houses as places of work.

On the 14th of August 1673, Hooke designed sheets for London with Ogilby in Garaways. Two months later, also at Garaways, Hooke showed him the way of letters for marking his map and also the way of shadowing. And so coffee houses were places of pleasure, but also places of work. Of course Hooke had his own work rooms, laboratories, in Gresham College, but also coffee houses were an important place for him, and others I'm sure, to meet people, to meet craftsmen, to meet scientists, to meet people you didn't expect to meet, to meet clients, to meet travellers from foreign lands, to make arrangements for future appointments, tell them things, pick up ideas, all that sort of thing. You get that from coffee houses, because there you meet people on the off chance to some degree at least, swapping information, swapping ideas, finding out what happened in faraway places that a sailor had been to or something like that.

Here are a few examples. This is December 1673, Boxing Day, when Hooke met a man called Yarrington and Captain Handen, who told him about an ironworks where they beat many plates under the hammer at once, like leaf or gold or tinfoil. The great difficulty is how to turn it under the hammer quickly enough.

A couple of weeks later, they started talking about the opening of the arch of the bridge, and making mills for raising water under London Bridge – and about Yarrington's proposal for an iron roll for staining printed studs. It covered all sorts of things, this conversation. This is the week after that, January 1674, at Garaways he met the Handen again. "Captain Handen told me that all the bottom of the Tiber near the bridge of St Angelo is paved with flat stones, that rosemary in the bottoms of one's feet is a pleasant remedy against the cramp, and also snakes' skins". Hooke had all sorts of medical problems, and that's another sort of information you'd pick up in odd places, at coffee houses especially,

Here's one more, in February 1674: "Mr Hoskins (Hoskins was a friend of his) told King's bit by mad dog, cured by a felon in the neck, that several tradesmen in the Indies use their feet as well as their hands for holding things. Gorge told us of the cabbage tree (that's a palm tree I think), that its outside is exceeding hard as iron, its middle all pith, the extreme deliciousness of the pineapple.

So it was a massive amount of information being gathered in coffee houses. Also, there's one or two examples of Hooke using coffee houses as a place to do experiments. Of course he wouldn't normally do that, but there's a famous one here. In November and December 1679, Hooke and Newton had a famous exchange of letters about the movement of the Earth, how the Earth moved and the nature of gravity, and what we could learn about those terribly important things by the way bodies fell – not dead bodies I mean, but stones or bullets and things like that – the path taken by a falling body. This correspondence really infuriated Newton. He didn't like Hooke, and he didn't like this sort of contact, unsolicited contact I suppose, but it also prompted Newton to start working, and he did for the next five or six years on this problem of motion of the planets and to produce *Principia Mathematica* in 1686, so it was an important correspondence, and it was correspondence in which Hooke gave Newton for the first time the idea that orbital motion was a compound of direct motion, tangential motion, and centripetal or gravitational motion producing a curve. That's the first time Newton ever got that idea.

They had an argument about how bodies would fall. The old idea I think was that a body, a falling bullet or something, would land a little bit behind where it ought to be because the Earth had moved on. Newton had

the idea that maybe it would outrun the Earth and go a little ahead, fall a little ahead of the perpendicular as it were. Hooke had an idea, and I don't really know whether this is true or not, that it would fall in a sort of oval curve or ellipsoid and land a little to the south-east of the perpendicular, and that's what he said. But he also thought that you could measure it by the methods used of the day and I think he couldn't really do so, but he said he'd measure it. Newton really hated this argument, but Hooke didn't know that, and Hooke really relished it and he thought that he could measure the fall of this object in a normal sort of way, and he took a bullet and tried to do that, and he often dropped things from height, that was one of the things he enjoyed doing, from high buildings, to see how they would accelerate and where they would land and how angry someone would be if it landed on them, and things like that.

But of course this was very, very delicate work and you had to eliminate the effect of any breeze, so he had to do it indoors. He chose Garaways, because Garaways had a high hall, apparently of 27 feet, and so on the 16th of January 1680, he went there with his assistant, Harry Hunt, and they tried this experiment. I think probably the deviation of an object over such a height is not measurable but he thought he measured it. First of all, they hung a plumb line into a bowl, a little pot of pipe clay, which he used often for experiments, and they made a mark, a little cross I think it was, exactly where the plumb line landed. Then they dropped the bullet and it did land to the south-east and so he thought he had proved his particular theory of the motion of the Earth, but I think it was just by chance. But he wrote in his diary, January 22nd, "diurnal motion of Earth established", and he also reported it to the Royal Society, 22nd of January: "it was desired that this experiment might be made before a number of the Society, who might be witnesses of it, before the next meeting". The time appointed was the Monday following at three in the afternoon, and they went to Garaways again, with Sir William Petty. He also wrote, "At Jonathan's, went on to another coffee house. Sir Christopher Wren talked about planetary motion," so he then went on to talk about it. It was an important moment I think.

Then of course, six years later, the report is given to the Royal Society of Newton's wonderful work. Edmund Halley explains it, after the meeting, Hooke, Hoskins, Halley, and various others, went to a coffee house, I think the Grecian, where Hooke claimed that he had given Newton the first hint of this invention, which is true, but the rest of them told him that if in truth he knew it before, he ought not to blame any but himself for having taken no more care to secure a discovery, on which he put so much value. He was thinking of the inverse square law. That's the thing he thought he had told Newton, but which he hadn't. He did tell him about this idea of orbital motion, but he didn't realise that he'd told him that I think.

You can see from Hooke's life – I'll have to answer lots of questions... Anyway, you can see from Hooke's life the different ways that coffee houses were used in the 17th Century. To some extent, they were places for people who knew each other to meet, you know, a particular interest group, a group of people who knew they were going to see each other in the coffee house. Hooke often met Hoskins or Halley or John Aubrey, or some other people you wouldn't have heard of, common interest groups.

That's one thing, but of course. Another thing Coffee Houses did was to provide places for people to meet who didn't know each other. They weren't exclusive. Even if you hoped that no one would turn up except your friends, you couldn't make that so. Quite often Hooke would say in his diary he met someone who he perhaps didn't really expect or want to be there. But that meant you had chance encounters, you have an element of serendipity, and you might broaden your horizons, you might learn things you didn't even know that you didn't know. Hooke met all sorts of people in that way. A famous meeting is Hooke's encounter with Captain Robert Knox, who was 17 years a captive of the Raj of Ceylon. He was a sailor, and when he came back, he knew a vast deal about Ceylon and matters Eastern, and Hooke happened to meet him, in 1681. Their conversations were extremely interesting and Hooke learnt a vast amount of things from him. This is 1689 and Hooke met Knox often in Jonathan's Coffee House. Hooke bought the chocolate, because you could drink chocolate there of course, and Knox did the talking, and he told him about ebony and musk and palm trees and Brahman mathematics, and a strange intoxicating herb like hemp known as gange, which takes away understanding and memory. When I told my sons I was doing a talk about coffee houses, they sort of nudged, because they're more used to this idea of the Amsterdam coffee house, which I religiously avoided ever going into when I was there. There's a link with Hooke there because he was the

first person to explain in a lecture the various effects and benefits and otherwise of cannabis, and he got all that from Robert Knox.

So this openness of coffee houses, the fact that anyone could go to them, was really quite an important feature of them. A lot of people commented on that. There were a terrific number, I think 10, 20 or so different, in the 1660s and 1670s, of different pamphlets and broadsheets about coffee houses, either advocating their virtues or criticising them because they wasted people's time and they were, one way or another, undesirable places. Often they were called the Character of a Coffee House; they had the same sort of title, these different pamphlets. We hear a lot about the fact that coffee houses were very specialised. You often hear about Jonathan's with its stock jobbers and Edward Lloyd's with its marine insurers and so on, and White's with its gamblers. In fact they weren't that specialised, as you can see from Jonathan's. When the stock jobbers were just turning up in Jonathan's in the 1680s and 90s, Hooke and his friends were still there too, and so it wasn't as specialised as one might think. So although you hear about coffee houses for Tories, for Whigs, for scientists, for whatever, that isn't exactly how they were because they weren't restricted like clubs. The Royal Society of course was a restricted club from the start, but coffee house weren't, though some of them did become clubs. That was in the 18th Century.

For instance, the famous gambling coffee house was White's of St James, which was White's Chocolate House. It was a similar sort of place, and a great focus for aristocratic gamblers. It was known in 1710 as the common rendezvous of infamous sharpers and noble cullies. I think a cully must be someone easily tricked. Aristocrats, they were the pensioners of their day, and people tricked them out of things. That was a chocolate house. Anyone could go into it, and people sometimes wandered into White's, not realising that it was a place where they might get swindled, and it wasn't until 1733 that it changed to being a private club, after a fire. The other sort of gambling clubs, like Brooks and Boodles in St James, began as clubs, they never were coffee houses.

In the City, for instance, like Edward Lloyd's Coffee House, started off in Tower Street and moved to Lombard Street in 1691, and that attracted almost straightaway merchants, ship owners, people who wanted to offload risks, and other people who wanted to take risks on their behalf in the 1690s. Edward Lloyd saw that this was a good market and so he published his Shipping News in 1696 and it became the regular place for people who wanted to insure or have insured ships in the 18th Century. It didn't become a private club, a sort of a place that anyone couldn't enter, until 1770, 80 years on, so it was for a long time an open coffee house that had this particular specialism, and it was a really important specialism.

Jonathan's, which was the great home of stock jobbers from the 1690s, was where the South Sea Bubble was cooked up in the early 1720s. That was an open coffee house again until about 1770 when it became New Jonathan's, which is the beginning of the Stock Exchange.

So in the 18th Century, these coffee houses, some of them at least, closed their doors to outsiders and there is a sort of closing down of society, but in the 17th Century, they seemed really very open places. In that sense, they're rather like 17th Century pleasure gardens, like Vauxhall for instance, where anyone could go, tinkers and all sorts of people, and did. It didn't cost anything or much to enter, and there's quite an openness, surprising, about late 17th Century London leisure activities. It's striking that Coffee Houses were quite egalitarian sort of places and both their defenders and their critics said that, and I think it's probably true. In a pamphlet of 1661, The Character of Coffee it's called it says: "A coffee house is free to all comers of every human shape. Orderly therefore, let any person who comes to drink coffee set down in the very chair for here a seat is to be given to no man [that is a special seat reserved for no man]. That great privilege of equality is only peculiar to the Golden Age and to a coffee house." So there was a spirit of the 1640s and 50s, of egalitarianism. Someone said no man is born with a saddle on his back and none with boots and spurs to ride him. You sometimes wonder what happened in 1660, did that all suddenly stop? Well, in some way of course the Puritans lost power suddenly and completely, that sort of egalitarian feeling didn't just disappear, and you find some of it in coffee houses still, and it's not only the defenders but the critics say the same thing, this open quality.

It was of course a way of criticising a coffee house to say that they didn't properly respect status and rank. An anti-coffee house pamphlet of 1673 pointed out their Republican origins in the 1650s because the first coffee houses were in the 1650s. The first in London was 1652, right in the middle of the Cromwellian period. Then, the critics said: "Each man seems a leveller and ranks and files himself as he lists without regard to degree or order, so that oft you may see a silly fop and an errant pickpocket, a reverend non-conformist and a camping mountebank all blended together." Samuel Butler in the 1670s, who was also a more Royalist critic of coffee houses, said: "A coffee man keeps a coffee market where people of all qualities and conditions meet to trade in foreign drinks and news, ale, smoke and controversy. He admits of no distinction of persons but gentleman, mechanic, lord and scoundrel mix as if they were resolved into their first principles." So it's quite a striking image; it seems to be true that coffee houses were rather open, democratic sorts of places. Although they were sort of clubby coffee houses, they weren't really restricted in who went to them. And this suspicion that coffee houses were really a residue of Cromwellian, anti-Royalist, egalitarian thinking, prompted Charles II to try to stamp them out in 1675. We always remember Cromwell for abolishing Christmas and things like that and making adultery a capital offence and so on, but good old Charles II is the one who tried to close down coffee houses, a really important social institution. In fact of course it's just as easy to moan about the king or whatever in a pub, in a tavern, as it was in a coffee house, and a coffee house isn't a good place to plot. There were quite often people accused of plotting in coffee houses and arrests and so on, and particular coffee houses were cited as being places where these plots, like the Ryhouse Plot and so on, had begun, but of course a coffee house is a very silly place to plot. It's a bit like the Internet or something like that; it's a very public sort of place. You're much better to plot in a private house than in a coffee house because Charles II had spies listening out for what was said in coffee houses.

Steve Pinkus in the *Journal of Modern History* of 1995, wrote that Charles II and his ministers tended to associate taverns with a slightly more loyalist approach. Taverns were more traditional, were more loyal, and drinking made people good spirited and cheerful. Coffee made them sharp witted and bad tempered – and it does do so, doesn't it? I'm usually very genial, but I've found in meetings, if you drink a lot of coffee, I'm very picky and aggressive. That's of course what made coffee a good drink as opposed to ale for scientists, or for philosophers. The first coffee house was at Oxford, for wits, for conspirators. I suppose coffee is a mentally stimulating drink. While ale makes you sleepy, coffee makes you wakeful and dangerous.

There's no particular reason to think that people's talk in coffee houses would be more rebellious or more seditious than their talk in any other place, perhaps slightly less so. I think it's just that coffee houses fostered the sharing of ideas, and the development of ideas. They turned one person's individual idea into a common idea, they helped spread ideas, and they helped turn opinions into public opinion. They're not the only agency for that, I'm sure taverns would do the same, and newspapers later on as well, but you can image the formation of public opinion, and I suppose public opinion which isn't especially religious. If you look at before 1640, there is a sort of public opinion but it's very much stimulated through preaching and through the clergy, and so it's of a particular type, it's opinion about religious matters. But the coffee houses fostered the type of knowledge you find in the late 17th Century, for instance the sort of knowledge which people like Dryden relied upon in their poems. I don't suppose that Dryden got all his political knowledge in coffee houses, I've no idea, but he was writing for a public that was receptive to the rather obscure references to different political figures and so on because they picked up news about them in coffee houses, among other places.

So you can see coffee houses as a sort of generator of public opinion. They took pamphlets and, after 1700 or so, newspapers. They even took newsletters and newsheets before that time. I was reading through Brian Lillywhite's book, and many of his references are to coffee houses as distribution points for the Post Boy, the Daily Courant, the Event Post, these early newspapers; that's one of the main functions they performed, as distribution centres and reading places, where you would read newspapers. And so if you get Charles II pursuing a pro-French policy, as he was in the 1670s, a sort of pro-Catholic as it seemed policy, it isn't surprising that the general talk of the coffee houses would be hostile to him because he was going against the flow of public opinion at that time. He tried to keep it secret, and so you could see how he

would think of coffee houses as seminaries of sedition, as places where oppositionist ideas would be developed and he determined to get rid of them, especially when he got a particular group of ministers, Danby and Finch and various others, who wanted to pursue a hard line.

A proclamation of 29th December 1675 really summarises the arguments against coffee houses, not just political ones: "They were the great resort of idle and disaffected persons and they'd produce very evil and dangerous effects, as well for the tradesman and others who do therein misspend much of their time." That's an often made point, that people wasted their time in coffee houses, and when they finished in one, they'd go on to another one and another one, so they wasted time when they should be doing something else. But you could have a proclamation abolishing beds, couldn't you, on the same grounds I suppose. "And also in such houses and by occasion of the meetings of such persons therein diverse false, malicious and scandalous reports are devised and spread abroad to the defamation of His Majesty's Government and to the disturbance of the peace and quiet of the realm." So it was declared that they should be closed from the 10th January 1676 - all houses selling coffee, chocolate, sherbet or tea. But what's interesting is not that they made such a proclamation, monarchs were always making proclamations that no more houses should be built in London - but the interesting thing is that they almost immediately withdrew it. They'd obviously made a mistake. Coffee houses were extremely popular for up to quite a high level, so there were Privy Counsellors who said you shouldn't do this. People like Halifax, for instance, were very influential people and stuck up for coffee houses, and they withdrew. Within a few weeks, three weeks I think, another proclamation was put out saying, we'll keep them open for the time being, and that was their way of backing down. The sort of arguments put forward by people like Halifax was that coffee houses actually were places where moderate opinion would prevail. They said that under Cromwell Royalists had been able to speak in coffee houses, that in coffee houses the extremist is usually beaten in argument by the moderate, that the good usually beats the bad, in free and open conversation, that the wise and sober will defeat hotheads. That's what they said and that may be true, but coffee houses, one of them said, "Civilise our manners, enlarge our understandings, refine our language, and teach us generous confidence". I think coffee houses were quite dangerous because Charles and especially James II, who was a Catholic, were running against a terrifically powerful tide of public opinion and that was bound to be dangerous. They spread news, they distributed information, they made people more questioning, more informed, a bit less loyal I suppose, and you can see, to go back to Hooke, some of the ways in which news spread through coffee houses, by looking in his diary.

In 1683 the Turkish siege of Vienna was beaten back by Christian forces, and after that, there was a war, the war of the Holy Alliance against the Turks, which liberated Hungary and various other places. Hooke heard about this, naturally delighted – Saturday 14th of September 1689: "At Jonathan's," he says "news of the total defeat of the Turks by Prince Louis of Barden." "At Jon, 10 posts confirm the Turks' overthrow." These are newsletters coming in by post. October 6th: "At Jon's, news from Man's that Dublin was taken." That's another story, that's William of Orange taking Dublin, and Man's was another coffee house, so that's quite interesting – news came from one coffee house to another. They're like little cells for the gathering of information, which then spreads from one place to another, or at least in that particular case. October 8th: "At Jon, by foreign gazettes, Turks totally routed. Nissa taken. Bon also believed taken." I'm not sure what Bon is. 3rd December: "At Jonathan's, 12 Flanders posts, one Holland, news of further progress against the Turks in Serbia." So that's interesting that they're picking up these things from gazettes. I've got one more, this is later on, 26th March 1693, this was a very big news day at Jonathan's: "Four posts, no peace between Emperor and Turks, Savoy not recovered. Earthquake in Sicily; a great plague in the Caspian Sea; a new but very mortal disease in Leghorn." So you can see, it's the way information was gathered. The first daily paper is 1702, and that also was spread through coffee houses, but before that, you got your information where you could, and hanging around in the coffee house and reading the latest gazettes and posts. The way to do it.

I should talk a little about the wits, like Dryden. One of the most famous coffee houses is Will's Coffee House in Covent Garden, which was the resort of Dryden and all his friends, until Dryden's death – after that he stopped going there! Will's Coffee House was on the corner of Russell Street and Bow Street, just near Covent Garden. I'm not sure that we know really how witty the conversations were. The conversation must have been witty, but they weren't recorded, unlike Johnson's conversations 60 years on. Samuel

Pepys, who went to Will's and saw them there in February 1664 wrote: "In Covent Garden tonight, going to fetch home my wife, I stopped at the great coffee house there where I never was before, where Dryden the poet I knew at Cambridge and all the wits of the town and Harris the player and Mr Hall of our college, and had I time it would be good coming thither, for there I perceive very witty and pleasant discourse, but I would not tarry and as it was late they were all ready to go away." So we don't hear what their conversation was.

Will's was the famous coffee house of conversationalists like Dryden. When Dryden died in 1700, then it seems that the wits went somewhere else, we know that from Addison and Steel. Addison and Steel wrote the *Tatler* and the *Spectator* from about 1709 to 1712, and they gave a lot of information about coffee houses. Addison certainly said that Will's Coffee House had gone right down since the death of Dryden, and they played cards there now and it wasn't an interesting place to go anymore. But actually he had a vested interest because Addison had set up his servant in another coffee house, called Button's Coffee House, over the road, in the same road, in Russell Street, just near Davy's Bookshop, which is now Boswell's Coffee House. Davy's Bookshop is where Boswell met Samuel Johnson in 1763 and Boswell said to Davis: "Don't tell him I'm a Scotsman! Don't tell him where I'm from!". "This is Mr Boswell from Scotland," he said, and so Johnson then made some catty remark about that. On that side of the road, Button's Coffee House was set up and Addison was a great plugger of Button's, and he kept saying how good Button's was and how Will's had gone down, but one doesn't really know that that's entirely true because he had a reason – he was on the side of Button's and he wanted to promote it. I wonder whether the image of coffee houses, given in the *Tatler* and the *Spectator*, may be a little over-polished, a little idealised. Is the conversation so witty, so well informed? I think probably very little conversation in coffee houses was better informed than Hooke's conversation, but it's a mixture. A lot of it is ludicrous health remedies and things like that, and also of course the idea which very much promoted in the *Tatler* and the *Spectator* is that coffee houses were very specialised, they all had their own special function and special clientele. That's half true, but it's not entirely true. The very first issue of the *Tatler* was in 1709. They put forward the idea that the letters, the *Tatler* was in the form of letters, they would come from different coffee houses. If a letter was about witty things, it would come from one coffee house, if it was about science, it would come from another, and so on, and so it always says at the top "From the Grecian", "From Will's". In the very first edition of the *Tatler* it says: "All accounts of gallantry, pleasure and entertainment shall be under the article of Bite's Chocolate House, poetry under that of Will's [that is before they decided that Will's was no good], learning under the title of Grecian, foreign and domestic news shall have from St James Coffee House." They didn't actually say anything about financial news, so they didn't mention Jonathan's or Garaway's, which were the financial centres.

There's another view of coffee houses, less rosy, more jaundiced, and that's from a man called Ned Ward, who wrote the *London Spy*. It was I think published in a periodical form, but it came out as a book in 1703, so it was about the same time. He went to these coffee houses too, and he doubted very much whether they were quite as witty as he'd been told they were. He wrote as a newcomer to London. He went into a coffee house, didn't say which one: "...where a parcel of muddling muck worms were as busy as so many rats in an old cheese loft, some going, some coming, some scribbling, some talking, some drinking, others jangling, and the whole room stinking of tobacco like a Dutch barge." And then he made fun of a Royal Society member "...with as many maggots in his noddle as there are mice in an old barn" and then he said: "Being choked with the steam that arose from their sooty-coloured ninny broth and the suffocating fumes of their nasty puffing engines, my friend and I paid for our gruel and away we came." So that gives you a different, balanced view. He's making fun I suppose.

There's one last account, which I like very much, of coffee houses. In the 1720s, a Swiss man came to London. Quite often you get good accounts of London from foreign travellers because they described things that the resident wouldn't bother to describe, and they haven't got an axe to grind like Ned Walder's. He describes coffee houses (this is about 1724): "In London, there are a great number of coffee houses, much of which to tell the truth are not over-clean or well furnished owing to the quantity of people who resort to these places and because of the smoke which would quickly destroy good furniture. Englishmen are great drinkers. In these coffee houses, you can partake of chocolate, tea or coffee, and all sorts of liquor served hot. Also in many places you can have wine, punch or ale." So they didn't exclude alcohol.

“What attracts enormously in these coffee houses are the gazettes and other public papers. All Englishmen are great newsmongers. Workmen habitually begin the day by going to coffee rooms in order to read the latest news. I’ve often seen shoe blacks and other persons of that class club together to purchase a farthing paper. Nothing is more entertaining than hearing men of this class discussing politics and topics of interest concerning royalty. You often see an Englishman taking a treaty of peace more to heart than he does his own affairs. About a dozen different papers appear in London, some every day, others twice a week.” There’d been a terrific growth in newspapers since the period I’ve been talking about. I’ve been mostly talking about 1670s, 80s, when there weren’t really many – there was no daily paper and there weren’t that many regular papers, but by the 1720s, there were many. Coffee houses played a part in the growth of newspapers. Then he goes on to say: “Some coffee houses are resort for learned scholars and for wits, others the resort of dandies or politicians or again of professional newsmongers and many others are temples of Venus. You can easily recognise the latter because they frequently have a sign of a woman’s arm or hand holding a coffee pot. There are a great number of these houses in the neighbourhood of Covent Garden. They pass for being chocolate houses, and you’re waited on by beautiful, neat, well dressed and amiable but very dangerous nymphs.” What would be dangerous? Probably sexually transmitted diseases, I don’t know.

I think probably you can’t recreate that coffee house experience any There isn’t a coffee house with a continuous history that still is a coffee house today in London, not as far as I know anyway. Some became taverns and they still exist as taverns. If you walk along the little Cornhill alleys, the alleys between Cornhill and Lombard Street, opposite the Royal Exchange, where many of the overflow activities of the Royal Exchange were, especially after the fire when there was no Royal Exchange, people went to coffee houses there. Those alleys are still there, but mostly they are tiled with funny white tiles, the backs of banks and things like that, but you can see those alleys are the alleys where the stock jobbers and the marine insurers and Hooke and Aubrey and Wren walked and went to their coffee houses and their bookshops, which were also there, packed in in a fantastically sort of complex way. The plaques are still there as well. There’s a plaque there for Garaway’s and for Jonathan’s, with the wrong date on it, and also there’s a plaque for the very first coffee house of all in London. There already was a coffee house in Oxford. The first in London didn’t last all that long, it didn’t outlast the fire. After the fire, all that area was burnt down, it was rebuilt and became the Jamaica Coffee House, especially for West Indies merchants. There have been other fires, it’s true, and the building there is a later building still, but the Jamaica is still there today. I suppose you can buy coffee there, and it’s full of City gents, as it would have been just then as well, so it’s the same. There’s been a coffee place or a place of refreshment on that spot for 352 years, so that wouldn’t be a bad place to go, as long as you have your coffee made in the right way. It should be made the Turkish way, in little china dishes, as hot as you can suffer it, black as soot and tasting not unlike it! So none of this café latte rubbish or anything like that! It smells a little burnt too. Everyone drinks it little by little for fear of scalding their mouths. There’s a kind of music in hearing the noise that everyone makes in sipping. So you have to get this very hot, black sooty coffee and have to go “sh”, make that sort of special sucking and sipping noise, and that would be the real thing.

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