

AN ORAL HISTORY OF BREWING IN 3 LONDON BREWERIES

INTERVIEWEE: Ian Swanson
DATE OF BIRTH 1947, Bristol (brought up in Yorkshire)
PARENTS' OCCUPATIONS Father: GP (doctor) Mother: housewife
INTERVIEW LOCATION Young's Brewery, Wandsworth
DATE OF INTERVIEW March 29 2019
INTERVIEWER: Raj Gill SUMMARISER: Celia Holman

An Oxford graduate with a degree in Chemistry, Ian joined Tetley's as a graduate trainee, completing a Masters in Brewing Science at Birmingham University.

Over the course of his career, he worked for several breweries, both large and small (Tetleys, Watneys, Youngs, Guinness). He speaks of how brewing changed from being labour-led to technology-led, and of how the '70s and 80s were a time of great increase in production, but coupled a shrinking workforce. He describes relationships between the management, workers and union representatives.

He also talks in detail of the changes to the brewing industry (the "Beer Orders") introduced by Lord Young (Secretary of State for Trade and Industry) in 1989. These had consequences that had not been anticipated, and resulted in widespread redundancies.

When Ian started at Tetley's, there was a maltings on site, and slate vessels were used. He moved around the country, working in Burton and Romford, amongst other places.

15 years into his career, he came to Watney's in Mortlake as 2nd brewer. Although was the "least exciting" of his positions, he remained for 10 years. One of his first jobs was to make people redundant and change shift patterns. He describes how dangerous the warehouse (essentially "an open yard") was, with kegs stacked 8 high, delivery vehicles weaving in and out, and fork-lift truck drivers doing 16-hour shifts. Many of the older buildings were "semi-abandoned".

Watney's was a "contract" brewer", brewing "under license" for Fosters, Holsten and Budweiser. It was "not a quality driven operation". Rather it was "shareholder driven" and "bonus driven" at the top. The biggest perk was that "you kept your job." There were several disputes, with different departments striking at different times.

In spite of the above, there was "a big sense of community" with sports teams etc. Croquet was introduced for older workers. It was so successful it became the brewery's "signature game".

Moving to Young's Brewery, Ian found a similar social scene - "any game that involved drinking a beer". It was a "point of honour" for Young's to always turn out a team (football, rugby, cricket). Young's was "very open" and "friendly". It was a "quality brewer" with a sense of history. It was "very emotional" to see the horses go as they had been an "integral part of the brewery" and "the best horses in the country".

Ian has enjoyed the “camaraderie” of the brewing industry, having made “friends for life.”