

AN ORAL HISTORY OF BREWING IN 3 LONDON BREWERIES

INTERVIEWEE: William (Billy) George White
DATE OF BIRTH 1948, Mortlake
PARENTS' OCCUPATIONS Father: Blue Circle Cement, bus driver
Mother: housewife
INTERVIEW LOCATION Fuller's, Chiswick
DATE OF INTERVIEW 18th March 2019
INTERVIEWER: Chris Conway SUMMARISER: Celia Holman

Billy worked at Fuller's from 1981 - 2013, and then worked for 5 years (part time) as a tour guide. During the course of the interview, he describes the daily routine of the draymen, and how it changed over the years. He also describes many of the social aspects of working at the brewery - Fridays in the pub, sports days, away days, Christmas outings.

Billy originally came to the brewery to cover for someone who had had a motorbike accident. He had a lot of friends who worked for Fuller's and was a member of the Fuller's social club before he actually came to work there. He describes Chiswick in general as a "very close knit community".

Billy's first week on the job was to deal with the empty bottles coming back in crates, having been picked up by the delivery team - "non-stop work for most of the day" and "wet and uncomfortable". He then moved into the tank room, working on cleaning out the tanks before the brewing. It was a very cold job. He stayed there a few weeks, before moving over into the boiler house. It was shift work, working 3am to 11am, starting up all the boilers by hand. Brewing would start at 5am.

Billy was keen to move over to the drays (or lorries), as it was "job and finish" (i.e. once the deliveries were completed, one could go home) - the "best job in the brewery." He moved over c. 1986. Billy describes in detail the daily process of "getting a ticket" and loading up with the deliveries, and then on the road ("you were your own governor"). Furthest north he delivered was Birmingham, and as far south and west as Southampton and Poole.

Over the years, the job became less manual. He describes how he first used ropes to deliver and would 'spin the barrels back' so they wouldn't bounce off the mat when dropped down into the cellar.

He describes a fellow drayman 'Alan the Gallon', who would start drinking at 4am (in the mess room, using beer tokens) and then go on shift at 7am. The brewery became 'dry' in the 90s.

He describes the various perks of working Fuller's - share scheme, pension plan - and the family atmosphere - "you couldn't wait to go to work".

He describes changes to working practices, especially with respect to changing over from the larger wooden barrels to smaller steel kegs, the latter being easier to handle. At first, he was "stiff as a board" after a week handling barrels. From 5-6 large drops a day, it changed to 15+ smaller deliveries.

Billy describes some of his co-workers over the years - his fellow draymen, and various members of management, and the women in the bottling hall and in the offices. His son Nicky came to work at the brewery, too. He speaks of how he came to become a tour guide when he retired - before becoming a guide, he didn't know how beer was brewed! He enjoyed meeting people from all over the world who would come for brewery tours, sometimes arriving from the airport with their suitcases.

"Fuller's really took off" during the time that he worked there, with business increasing and Fuller's brewing a greater variety of beers. "I had an amazing time here. I used to love coming to work." He ends by speaking optimistically of the future of Fuller's now that it has been bought by a Japanese brewer.