

AN ORAL HISTORY OF BREWING IN 3 LONDON BREWERIES

INTERVIEWEE: John Hatch
DATE OF BIRTH [no Y.O.B given], Thornbury (village near Bristol)
PARENTS' OCCUPATIONS Father: engineer
Mother: housewife
INTERVIEW LOCATION Young's Brewery, Wandsworth
DATE OF INTERVIEW 20th March & 5th April 2019
INTERVIEWER: Elizabeth Knowles & Matthew Rosenberg SUMMARISER: Celia Holman

John's interview provides a very comprehensive overview of the work of Young's brewery, to include detailed descriptions of various aspects of the brewing process and early innovations in computerisation and automation.

John started as a laboratory assistant at Young's, and then soon moved into brewing. Subsequently, he became more involved in H&S (health and safety) and quality control.

A graduate in biology, John started brewing at university. One imbibitor told him "you should do it for a living." At the time there were 423 breweries in the country - and he wrote to each of them. Whitbread replied, inviting him to be in contact when he graduated, and he started working at Whitbread as a microbiologist immediately after completing his degree.

At Whitbread's John learnt techniques to analyse beer. He was, however, soon made redundant, and went to Young's in 1988 where it was very "hands on" and he was "trained on the job". "Every day was a complete thrill" - there was so much to do and learn alongside the "chemist" (as the laboratory manager liked to be called).

He soon moved out of the laboratory to become a Junior Brewer. An early accident he witnessed made him very aware that brewing could be a dangerous business, as it involves high pressure, caustic material and carbon monoxide ("which can suffocate you").

He describes his interview at Young's, which culminated in drinking beer with the brewers and getting "legless". One of his first impressions on starting work was the noise of the various animals (especially the horses) on site. There were also 17 guard geese, and peacocks - "the whole place was a farmyard."

He describes in detail the various jobs he has had at Young's since 1988, to include many technical details, and developments in quality control and health and safety, culminating in Young's being "the safest brewery in the country."

He describes a typical day as a brewer, which started at 6am, detailing the various stages of the process, the people he worked alongside and the equipment that he used. "Automation is the big key word" with respect to changes in the brewing industry over the time that he worked at Young's. This involved fewer people being employed ("one person could do the work of three"), and also resulted in greater efficiencies in the use of power and improved quality control.

Sample room: Young's was the last "wet" brewery in the country i.e. workers could drink on site, and had a daily beer allowance. Other perks were various Christmas gifts. "I was treated remarkably well" by the company and "Young's was the most sociable brewery in the country". He describes various parties and gatherings.

The atmosphere at work was "harmonious" and the "camaraderie was second to none". He speaks of John Young - an "extrovert" and "a passionate man" whose enthusiasm spread through the brewery, and the "shared pride" across the workforce in the work that they did.

Role of women: initially predominantly administrative staff, canteen workers and the "bottling girls". Over time, more women started working on the technical side, but women in the workforce decreased as the canteen closed and bottling became more automated.

London Brewery Amateur Sporting Association - many sporting activities possible. It gradually dwindled as breweries moved their production outside of London.

He speaks of the various awards and medals that Young's has won, to include the 'Brewing Oscars' and winning the "Challenge Cup". Young's was "all about passion" and "that made us different." He talks of the "brewing books" - leather-bound books dating back to 1905 in which comprehensive details of every brew was handwritten (even post the introduction of computers).

He gives a detailed description of the various 'trades' on site (there were 330 people employed on site): "a fantastic array of skills" that could address each and every problem that arose.

The summer after the announcement of the closure of the brewery: that summer "everybody had tears in their eyes". It was "highly emotional time."

John Young: he speaks of his "passion and enthusiasm filtered through the whole company", and his resistance to keg beer ("fizzy stuff") overtaking cask beer. John speaks briefly about CAMRA (the Campaign for Real Ale) and describes John Young as the "Patron Saint of Cask Beer" for his resistance to the increasing production of keg beer.

John Young made everyone feel "wanted and special" and when interviewed would say that "the people are my passion", referring to the workforce. He was also very philanthropic to causes outside the company. "Mr John" would not, however, "suffer fools gladly". He goes on to describe some of John Young's eccentricities, especially with respect to the various animals he introduced and wanted to introduce (elephant, ostrich) on site. He also details John Young's career prior to coming to work at the brewery in the early 1960s, some of which happened serving with the RAF during World War II and subsequently with the Merchant Navy. He passed away the day before the brewery's final brew and the day of his funeral was the day after the brewery had closed its gates for the final time.

Closure of the brewery: the business had considerably expanded (pubs, contract brewing, contract packaging) and the options became to shut the existing brewery and move out of London to a new site, or to amalgamate with a larger brewery. The latter decision was taken, to partner with Charles Wells.