

AN ORAL HISTORY OF BREWING IN 3 LONDON BREWERIES

INTERVIEWEE: John Keeling
DATE OF BIRTH: 1956
PARENTS' OCCUPATIONS: Father – train driver; Mother – housewife
INTERVIEW LOCATION: Fuller's Griffin Brewery, Chiswick
DATE OF INTERVIEW: March 22nd 2019
INTERVIEWER: Miranda Vickers
SUMMARISER: Ioana Constantinescu

John Keeling joined Fullers as a junior brewer in 1981 and throughout his interview spoke highly about his work, job satisfaction, colleagues and the company. John was chosen to be the head brewer. He picked Georgina Young, the first female brewer at Fullers, to be head brewer when he retired.

John worked at Wilsons, not far from where he lived, from 1974 – 1977 and went back there every summer during his university years as a lab technician. He says that if it weren't for his mother seeing the job advertised in The Manchester Evening News he wouldn't have got the job there and he wouldn't have ended up at Fullers. A 6-month induction included a week at the maltings and hop picking where he met and observed the farmers trade in grain. "All the farmers had shares in Fullers".

John related a couple of stories about amusing break-ins and numerous stories about the drinking culture, including the fact that "everything was overmanned to carry those who drank". The draymen drank the most, especially "Alan the Gallon". Automation finished this and Fullers became a dry site in the 1990's.

John described his jobs starting as junior brewer through to head brewer; "the equipment wasn't as modern as Wilsons" and having to be good at quadratic equations. Others were better at the detail and John moved onto thinking about how to make the brewing process more efficient and to ensuring the standards and values of the brewery.

John talked about the many perks of the job which included free beer, help with his mortgage: Fullers "recognized that it was hard"; going to Brazil and Australia, all expenses paid, as a beer judge and as an ambassador for the company. John explained why cask beer doesn't exist anywhere except in GB and that the demise of the pub meant the demise of cask beer. John always got promotion before he asked for it.

There was a strike in 1980 when the brewery had to allow pubs to buy their stock wherever they wanted and a spike in larger packing during the summer of 1976 and in pale ale production during the Olympics when Courage went on strike.

The atmosphere is the worst he's ever seen it since the takeover. Generally Fullers was a happy place to work. Everyone was encouraged to work and

socialize together. Plus Fullers has always been “on the front foot” so it was easy to keep morale up. John got a lot of satisfaction out of his work “after a hard day you can go down to the river walk along to the Dove pub and see people enjoying your beer”.

John also enjoyed working with some “lovely people” and “great characters”. “The best thing about the brewery is the people, the conversations; seeing people”. He listed some of the families who worked at Fullers in the 60’s, 70’s and 80’s and the community atmosphere; “not just a job”. Some people worked there for several generations, but that all changed a lot when the council houses were sold. Several people lived in company houses and the head brewer used to live in the house on site. John explained how he was introduced to everyone immediately when he joined the brewery. He enjoyed cricket games, which he was introduced to by his first flat mate in Brentford, the darts matches, the bowls competitions and drinking games from pub to pub. He recalled the visit by Prince Charles.

Speaking of the atmosphere at the brewery “it was a very busy compact site”; “a happy atmosphere”; the multiculturalism and liking London because of this and because of his love of jazz music.

He talked about how women were only in the bottling plant early on and are now heads of brewing and marketing and sit on the board of directors.

“Fullers wasn’t us and them”. John was a Northerner so “could be blunt” but “built up relationships that lasted a long time”. Best to “do things the Fullers Way”.