

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

INTERVIEWEE: John Kenneth Don  
DATE OF BIRTH 1945, Alloa (Scotland)  
PARENTS' OCCUPATIONS Father: gardener/glass factory  
Mother: housewife/cleaner (4 children)  
INTERVIEW LOCATION Young's Brewery, Wandsworth  
DATE OF INTERVIEW March 20th 2019  
INTERVIEWER: Chris Conway SUMMARISER: Celia Holman

A very detailed interview with a multiple gold-medal winning brewer (winning the Brewer's Cup was "like winning the FA Cup") that gives a comprehensive overview of brewing in various breweries across the UK from the mid 1960s onwards. John describes in detail the work of the brewer, to include quality controlling the brews for clarity ("bright"), aroma and taste. John spent most of his brewing career at Head Brewer at Young's (1980-2006).

John's mother's cousin was a plumber at a brewery. This led to a 4-year apprenticeship, culminating in a 3-year degree in Brewing and Distilling. John learnt his craft working in a wide variety of breweries - some modern, some more traditional - in Alloa, Burton on Trent, Watford and Warrington, before arriving at Young's in 1980. He was interviewed for the position by John Young. Part of the interview was going round several pubs: this "set the tone for the next 26 years." John Young "made Young's unique" - he was a "larger than life" character who was often outspoken and had strong views on the industry.

The expansion and renewal of facilities at Young's was an "interesting time". The work was very "practical" and "hands on". It was a time of "constant innovation", with the expansion of lager brewing (new to Young's). Ken used to his technical expertise to improve hygiene and produce beers that were more consistent and with a longer 'shelf life'. He brought on new recruits with brewing degrees, and trained other workers to understand the brewing process from a technical point of view. He "spread beer knowledge" and introduced a graduate training scheme, which brought more female workers into the on-site laboratory. John was known as "The Don" by other departments, his 2nd brewer "The Captain".

John describes in detail the changes that took place across the various departments (packaging, bottling, transport) which led to a "natural wastage" of staff with increased mechanisation. Very few people actively left Young's - it was a "job for life" where "everyone knew everyone". John Young's father was a "great socialist" and Young's was a "generous company", looking after its staff. This was also reflected in the many social activities that took place, to include The 35 Club for long-serving employees, with at one point just under 30 members of The 35 Club still working in the brewery.

His last day at the brewery was “very emotional”. He describes his time at Young’s as “fantastic”, largely down to the “family atmosphere that Young’s encouraged.”