

Geoffrey P.S. Ballard

1929 - 2009

Jeff Sechiari

Geoffrey Ballard, for many years President of the Brewery History Society, died peacefully in November 2009.

Geoffrey grew up in Surrey and was educated at St. George's School, Weybridge. His uncle, James (Jimmy) Vickers had no children and when Geoffrey was just nine years old the family agreed that he should be destined to follow in Jimmy's footsteps in the family business - James Vickers Ltd, Isinglass manufacturers.

After school Geoffrey joined James Vickers Ltd as a trainee and undertook a pupilage at Hodgson's Kingston Brewery, joining them in 1947. I discovered this when I was recording Geoffrey for the BHS Oral History Archive and it was particularly special for me as Surrey, as my home, is one of my counties of study and I had long been trying to find someone who had worked at Hodgson's - something of a problem as they closed in 1948.

His pupilage was interrupted when he was called up for National Service in the Army, during which he was commissioned into the Royal Artillery. On his return to civilian life Hodgson's had

closed and he returned to James Vickers Ltd. to learn all aspects of production, starting on the shop floor in the factory at Coggeshall and rising to become first a Foreman and then a Director in 1956. During this period (1951-2) he spent time at Friary, Holroyd and Healy of Guildford to complete his pupilage - the other major Surrey brewery of the period and much more very useful information and recollections for my Surrey work.

In 1959-61 he spent time in Manchester as a Director and Manager of Manchester Finings Ltd., a company they had taken over to extend their involvement in the liquid finings trade and to get into the Auxiliary and Kettle finings trades. His role was to modernise the factory and develop the business. He then returned to Coggeshall as Assistant Manager, followed by a period researching alternative raw materials and product development. Between 1967 and 1981 he was managing all production functions at Coggeshall, becoming a main board Director in 1970 and Group Production Director between 1974-83, followed by periods as Group MD (1983-85) and Deputy Chairman (from 1985). During this period Geoffrey also held director-

ships in other Group companies, including its American subsidiaries.

One of Geoffrey's passions was world travel and from 1966 he was able to undertake many journeys to explore the sources of supply of isinglass, building relationships that were to stand him in good stead for the rest of his life, and probably making him the leading expert in the international market for trading Isinglass. Indeed one point that arose during our oral history recording was that there was a need to write the definitive story of the International trade and he was the person who should address this, although sadly arthritis meant that writing became increasingly difficult. During this period many international conferences were attended, both as a delegate and a speaker, and this led to a vast array of contacts and friendships throughout the industry around the world.

Geoffrey was also a very active member of Allied Brewery Traders Association (ABTA - now the 'Brewing, Food & Beverage Industry Suppliers Association', BFBi), being London & Home Counties Section Chairman in 1982 and National Chairman in 1987. He sat on ABTA's Executive Council from 1975 - 1986 and Management Committee from 1987 to 1991. Thus, in the words of BFBi's chief executive Ruth Evans, 'Geoffrey played a major part in the strategy of BFBi for a number of years.' I was also to enjoy the fruits of Geoffrey's ABTA connections as he invited me to the London Section annual lunch on a number of occasions,

where we were able to meet a large number of key people in the industry, resulting in a number of new corporate members joining, as well as having a thoroughly enjoyable day out with a wonderful host.

Looking beyond the bare facts of a successful career there was a family man, devoted to his wife, Adair, children Claire and Arabella, and his grandchildren. He had a passion for antiques, his garden and horses - regularly going to the Burghley Horse Trials until travel became too difficult.

In 1988 Geoffrey joined the BHS as Honorary President, up until then a largely symbolic role giving the Society a link with the industry. Geoffrey, however, saw it as an opportunity to help the Society to develop further, using his many friends and contacts throughout the industry to encourage membership and to open doors for many fascinating meetings. He took a personal interest in each visit to a corporate member's brewery, wherever possible visiting beforehand to plan out the details of the day with our hosts. Likewise, he took a very active role in helping to organise our conferences at this time and they featured many of his industry colleagues as speakers.

He and Adair made a wonderful team working tirelessly for the Society for many years, making a major contribution to the current success of the Society. They were also happy to be very hands on when needs be. With the closure of

Watney the BHS Archive expanded enormously and Ushers (though another of Geoffrey's friends) kindly offered to store this for us. A number of offices were filled with a vast number of boxes of books and papers and Geoffrey and Adair, with one or two other stalwarts, spent days at the brewery cataloguing the vast pile of paper. (See BHS Newsletter 18 for Adair's obituary).

On reflection, I now recall sitting at a committee meeting digesting the news that Peter Moynihan had stood down after a very successful stint as chairman and considering who of the many excellent candidates on the committee might take on the role when I heard Geoffrey suggesting that he would like to propose me, a prospect that hadn't crossed my mind up until then.

It was typical of him that when he felt his contribution had run its course, a view which was not shared by the rest of us on the committee, he was very thorough in researching and suggesting a suitable successor (Ray Anderson), and showed exceptional judgement in doing so.

The remarkable Norman church at Copford was filled with friends and family from both within and outside the industry for his funeral. It was a great privilege and pleasure to have known and worked with him. We offer our condolences to Geoffrey's family and friends and we shall miss not only his wise counsel but also his friendship. The industry has lost one of its true gentlemen.

Bill Taylor has sent a few personal memories of Geoffrey.

I first met Geoffrey in the early 1970's while working at the Castlemaine Brewery in Brisbane. Geoffrey I believe made his first visit there in 1973. As I was not a senior manager I did not have the opportunity to discuss finings with him first hand. I did meet him in about 1975. I have never forgotten the occasion. The senior management team at Castlemaine used to come together at 10am to discuss the issues of the day over morning tea. Occasionally special guests were invited to join. I remember sitting at the table with others when Frank Burnett, the boss, walked in with a guest - Geoffrey Ballard. Geoffrey was asked if he would like a cup of tea and his reply was along the lines - Frank, I can get a cup of tea anywhere - would you have a glass of Castlemaine XXXX? A bottle was duly delivered and Geoffrey entered my historical perspectives as the first to ever ask for a beer at the morning tea management meeting. While I remember Geoffrey from this special occasion I was working as Packaging manager for most of the late 70's so while I continued to see Geoffrey I still did not have direct business dealings. That changed in 1981 when I became Head Brewer of Castlemaine Brewery. Thereafter I took an interest in finings and although it was not necessary for the Head Brewer personally to purchase finings I did choose to take that on and communicate with Geoffrey personally for many years. This was because I learned a great deal from

him and I felt he gave me a connection to other parts of the world and what was happening in the industry.

Geoffrey had a wonderful ability to keep his finger on the pulse of our business. He had a lot of information stored away in a black notebook. Two or three times a year the phone would ring at my desk and it would be Geoffrey calling from England - I suppose he must have been calling from Oldhouse while the family was asleep upstairs. After various general topics Geoffrey would come to the point and say something like - if my calculations are correct Bill you should just about be ready to order some more isinglass. I would usually respond by saying I'll have to check and call back. I would then phone the brewer who would get his clerk to do a physical stock check. I would then call Geoffrey back in a day or two and say - Geoffrey your little black book is correct yet again. We are a little low on stock and would appreciate an immediate dispatch! I also remember that Geoffrey held the price at just over 8 pounds per kg for several years. That sort of price stability is unheard of today. I used to try and negotiate price but Geoffrey would tell me how difficult it was to trade with the locals on the banks of Lake Victoria or how the floods in the Amazon had shortened supply or how the Chinese demand for fish maws was putting pressure on price etc.

Geoffrey probably had similar conversations with a number of the brewers in Australia but what is certain is that he had

a similar positive impact with all of us. Geoffrey was too discrete to discuss other people but from time to time at various industry meetings in Australia it became apparent that his business relationships were not only fruitful but also enjoyable and a good many long lasting friendships were born in our part of the world.

I was fortunate to go to England on business in 1983 and then for an extended period in 1984. I worked in the Wrexham Lager Brewery. Geoffrey surprised me one day by sending me an invitation to be his guest at a dinner in London. It was an ABTA dinner and was held at Grosvenor House. It was a big event for me. I made my way to London. I found a Moss Bros store and hired a suitable outfit. This was my introduction to the formal dinners so much a part of the UK industry. It was a wonderful occasion but it had another memorable and rather embarrassing moment. Geoffrey had been so kind as to book me into the Mayfair hotel. At the end of the night he asked me if I would care to partake of a nightcap. It seemed like a good idea at the time. He insisted that we go to his room (the hotel bar was closed - it was after midnight). Geoffrey went ahead into the room first asking me to wait a moment -- he must have woken Adair asked her to ready herself for a visitor - and then he asked me in. To my astonishment I was introduced to Mrs Ballard for the first time at 12:30 am in the morning as she reclined in the bed in her night attire. I was so embarrassed and made a hasty retreat. However I do



Geoffrey and Adair Ballard holding the cake at the Greene King staff reunion held for the 50th anniversary of VE Day.

remember how gracious Adair was and how cool she remained under the circumstances. A few years later I was again a guest of Geoffrey's at another ABTA dinner. On this occasion he was the President of the ABTA.

In 1984 I attended the first of several Brewing Technology Conferences in Harrogate. I had just driven up from Wrexham and walked into the reception area of the George Hotel to find Geoffrey and Adair checking in at the desk. What a coincidence. We had dinner that evening at the Drum and Monkey - It was March 1984. This was the second occasion that I met Adair - and I spent the whole dinner hoping no one would bring up the circum-

stances of the first occasion. By mid 1984 Castlemaine XXXX had been launched to the market and over the next few years Allied Breweries sought to have other breweries in the group approved to brew it. Over the next few years I worked in Alloa, Romford, Leeds and Burton. During this time I accepted the invitation from Geoffrey and Adair to visit them at Oldhouse. I can't remember how many visits I made but I made many alone during business trips and a couple in the company of my wife Annamaria. On more than one occasion we seemed to lose track of time while we slowly supped an ale or two, or maybe a scotch or three. We had some wonderful talks. I learned a lot from Geoffrey about breweries, brewers of times past, the journeys to buy isinglass and other travels.

Geoffrey was a mentor to me at a very formative time in my career. Geoffrey introduced me to the ABTA. I met many people in the industry in the UK through ABTA and the Institute of Brewing as it was then. I am privileged to say that I still support both organisations. Geoffrey gave me a good appreciation of the history and tradition of the UK industry, the fraternity in the industry not just the business aspects. It was a rare approach from someone who only needed to sell a product. Geoffrey took a more holistic approach with people and the industry that he cherished.

Geoffrey and Adair will long be remembered by friends that span the world.