

Brewing Stories

INTERVIEWEE	Graham Rixon
DATE OF BIRTH	1967
PARENTS OCCUPATIONS	Father worked at Watney's Brewery. Mother was a housewife
Interview Location	The Tun room, Griffin Brewery, Chiswick
Interviewer: Miranda Vickers.	Summariser: John Maguire.

Graham is a Cask Racking Technician. He has worked at the Griffin Brewery since 1988.

Graham came from a brewing family. His father and brother worked for Watneys, and he grew up within sight and sound of the Mortlake Brewery. As a child he was often taken to Watneys social events, and used to feed the dray horses. He applied for a job at Watneys, but at 5' 4" he was considered too small for a role that involved heavy lifting. His first job was as a trainee chef, but he didn't like it. He then applied for a temporary job at Fullers (3 months) and has been there for over 30 years.

He started work as a hand on the Cask and Keg production lines and was promoted to supervisor. Work on the line involves sterilising the casks, carrying out checks to ensure that there are sufficient casks for the run, and the line is functioning ok; completing the run, and cleaning out the racking tanks ready for the next run. At the end of the day, he is responsible for the clearing and cleaning of the production line before going home. In his time the changes have centred around automation, computerisation, hygiene and health and safety. The job involves more paperwork and more meetings now than when he started.

When asked about the perks of the job, Graham started with the beer machine. This machine would deliver pints for discs employees received each day. Sadly, the beer machine was withdrawn at the end of the eighties or the early nineties, and a memorial service was held for it. The brewery is dry now, with no drinking allowed while working, although the disks have been replaced by staff accounts, which allow staff to buy discounted products from the company.

In common with other past and present employees, Graham believes the staff are well treated by the company. Other perks included share-save and share allocation schemes, jollies away from the brewery, cricket matches, inter-brewery darts matches. The sports & social facilities were sold off some years ago but some events are still organised. Every 5 years a black tie event is held at the Grosvenor hotel for all staff – brewery and "trade" (ie: pub). The money is fair and the atmosphere is friendly. Unlike Watneys, there have been no strikes in his time. The organisational hierarchy has flattened out over time, and the deferential mode of address - Mr Michael, Mr Anthony etc, when dealing with members of the Fullers or Turner families, is a thing of the past.

When the other breweries were operating there was friendly rivalry between the companies. Watneys' employees described Fullers beer as being "All shit and full of slops".

Risks are as with any production plant with moving vehicles and lines. Graham doesn't remember any serious incidents although he has suffered from steam burns, broken ribs and fingers. This contrasts with Watneys, where there were fatalities, and once a fire that caused his school to be evacuated.

Graham was upset by the Watneys shutdown, and understandably, given the pending change of ownership at Fullers, is careful and circumspect in this interview.