

## **AN ORAL HISTORY OF BREWING IN 3 LONDON BREWERIES**

INTERVIEWEE: Derek Prentice  
DATE OF BIRTH 1950, Camberwell  
PARENTS' OCCUPATIONS Father: post office worker  
Mother: housewife/dinner lady (5 children)  
INTERVIEW LOCATION Young's Brewery, Wandsworth  
DATE OF INTERVIEW March 29 2019  
INTERVIEWER: George Warren SUMMARISER: Celia Holman

Derek Prentice is a highly experienced brewer who worked at 3 major London breweries: Truman's, Brick Lane (1968-1989), Young's, Wandsworth (1989-2006) and Fuller's, Chiswick (2006-2014). "I enjoyed them all" but "Young's was outstanding". It was "almost a place of worship" for a brewer. "If I could have got there earlier, I would have done." Derek still works in brewing, alongside his son in a small 'craft' brewery in Wimbledon. He speaks of a "renaissance of the craft sector in London", with over 100 breweries.

This interview is very wide ranging, with Derek not only describing the brewing process, but also discussing breweries as businesses that needed to adapt to changing times.

Truman's Brewery: parts dated back to 17th century - a warren of rooms, "like Gormenghast" (a fictional sprawling and decaying castle) with "acres of character, acres of problems". His A levels in Sciences lead him to work in the laboratory, allowing him to see work in many different departments, before he moved into brewing. He describes the brewing day: the early starts and the shift work, with breaks or over-night stays in the on-site flat as 8 mash tuns were run a day. The process gradually became more automated, with 50-60 workers being reduced to 10-12. The work started to have "a lot less personality". The increasing affluence of the surrounding area meant that "the writing was on the wall" with respect to the eventual closure for redevelopment of the brewery in 1989.

Young's Brewery: "leapt at the chance" to join. It was "like stepping back to when I first joined the brewing industry some 20 odd years ago". Working under Head Brewer Ken Don ("he allowed the team to develop"), Derek had input into developing new beers. He had a "genuine role" from which he gained "real satisfaction". Even though the brewers were in a Victorian brewhouse, it was both "advanced" and "innovative".

John Young was "highly influential" and the "ultimate character," having a "love of the brewery, love of the beer, love of the people" (employees, pub workers, customers). The brewery was very much part of the wider community.

Derek describes "very close" relationships between breweries. The degree of collaborative 'competition' was perhaps unique to the brewing industry. It extended to the sports field, with inter-brewery sporting competitions, with some participants competing at county and national level.

There weren't any significant disputes. The newer breweries outside of London gained a reputation for a more militant workforce, having joined from other industries.

Derek remembers the "magic moment" when Ken Dun was awarded a Gold Medal for his brewing, as well as the brewery being awarded the overall cup for the first time in the history of Young's.

Sale of the brewery for redevelopment: it was "hard to see what we were losing", but he accepted that maintaining a small brewery no longer made economical sense.

Fuller's: there were great similarities in ethos with Young's, but perhaps "took business more seriously."

Derek finishes by describing the current climate that has allowed a resurgence in craft brewing.