

**BRADFORD MADE**  
Heritage Brought to Life  
Stories from Bradford's Communities

**KS 2/3 (AGE 9-14)**  
**Activity Pack**

# **A SPOONFUL OF SUGAR**

## Bradford's Sweet Traditions



**LOCAL STORIES**  
**FOR LEARNERS**



**BRADFORD 2025**  
UK City of Culture

# PACK AT A GLANCE

Through the stories of two families, learners are introduced to two significant Bradford migration histories: Italian migration in the nineteenth century and Syrian migration since 2014. Learners discover the connections between these two stories and consider the links between food, heritage, community, and belonging in the city.

This pack contains a short film and images about The Bradford Selection – a project by Edible Archives, that tells the Bradford community's histories through the design and production of five biscuits. The Edible Archives artists set a creative brief for learners to design their own biscuit that tells a story.

**Recommended for:** Ages 9-14 (Upper Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3 Learners)

**Includes:** Discussion prompts, writing activities, design brief, worksheet for design task.

**Links to:** History / English / Local learning / Citizenship / PSHE / Design / Food Technology

# BARRELS OF ICE AND DREAMS

## Bradford's Italian Brothers

Bradford had a significant Italian community during the mid-to-late 1800s, with thousands of Italians seeking financial stability and safety following three wars in Italy (between 1848-1849, 1859-1861, and 1866). The wars led to widespread poverty, starvation, and political uncertainty. The UK, along with other European countries and the USA, provided opportunities for Italians seeking stable work and a new life.

Many Italians sought out Bradford, the 'Wool Capital' of the UK, for work in its busy factories. By sending money back home to support their families, they encouraged friends and relatives to join them, helping the city's Italian community grow. Many found work in the mills, but others brought with them the flavours and cultures of home, setting up businesses as sellers of ice cream, pasta, and fried fish. New sounds also filled the streets with many Italian street musicians using a *tingelary*, a hand-cranked barrel organ that would draw a crowd. Similar to a jingle on ice cream vans today the music would bring people to the cart, some even had trained monkeys performing in little coats. The sellers became famously known as 'organ grinders', inspiring the phrase "speak to the organ grinder, not the monkey," meaning speak to the person in charge, the powerful master, rather than the helper who just follows orders.



Example of tingelary

Two brothers who moved and settled in Bradford during this time were Giovanni (who later became known as John) Nero and Giuseppe (known as Joseph) Nero. They moved from Naples around 1880, and their Great-Great-Granddaughter, Jennifer Mahon, told us more about their journey. "The Neros settled at Garnett Street in Bradford, but a whole community of Italians was settled around the bottom of Otley Road."

Italian families would help one another out, and Jennifer says,

*“There is a story passed down through my family about another prominent Italian family at the time, the Bacigalupo family, who would rent out ice cream bikes to other families. It’s said that the Nero brothers lodged with the Bacigalupo family when they were new to Bradford”.*



**Giovanni and Guiseppe's families together**

It is likely that they rented their first-ever cart and bike from the family to sell ice cream. There was support for newly arrived immigrants within the Italian community, but even so, there was also a lot of competition for business!

Selling ice cream was becoming a really successful way to start a business as the demand for ice cream soared. Until the mid-19th Century, ice cream had only been available and tried by Royalty and the very elite in society. Ice was hard to come by, and the skills and expertise in how to make ice cream were first brought to the UK by many Italian immigrants at the time. Sellers in Bradford were territorial over space to sell ice cream, a bit like street buskers are now, and wouldn't take kindly to other sellers who tried to sell on their usual spot!

Records show that both brothers married and settled down in Bradford. Giovanni Nero married Sarah Rhodes in 1894, and his brother Giuseppe Nero married Annie Coulson in 1883. Jennifer and her family still call Bradford home today.

Setting up a business wasn't easy. The brothers would use their new cart to sell their ice cream, packing barrels full of ice to keep the ice cream cold. Jennifer also remembers the stories of the Nero brothers selling ice to other people, probably to make a little extra money, as ice was still hard to come by in the late 1800s! Each family would have a unique and secret recipe for their ice cream and have to source their own ice (in a time with no freezers!), using ice dredged from canals, or imported and stored underground. Italy was the first country to have perfected making ice cream, so there was great pride in passing on the knowledge, skills, and recipes within their communities and building businesses that offered something unique in the UK at that time.

As Jennifer says,

"We remember my great-great-grandad Giovanni and his brother Giuseppe with great respect and admiration for their resilience in travelling from hardship and thriving as entrepreneurs in a new country."

The Italian people brought food, culture, music, and community to the region, and are one of the key pillars in Bradford's vibrant and long history, giving locals a taste of something delicious and luxurious for the very first time.



Nero Ices Family Early 1900s



Jenny and Garry Mahon with Neros Ices



Sweetness  
from Syria: →

# SWEETNESS FROM SYRIA

## Kunafa Dreams

You may know Kunafa Tea as a popular Bradford dessert spot, but did you know it was founded by Syrian refugees Ayham Alhalabi and his brothers Anas and Hamza? Co-founder Ayham Alhalabi told us about his journey to Bradford via Egypt, and the memories and motivation behind starting Kunafa Tea.



The family fled Syria due to the war, leaving behind their home in Damascus after losing their father. *"It was a very difficult decision,"* Ayham explains. *"I was in my first year of medical school, but we prioritised safety — you can rebuild your future, but not your family."*

They first sought refuge in Egypt, but life was tough. Ayham worked three jobs a day while trying to restart his education after having to abandon medical school, cleaning, working in cafés, and clothes shops. Then came devastating news: their youngest brother Hamza, aged just eight years old, was diagnosed with cancer. With help from relatives and by selling family land in Syria, they paid for urgent chemotherapy.

In 2014, the United Nations began to resettle families into the UK, and the family was given priority, due to Hamza's condition. On their second day after arriving in Bradford, the family were taken to Leeds Hospital, where Hamza began a new round of treatment.

When they first arrived, there were few Syrian shops in Bradford. Ayham remembers eagerly waiting for ingredients like pomegranate molasses, brought from London every few weeks. Their mum, Zekka, kept the taste of home alive with her cooking. A trained biologist, she retrained in the UK, passing her GCSEs, English exams, and driving test – all after age 50! The idea for Kunafa Tea came from Ayham's brother, but at the heart of it was always their mum. She doesn't work in the restaurant, but all the recipes are hers. "She's our executive chef," Ayham smiles. "Everything has her approval."

Kunafa is a traditional dessert popular across Syria, Palestine, Lebanon, and Jordan. "It's more than food – it's memory, connection, family," says Ayham. "I remember my dad crushing pistachios by hand at home. We always made kunafa together." Today, Kunafa Tea offers creamy versions, nutty ones, and even kunafa with ice cream to suit different tastes. Youngest brother Hamza is now fully recovered and helps out at the cafe alongside studying IT at Bradford University; he's now even taller than his big brothers!

Recently, the Kunafa dessert's popularity exploded, helped by trends from Dubai and Bradford's love of sweet treats. "Bradford's youth, who often don't drink alcohol, go out for dessert. It's a social thing," Ayham explains.

*"Bradford is known for its food culture, and we're proud to be a part of that."*

The Alhalabi family was one of the first Syrian families resettled in the UK, and Ayham says Bradford was the best place they could have landed. "It's welcoming and diverse. I've never experienced racism here. We live side by side with people from every background."

**As Ayham says,**

*"I am reminded of how far we've come. From losing everything to building a business rooted in family and community. Bradford gave us a chance – and we hope Kunafa Tea gives something back – a taste of home and a place of welcome."*



**Continue to get inspired,  
dig deeper, learn and create:**





# INVESTIGATE

## Maps and Journeys

- Look at a map and trace the routes of the Nero family and the Alhalabi family to Bradford. Where else have people migrated to Bradford from?
- Why did the Nero family move to Bradford?
- Why did the Alhalabi family move to Bradford?
- What might it have felt like to arrive in a new city? In 1880? In 2014? In 2025?
- What might it feel like now?
- Bradford is a 'City of Sanctuary' - Sanctuary means a place of safety for people who have experienced danger. What ideas do you have about how we can welcome people who have just arrived in Bradford? What can we do as a city to make people feel at home here?

## Food Culture

- Both the Nero family and the Alhalabi family started businesses selling foods from their home culture in Bradford. Why do you think they chose food businesses? What would have been the positives and the challenges of starting a food business?
- Bradford is well known for being a city with good food. What different food cultures do we have in Bradford? What can the food in Bradford tell us about our city's history?

**"It's more than food—it's memory, connection, family,"**

Ayham Alhalabi said about the dessert Kunafa.

- Explain in your own words what you think he means by this? How does food connect us to our families, memories, and heritage? Work as a group to collect some examples of foods that are 'more than a food.'

## Can you create a 'Menu of Bradford'?

- What food and drinks best represent the diversity of Bradford and the history of migration to the city?
- You might want to start by researching the different parts of the world people have migrated from that have now made their home. Find out about migration from other parts of Europe as well as Asia, the Caribbean, and Africa.
- There are also traditional English recipes that play an important role in Bradford's food history – roast dinners, shepherd's pie, and deserts such as sponge and custard, to name just a few!
- Create a menu for a meal that celebrates Bradford. What snacks, main course, side dishes, bread, desserts and drinks will you include?

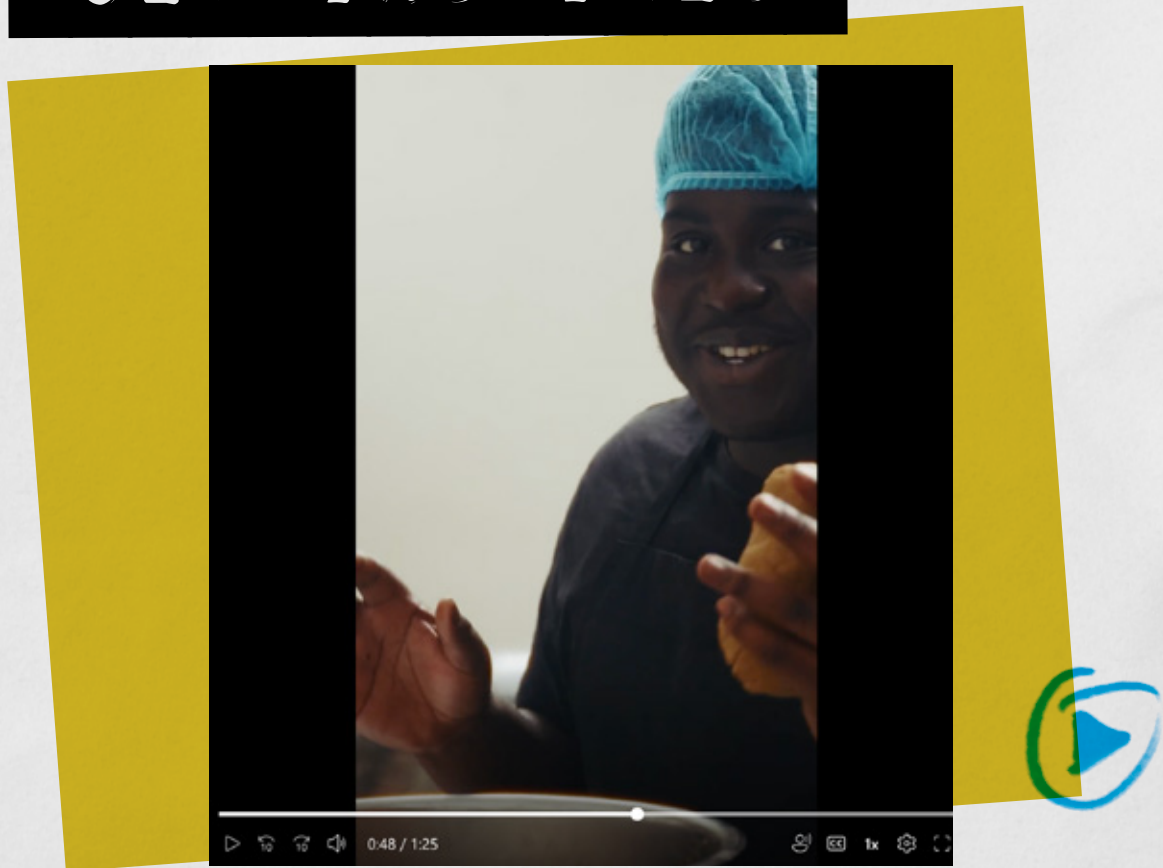
## Creative Writing Prompt

Look at the images of the Nero Family ice cream carts.

Imagine it is the 1880s and the cart has arrived on your street (maybe the Nero family has brought their street organ and monkeys as well as the ice cream to get everyone excited and interested – remember how little entertainment there was in the 1880s!)

- Create a five senses mind map with as many ideas as possible about what you could  
see • hear • taste • feel • smell
- The pictures are in black and white, but imagine what the colours might have been, and add to your mind map.
- Now write up your ideas – describing buying an ice cream from the Nero brothers.
- You can use the sentence starters below to help if you need them:
  - Before I even saw the ice cream cart, I could hear it coming. The usual sounds of our street on a Saturday were suddenly interrupted by the sound of...
  - Along with my brothers and sisters, and all the other children on the road, we ran as fast as our legs could carry us to the corner to see...
  - My mouth started to water as I imagined the taste of...
  - A long queue of children clutching their pennies had started to form, and we all felt...

# GET INSPIRED



**Edible Archives Video: (Intro Video.mov)** →

**Edible Archives Images:** →



**Press Photographs:** →





# LEARN AND CREATE

## Design a biscuit that tells a story –

### A creative brief from Edible Archives

Edible Archives creates multisensory artworks that use food as a tool to tell the stories of people and places. We think art shouldn't just be in galleries, museums, and theatres, and that it can be on our plates too!

We would like you to design a biscuit that tells a story about you. It could be something you love, your own community, family, or heritage.



## Background

Our most recent project was The Bradford Selection. We created a selection of biscuits that told different stories through how each biscuit looked and tasted. We featured five biscuits that represented communities and buildings.

## How did we do this?



## The Welcome

The Welcome is a biscuit that was designed to represent Bradford as a welcoming place for refugees and asylum seekers. To tell this story, we thought about:

- **Ingredients** - we used two different coloured doughs marbled together to represent the coming together of different cultures all in one place. We used turmeric in the biscuit because turmeric was in lots of recipes people shared with us.
- **Design** - the biscuit had WELCOME written on it in English, Arabic, and Burmese, languages spoken by refugees in Bradford. It was designed to look like a welcome door mat.
- **Packaging design** - an illustration we used on the packaging was of a handshake in two different skin tones to represent welcome and solidarity.

## Gur in a Suitcase

'Gur in a Suitcase' told a story that was personal to artist Sonia Sandhu. Her family are Sikh Punjabi migrants in Bradford, and she wanted to share that story through this biscuit.

- **Ingredients** - we used brown sugar from Punjab, in northern India, and spices like ginger, commonly used in Punjabi food.
- **Design** - the shape was like a packed suitcase, stuffed full of belongings to take to Bradford.
- **Packaging design** - an illustration we used on the packaging was of the sugarcane plant to show where one of the ingredients had come from.




## The Richard Dunn-ker

The Richard Dunn Sports Centre was an iconic Bradford building and was famously named in honour of the local boxer and scaffolder, Richard Dunn. He downed tools while working on the the construction of the sports centre to fight Muhammad Ali for the World Heavyweight Championship in 1976. Dunn lost the fight but returned to Bradford a hometown hero.

- **Ingredients** - we used oats to make a chunky and dunkable biscuit. Something robust to represent a large concrete building and the power of a boxer.
- **Design** - we stamped an image of boxing gloves on the front to represent the boxer Richard Dunn, after whom the building was named.
- **Packaging design** - an illustration we used on the packaging was of a boxing glove, and squiggly lines to represent the water slides at the leisure centre.





## **Now it's your turn**

- 1. Think about a story that you would like to tell. It could be about you, your family, your heritage, somewhere you enjoy spending time, or something you enjoy doing.**
- 2. Make a spider diagram and write down all the things that make it important to you. Include all of the key pieces of information you would like to communicate to other people in your design.**
- 3. Are there any flavours that would help to tell the story of this biscuit? They might be important flavours because of where they are from, or because of how they taste. Be as creative and imaginative as possible! You can use anything you like, think of herbs and spices, food colouring and decoration that will bring the story to life in an edible artwork.**
- 4. Think about the shape and the colours of the biscuit. What could this represent? Does it have a pattern on it? Is it shaped like something? Does it have any writing on it?**
- 5. Finally, design your biscuit and its packaging. What colours and shapes will you use? How will these help to tell your community's story?**

**Be ready to share your designs and talk about the decisions you made for your biscuit and packaging.**

## Worksheet for design

**EDIBLE  
ARCHIVES**

**Biscuit name:**

**Biscuit design:**

**Packaging design:**

**Ingredients:**

**My biscuit tells the story of...**



# DIG DEEPER

## Further reading

### [How This Town Became a South Asian Sweet Shop Paradise](#)

This is a piece of food-based memoir by Bradford and London-based journalist Aina Khan about Bradford's Asian sweet shops and bakeries. This is a fantastic piece of non-fiction writing to explore with learners and to use as a model for a piece of Bradford-focused food writing.

Helpful resources on teaching migration and sanctuary seeking:

### [Resources - Bradford City of Sanctuary](#)

Sweet Centre Bradford:

### [Our History - Sweet Centre Desi Food Restaurant in Bradford](#) [Sweet Centre](#)

The British Museum, the history of ice cream article:

### [Ice cream: the inside scoop | British Museum](#)

BBC Radio 4 Ice Cream History Documentary:

### [BBC Radio 4 - You're Dead to Me - 8 scoops on the history of ice cream](#)

Bradford Telegraph and Argus article about ice cream sellers:

### [Who remembers the Italian ice-cream sellers of Otley Road?](#) [Bradford Telegraph and Argus](#)

Italian Migration History and Stories:

### [Building Italian communities:](#) [caterers, industrial recruits and professionals / Our Migration Story](#)

Dubai Chocolate Craze and its history:

### [Dubai chocolate: How a sweet treat worth £15 went viral - BBC News](#)

## Further reading

### [BOY, EVERYWHERE AGES 10 – 14+ – A. M. DASSU](#)

An excellent class reader for Key Stage 2 and 3 that tells the story of a Syrian family's journey from Damascus to Manchester.



# NOTES FOR EDUCATORS

## Guidance from Bradford Schools of Sanctuary when discussing forced migration with learners:

### Key Principles for Bradford Educators

#### **Start with yourself**

Reflect on your biases; model empathy, openness, and accurate understanding.

#### **Know your learners**

Understand learners' knowledge and context - some may have lived experience, others may have misconceptions.

#### **Centre lived experience respectfully**

Use curated refugee stories; never force personal disclosures from learners.

#### **Foster empathy, not pity**

Frame narratives around strength, resilience, and our shared humanity, helping learners see people seeking sanctuary as individuals like themselves, not victims or defined solely by the label 'refugee.'

#### **Teach safely**

Use trauma-informed practices; some content may be triggering, so you may wish to have a quiet word with any learners with lived experience before a lesson. Create safe, respectful learning spaces.

#### **Inspire action**

Encourage learners to turn empathy into real-world responses and action.

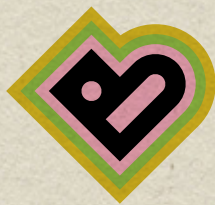
## For more detailed advice and ideas from Bradford Schools of Sanctuary, please visit their website:

[Teaching about Forced Migration – A Guide for Bradford Educators](#)

## Other helpful resources when talking about migration and sanctuary seeking with learners:

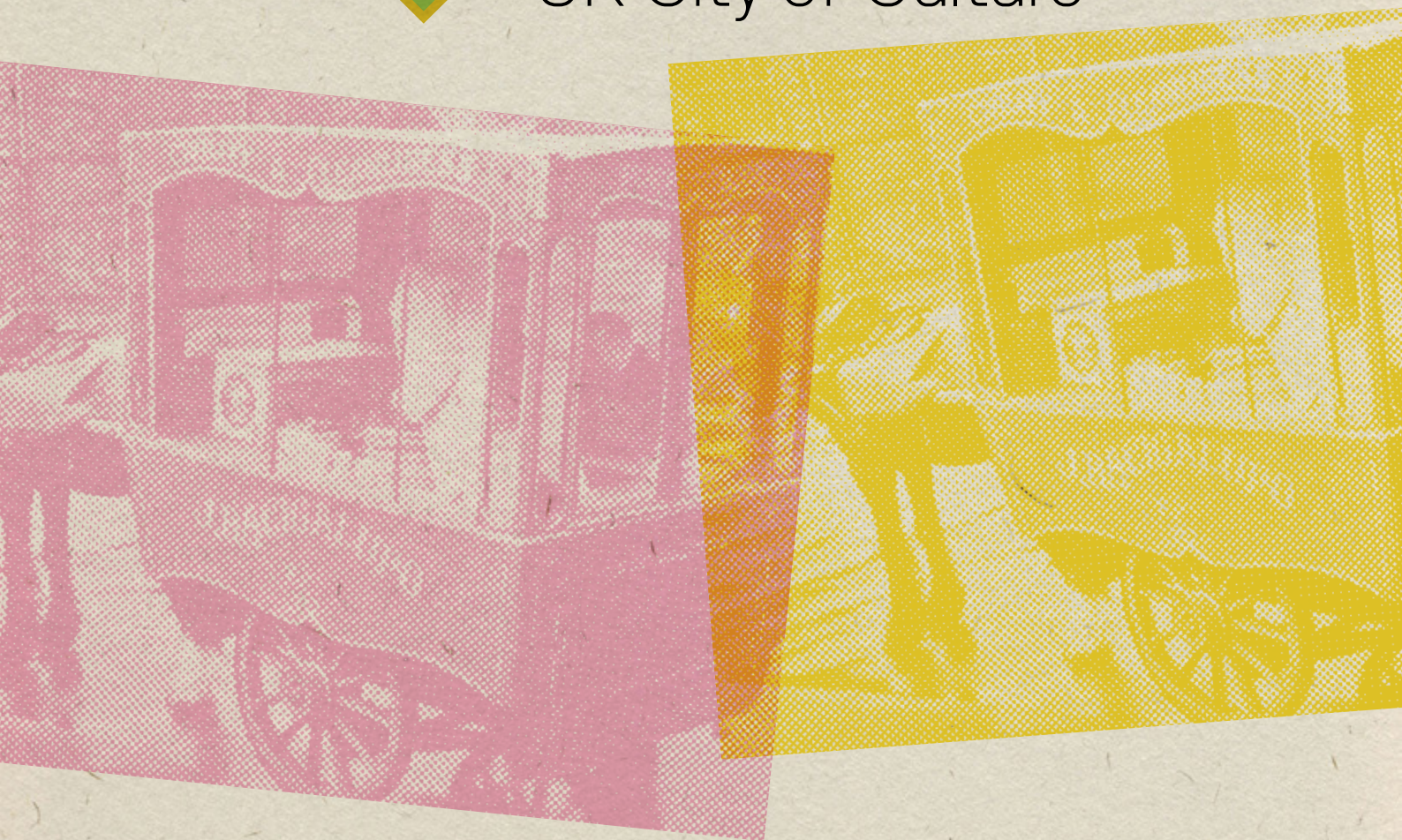
[How to talk about Migration / Our Migration Story](#)

[Teaching about Refugees | UNHCR UK](#)



# **BRADFORD 2025**

## UK City of Culture



This resource was co-created by the Bradford 2025 UK City of Culture Cultural Learning Team and Jennifer Mahon (Bloomin' Buds Theatre Company), Ayham Alhalabi, and Bradford Schools of Sanctuary.

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The  
**Charles & Elsie Sykes Trust**