

AN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT – “BREWING STORIES”

INTERVIEW SUMMARY – JAMES YOUNG

Interviewee:	James Young
Year of birth:	1951 in Newcastle
Current Employment:	Retired
Previous Positions:	Brewer and Board Member
Interview Location:	Ram Brewery, Wandsworth
Date:	20 th March 2019

James Young started the interview with a brief summary of his family connections at the Ram Brewery. He is a sixth generation direct descendant of Charles Young who bought the brewery in 1831. When James was born, his grandfather, was running the business. He never allowed his sons to get involved in the brewery at all. In fact they hardly knew it existed. That is until he was about to retire. He then requested that his sons take over the running of the brewery. Reluctant at first, they were persuaded by their mother to pack in their existing jobs and run the brewery. John Young (James’s father) took charge and became chairman of the company. John soon fell in love with his new job and became a prominent character both at the Ram brewery and in the brewing industry in general. He was very much a traditionalist and fought to retain the brewing of real ale when the competition opted to move over to kegged beer. He was also proud of all the animals that were present on the site of the brewery, also adding a few new species of his own.

Unlike his father, James was willing and happy to get involved in the brewery business at a young age. He started his career learning about the wine industry and served his apprenticeship in vineyards and wineries throughout Europe. From there he started his training as a brewer, first at the Devonshire brewery and then the Eldridge brewery.

In the late 1960’s, he was ready to further his career as a brewer at Young’s. He gained valuable experience by working in all the various departments. He even had to do his share of sweeping and cleaning at the site. He emphasises that he got no special treatment by being a family member. Even declaring that once he was qualified, that he got less pay than the other brewers. He goes on to tell of his 34 years work experience at the brewery. He describes the working conditions, his many colleagues, the animals, the social activities and the changes over time. It is very apparent that he really loved his time there.

In 1989, James went on to join the board of directors. He goes on to describe how sad it was to see the closing of the brewery in 2006 and the effect it had on both the workers and the family. His father John died a few days before the closure, and the final brew was served at his funeral. The main reason for the closure, was that the site was becoming inoperable due to the extensive local building work including changing the surrounding road systems. It was becoming almost impossible to get the ingredients in, and the finished products out of the site. A decision was made to transfer the brewing to Charles Well and Co. in Bedford. A new company, Charles Well’s and Young & Co, was formed to run the joint venture.

On summing up his career at Young’s James says, “Making something that people enjoy is great fun. No regrets, I’m really lucky”. Another interesting quote is, “The animals were good for the soul of the brewery”.

He recollects some amusing tales relating to the brewery. He also mentions that he wouldn't have liked to work in one of the company's many pubs, stating that the job is very hard with the long hours and the seven day week.

Although retired, James is a member of the Young's charitable trust, and still attends many of the events associated with the organization.

Summariser: Bob Hall