

## THE POPES AND THE DYSONS FIVE GENERATIONS OF WATFORD BREWERS

By  
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Up until now most histories of Benskin's Brewery at Watford have commenced with Joseph Benskin's purchase of the Cannon Brewery in 1867. Scant reference is made to the Dyson family who owned it previously, and none at all to their predecessors, the Popes. As a result of a thorough search of the old deeds and other documents kept by Benskins, a fuller picture has emerged.

The story begins with a man called John Pope, who was born about 1662 in Hemel Hempstead, and became a miller and baker of Watford. By 1693 he is believed to have been baking at The Bakehouse or Pope's Head in Watford High Street, which he rented from the Edlin family. This property was later known as the Barley Mow (when it was kept by one Gabriel Pope) and later still as the Eight Bells public house, but it is now demolished. John Pope supplied bread to Cassiobury House, in Watford, and from 1694 he rented the New Mill on the River Gade from the Earl of Essex.

In 1691, he married Jane Benbow of Winslow, Bucks, at Watford Church, and they had four children, Godley, Grace, Mary and John. But only Grace and Mary reached maturity, and Jane herself died in 1699. Two or three years later John Pope re-married, to a young woman called Sarah (née Chapman or Humphrey) and they also had four children, Sarah (1704), and three boys, John (1706), Daniel (1708), and Silvester (1712).

In 1708, John Pope leased a malthouse, barns and stables in the lower High Street, Watford (it was later known as Three Tuns Yard), and thirty two acres of land near Callowland Farm in Watford, and a piece of meadow in Parkmead at Bushey, from John Ewer, at £38 per annum. By the following year, 1709, he was renting a cottage and barns in Shelton's Yard off Back Lane (now New Street), Watford, from John Shelton and his sister-in-law Martha Clarke, and using them as his bakehouse. He was evidently successful at his business, for in 1710 he bought a cottage and a stable, also off Back Lane, from Nathaniell Howard; and in 1714 he purchased the entire Shelton's Yard comprising a house, two cottages, Lower Stable, two barns and a garden from John Shelton and Johh Puddephat (Martha's husband), for £132, and lived in the 'Front House' with Sarah and his young family.

Between 1714 and 1722, the date of his will, John Pope, in addition to his baking, milling and malting interests, set himself up as a common brewer of no mean size in Shelton's Yard, by now called Pope's Yard. In his will, after bequeathing all his bakery to his eldest son, John, he leaves his brewery business with the brewhouse, copper and backs, mash tun, working tun, and all his barley and small vessels with his two drays and two horses and harness, with twenty quarters of good malt, to his second son Daniel Pope, for when he comes of age. His wife Sarah inherits two hundred barrels of beer, besides ale, with casks and stands, bottles, wine and brandy, and household goods. Daniel is requested to give to his brother John 'all the yeast he useth for his baking.'

John Pope died in 1722, when Daniel was only fourteen, but as his widow was specifically requested in his will to maintain her husband's business for the sake of their sons' inheritance, as he had 'struggled very hard for them' no doubt brewing continued in Pope's Yard.

John Pope's daughter, Sarah, married William Dyson, a Watford maltster, in London, in 1721; and they had three children, Sarah, Elizabeth and John Dyson, who was born in 1729. William Dyson died in 1735, and his widow Sarah, having remarried in 1739 to John Dagnall, a wealthy miller of Watford, died in 1741.

On the death of his mother, John Dyson, now aged twelve, became the ward of his grandmother Sarah Pope. and went to live with her in the 'Front House' at Pope's Yard. In the meantime, after the death of her husband, John Pope in 1722, Sarah Pope had bought several properties in Watford and Aldenham, including, in 1724, the malthouse, barns and stables at the lower end of Watford High Street, which her late husband had leased; and, in 1727, the adjacent property on the south side, consisting of a house divided into several dwellings, a cottage, barn and stables, yard and garden called 'Leaden Porch.'

In 1749, Sarah Pope made out her Will, and after bequeathing Leaden Porch to her nephew James Chapman of Rickmansworth, left all her other properties and land to her grandson John Dyson. Her own children and other grandchildren had all died by this time. Sarah Pope died in the following year, aged 66, and by 1751 John Dyson is described as a brewer, using the Brewhouse in Pope's Yard set up by his grandfather. No doubt John Dyson learned his brewing skills from his grandmother, and perhaps also from his uncle Daniel, although Daniel died in 1741.

Daniel's brothers, John and Silvester, are both described as bakers rather than brewers.

John Dyson inherited a cottage and copyhold lands (later the Bell) at Primrose Hill, Abbots Langley, upon his father's death; and Pope's Yard Brewery, the Lower High Street Maltings, the Three Crowns in Watford, the King's Head in Watford, and the King's Head, Caldecott Hill, Aldenham, from his grandmother. In 1751, he purchased the copyhold property called Coney Butts in Watford, which became the Red Lion (Vicarage Road). Before 1756 he had opened the Three Tuns, probably in an existing building, which fronted the road, at his maltings (later called Three Tuns Yard) in the Lower High Street.

By 1758, when he mortgaged the brewery and his farm lands for £200, he had rebuilt the 'Front House', where he lived at Pope's Yard, and the former bake house had become a hop house.

John Dyson married Mary Griffin in 1761, and they had twelve children, nine of whom survived, the eldest being John Dyson II, who was born in 1763.

The first John Dyson died in 1790, leaving the Three Tuns and Yard in Lower High Street to his son, John Dyson II, together with a one third interest in the Pope's Yard Brewery; the remainder going to his widow Mary Dyson.

John Dyson II was more ambitious than his father, and in 1794 he bought the house, cottage, outbuildings and garden, known as Leaden Porch, from Lucy Bramall. This property adjoined his Three Tuns Yard, and presumably he had in mind the future expansion of his maltings. Leaden Porch was the property that had been acquired by his great grandmother Sarah Pope in 1727, and left to her nephew James Chapman.

Upon Mary Dyson's death in 1800, her share of the business and properties was divided amongst her other eight children, and between 1804 and 1821, John Dyson II bought out the interests of his brothers and sisters, giving him sole ownership. The documents indicate that adjacent premises had been acquired to enlarge Pope's Yard, now called Dyson's Yard in Back Lane: and that most of the buildings there had been converted to brewery use.

Not content with the existing brewhouse. John Dyson II had a survey and plan made of his Three Tuns Yard and the adjoining Leaden Porch in 1811 with the intention of building a brewhouse. However, at the end of 1810, the substantial red brick mansion opposite, which had been built by Edmund Dawson in 1775, and had been completely refurbished and converted into two residences by George Pepper in 1807, came up for auction, and John Dyson II decided to buy it. The negotiations took some time, and the purchase was not completed until 1812. The building now houses the Watford Museum.

John Dyson II moved into his newly acquired house and in the following years, probably before 1829. He built a new brewery, eventually called the Cannon Brewery, to the left and rear of his house, to replace his brewery in Pope's Yard, by now called Dyson's Yard. Between 1819 and 1821 John Dyson II acquired some adjoining land in Watford Field, including William Paxton's orchard to the northwest, and built a brick wall round it to enlarge his garden. A stone tablet, believed to have come from this wall, is inscribed "Built by John Dyson, June 1824".

In 1827, he made an agreement with Hugh Smith to replace the fence around Leaden Porch with a brick wall, to enable him to construct new buildings on the Three Tuns Yard; and in 1836 he rebuilt the old maltings there.

About 1830, the date of a Land Tax Assessment, he had closed down the old brewhouse and storehouse in Dyson's Yard, and the property was sold off. Dyson's Yard was lined both sides in the nineteenth century with more than forty mean cottages. These were acquired sometime between 1838 and 1849 by William James Ballard, and were then known as Ballard's Buildings (or Court No 8). They became notoriously overcrowded slums and were demolished in 1926, together with the 'Front House', which had become a common lodging house.

By about the same time the Rising Sun, Watford, and four adjoining cottages that he had acquired in 1816, were no longer in his ownership. The Land Tax Assessment for 1830, shows that he owned an Orchard (formerly belonging to Job Woodman); The King's Head, The Three Crowns and two cottages; The Three Tuns and Maltings House and two cottages; The Red Lion, Coney Butts; Cole King's Farm, (approximately 75 acres, late Job Woodman), all in Watford; also the King's Head and cottage at Caldecote Hill, Aldenham; and the Bell at Primrose Hill, Abbots Langley.

In addition to his brewing interests, John Dyson II was also a farmer. The Watford Terrier for 1798 shows that, in addition to eighteen acres in the common fields of Watford, he owned Brightwells Farm (also known as Hatters Farm), 155 acres, occupied by William Palmer; and occupied a further 115 acres of land owned by Mr Moody (which could have been Cole King's Farm, which was south of Hagden Lane). In 1830, he already owned 75 acres of Cole King's Farm; but in 1844, just before his death, the Tithe Apportionment shows that he owned 244 acres (presumably both Brightwells and Cole King's Farms).

John Dyson II married Maria Ehret at Watford Church in 1806, and they had six children; three daughters and three sons: John (1809), Henry (1813) and Ralph (1815). Upon their father's death in 1845, Henry inherited Brightwells Farm, and John Dyson III and his brother Ralph inherited the brewery business.

In 1847 and 1853, they bought land jointly in Watford Fields adjacent to the Brewery and Brewery House garden, but in 1858 the partnership was dissolved and John purchased his brother Ralph's half interest in the land and brewery business for £7,700. The Census of 1851 shows that twenty-one men were employed at the brewery.

John Dyson III continued to expand the brewery business, and upon his death in 1867, the Cannon Brewery, the Brewery House, two malthouses, 31 freehold and copyhold public houses and eleven leased public houses were auctioned off, and were bought by Joseph Benskin and his partner William George Bradley for £34,000. The partnership of Benskin, Bradley and Co. was dissolved in 1870, and Joseph Benskin ran the Cannon Brewery, Watford, alone, as Benskin and Co.

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#### Acknowledgements

*The Author is grateful to Ind Coope Benskins Ltd. for allowing their records to be used as the basis for this article, and to Helen Poole (formerly Curator of Watford Museum) and Edgar Chapman for their assistance during its preparation.*

*Many of the Pope and Dyson families are buried in Watford churchyard, where their memorials can still be seen.*

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*This article was extracted from Hertfordshire's Past, Autumn 1988. The Society is grateful to the Hertfordshire Archaeological Council and the Hertfordshire Local History Council for their permission to reproduce it.*

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