

Brewing Stories

INTERVIEWEE	Iain Dark
DATE OF BIRTH	1960
PARENTS OCCUPATIONS	Father was a window cleaner. Mother worked in the Payroll Department at Mortlake
Interview Location	Lyncroft Gardens, Ealing.
Interviewer: Miranda Vickers.	Summariser: John Maguire.

Iain worked in the Engineering Division at Mortlake from 1977 to 2010. He started as an apprentice electrician and rose to become a Technical Planner responsible for planning and organising maintenance shutdowns.

Iain was born and raised in Barnes. His mother worked in the payroll department when he applied for a job at the brewery. In his interview he remembers that confirming he could swim, play cricket and football were the attributes that swung it for him. He got the job and was playing football for one of the brewery teams the following Tuesday.

He started in the last year or so of the “old brewery”, soon to be replaced by the “new brewery” which was built on the other side of ship lane. The containers in the old brewery were made of wood and copper. This was before the days of Health and Safety, and the old plant and processes were unhygienic - flies, cockroaches, mice, grain weevils, pigeon droppings and feathers proliferated, and could often find their way into the beer, although he assured us that the brewing process sterilised the final product.

His working day began at 7:30 in the “mess” for tea. Everyone had their own place in the mess, and if you took someone else’s there would be trouble. Then some work, then off to the canteen for breakfast where the Brewing, Engineering and Transport divisions each had their own table. The productive day tended to finish at lunchtime, when the drinking started. The official daily allowance was two pints, but bottles and kegs would find their way into the workshops for afternoon refreshment. For some the entertainment would continue after work at the company sports club. Local police and firemen would sometimes join in. Most employees found their way home at night, but a few would sleep in the locker room.

There were dangers in the job. Four fatalities occurred during Iain’s time there. The risks centred around Co2 gas, and toxic gases in the sewage plant at the site. The site had it’s own health centre, although the nurse – Mary – was often drunk. Pay and conditions were very good – there was a bonus scheme, good sickness payment rules, a final salary pension where the company offered generous early retirement options, and many family orientated social activities. The brewery even had a property on the coast where employees who had suffered serious illness or injury could convalesce. Having said that, there were some instances of industrial action at the site – a strike in the late 70’s which lasted five or six weeks, and some subsequent periods of “work to rule”.

The ethnic mix in the early years was overwhelmingly white English. Women worked at the site from the start – the canning hall was a dangerous place for young men. Over time more women came to work in administration and more technical roles in the laboratory.

The Brewery had four owners during Iain’s time there – Watneys, Courage, Grand Metropolitan, and Budweiser. Iain’s particular fondness is for the Watney years. This is a witty and entertaining interview. Iain’s affection for the Mortlake brewery, and how he chooses to remember it, is touching.