

Brewing Stories

INTERVIEWEE	Simon Rigeon
DATE OF BIRTH	1959
PARENTS OCCUPATIONS	Father worked at Trinity House. Mother was a housewife
Interview Location	The Tun room, Griffin Brewery, Chiswick
Interviewer: Celia Holman.	Summariser: John Maguire.

Simon was the Quality Assurance and Systems Manager at the Griffin Brewery. He worked there from 1978 until 2013.

Graham was born and raised in Bracknell. His father worked for Trinity house, a charity which promotes safety at sea and is responsible for the development and maintenance of lighthouses and light ships. Simon did not have a background in brewing but he did have an interest in microbiology, amongst other things. His appointment was sponsored by Reg Drury, the head brewer at the time, who believed in quality management as a method for improving the beer itself and modernising the operations at the site.

In his early years in the job there was much to be improved. A pejorative alternative to Fullers, Smith and Turner at the time was “Full of Shit and Turnips”. In the interview Simon gives many detailed examples of quality improvements made over his time at the site. The initial focus was on cleaning the beer (and the ingredients, such as the yeast) by eradicating inappropriate bacteria. This both revealed the need for and led to the identification of improvements that could be made to the equipment used in the brewing process. Simon came across some scepticism from fellow workers during the early years. He felt he had to “prove the difference between something looking clean and being clean”. One of his major achievements was to attain ISO 9000 accreditation for the brewery.

When asked about memorable incidents at work he mentioned the installation of Liquor tanks that were made out of some form of composite material that caused them all to explode when the water was heated. He also mentioned a practical joke his workmates played on him – when some caustic solution was spilled (a trivial incident) he was persuaded to call the fire service, who came and treated it as a major incident.

In common with other past and present employees, Simon believes the staff are well treated by the company. He mentioned the various sports and social events that took place, and also referred to instances where the company stepped in to relieve employees in financial stress. Simon met his wife on the job and they had their wedding reception in the tasting vault at the brewery. Simon’s view is that rivalry in the brewing industry was friendly, unlike the cut-throat competition seen in other industries

In his early years at the site it was male dominated. Over time, as the operation became more mechanised, and involved less heavy lifting, more women came on board. He told us that the bottling line ladies had a reputation for aggressive horseplay – which may have involved getting hold of, and de-bagging young men on the line.

This interview will be of particular interest to those who want to know how the processes at the site came to be modernised, and the challenges the modernisers faced in the 35 years Simon worked there.