

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

INTERVIEWEE: John William Smith  
DATE OF BIRTH 1963, Roehampton  
PARENTS' OCCUPATIONS Father: driver at Fuller's  
Mother: housewife  
INTERVIEW LOCATION Fuller's Brewery, Chiswick  
DATE OF INTERVIEW 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2019  
INTERVIEWER: Ioana Constantinescu      SUMMARISER: Celia Holman

John has worked at Fuller's since 1982 to the present day. His main job has been as a delivery driver. This is a detailed and often very humorous interview ("it was a good laugh, nice days"), with John describing many of his co-workers over the years, and how both the brewery and his job has changed.

Both his father and his uncle worked for Fuller's (c.45 years and c.35 years respectively), the former as a delivery driver and the latter as a drayman (as he couldn't drive). John explains the distinction between the two: a driver drives the lorry, and the drayman does the "cellar work" at the delivery site i.e. unloading the delivery and loading up the empties, be they barrels or bottles.

John's first job was in the Bottling Hall on the bottling line. When he first started, the bottles would come back in wooden crates that had to be stacked and then transported around the site on a forklift truck. After a while, he was trained to use the forklift. He then moved into the Stores, putting out deliveries on the road ready for collection. At the time, "you were your own boss" over in the Stores. "If you didn't behave yourself" you would be back stacking empty crates.

He talks about some of his long-standing co-workers with whom he first worked - "it was mad". The canteen "looked like a prison" with "a few nice chairs for the people in suits". "We all got on good" but it was "a different world."

"He can't smell nothing" as he's got so used to the smell of the hops. "It's always been noisy here". John also describes going on deliveries with his father as a young boy. "It was a nice day out."

As a delivery driver, when he started he was delivering to Fuller's shops (wines and spirits). He was then 'promoted' on to delivering beer to pubs. (Nowadays, a lot of wine is delivered to pubs.)

He describes the delivery vehicles he first drove - "old Bedfords" that were very physical to drive ("that was half your day's work"). It was also "baking hot" in the cab, as the engine was situated underneath.

He and his fellow deliverymen used to throw deliveries down onto a "pad" and throw the empty barrels back up. They could work quickly. (Health and safety: "Them days you didn't care.") Nowadays a lift is used, and it takes longer to deliver. However, the work is still as "heavy" and physical as it has always been: "Your back wears out a bit." Each van makes more deliveries per day than it used to.

Some terminology: "tubs" are barrels, and "below" was shouted as each was put down into the cellar.

Beer tokens: 10 per week, with extra when you did overtime. These could be spent in the beer machine. Former workers would come down on a Friday, and several generations of workers would stand around, having a chat and a drink. This was removed when Fuller's became a "dry brewery". A wreath saying 'rest in peace' was put on the beer machine.

Discipline: John talks of how previously, your boss could take you aside and have a word with you. Now the process seems much more formal. "The younger lads can go a bit more the other way" as a result, rather than "taking on board what's happened."

Mixing between departments: there used to be ('in my Dad's time") a clubhouse on site, and workers who "worked inside" (in the offices) and transport would all know each other. Nowadays, people are friendly to each other, but don't mix as much: "People were a bit more chatty with each other."

Social events: "years ago" there was a Christmas party for the kids, and one for retired workers. At the latter, "the family" (the brewery owners) would "come down and have a chat with them." "It was a nice night."

Outings: workers would have "a good get together" going to the coast or to the horse races. "All different types of people" would go, but "it's died a death now", and social outings tend to be more within individual departments. "It's not like it used to be" when there used to be 3-4 trips a year: "It's nothing now."

"Fuller's Friday": last Friday of the month, you can have a few drinks between 5-8pm in the Mawson (the pub attached to the side of the brewery). Transport would finish earlier, so the time they could be served was moved earlier: "Can't knock having a few free drinks."

Ancient large wisteria on site: "Touch that and you've had it. Whatever you do [in your lorry], make sure you miss it."

Other breweries: you would wave to other delivery drivers you encountered. John has also taken part in inter-brewery bowls, organised by London Breweries. However, many of the brewery-owned sports grounds have gone. "It was a nice thing years ago. It was good." Prince Charles visited the brewery: before Prince Charles arrived, a couple of the drivers unveiled the plaque (celebrating 150 years of Fuller's) that the prince was due to formally unveil later in the day. The plaque came off the wall - "we screwed it back on" and watched with trepidation to see if the same would happen to Prince Charles.

Best things: "We all get on" and he keeps in touch with the people he's worked with over the years.

Worst thing: his brother-in-law worked on the Transport (John's father had got him a job), and got killed on the road, after a blackout when driving. 'Fuller's were good' in looking after the family.

Main changes: "it was more relaxed" whereas now "we're all beavering away". Congestion in London is much more of a problem, and John starts very early in the morning (c. 5am) to try and avoid the worst of it.

Initially, might have 7 jobs (over 3 loads), now that has doubled and you are going between more sites. "You used to be able to stop and have a drink with the governor [the landlord]". Now the drivers have to log in the times of the deliveries, and a sheet that shows them when they need to be in a particular location.