

Mona Brewery, Llanfachraeth, Isle of Anglesey, North Wales (1836 - 1901)

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The Mona Brewery is situated at Llanfachraeth on the north-west coast of Anglesey, approximately three miles from the A5 road to Holyhead (SH 311 828).

An early photograph shows a low two-storey rectangular building with a three-storey square structure attached and a tall Victorian chimney alongside. A recent visit to the site found the buildings substantially in place. There had, however, been a dense growth of trees and bushes in the dried up area of the millpond,

between the buildings and Alaw Bach, a tributary of the River Alaw.

The buildings

An entrance from the lane leads to the cobbled yard, which is surrounded by the brewery buildings. On one side is the two-storey rectangular block, which would have been the malting rooms. On another side is the office and hop store, attached to the stables.



Figure 1. An early photograph of the Mona Brewery, date unknown.

From the yard can be seen the three-storey brewing block and the kiln chimney. On the fourth side of the yard stands the Brewery House, a substantial family residence.

A deep circular well provided a pumped water supply for the brewery, the gardens and the domestic requirements. The water was rich in minerals - an important factor in any successful beer.

Development of the brewery

The earliest reference to the Brewery, so far, is an 1836 baptism in the Calvinistic Methodists records.¹ Thomas Williams, father of Mary, is a maltster at the Llanfachraeth Brewery. By 1841, he was no longer working there, his occupation being shown as an agricultural labourer. Perhaps the presence of John Jones and his wife in that year was the sign of a change of direction.

In 1841, the Reverend GJ Hughes, a clerk in holy orders, was amongst the subscribers to the Mona Brewery.²

E Wyn Hughes in *Looking Back: Anglesey Life in Bygone Days* writes of ten workers being employed in 1845.

For most of the period 1836-1895 ownership and production was in the hands of the Jones family. John Jones is listed in the 1841 census as a brewer, together with his wife Margaret, employing two female servants and two male servants.

Both he and his wife were born in Amlwch, where breweries already existed.

The 1851 census records John Jones as brewer and maltster, as well as farming 65 acres and employing ten workers, presumably growing his own raw materials.

In the *Liverpool Mercury* 17 November 1848 we see that:

Mr Jones, of Mona Brewery, Llanfachreth, had, last week sustained a loss of four valuable milch cows, which died in consequence of eating over-much of fresh grains from the brewery.

Transport and communications, it seems, were in need of some improvement by 1852. A letter to Anglesey Quarter Sessions from R Trygarn Griffiths (the land owner) of Carreglwyd Estate said that:

He and Mr Jones, the brewer of Llanfachraeth, have been to inspect the bridge over the Alaw and found it is in a very unsatisfactory state. He discusses the costs of widening it. There is much travelling over the bridge at night as the train reaches Valley station at 10pm. it is important to secure a safe passage across the bridge.

Repairs were authorised in 1855 for the widening, altering and repairing of Pont Havron over the River Alaw, thus freeing the way for the wider export of the brewery's products to the rest of Anglesey and possibly North Wales via road and rail.



Figure 2. The Mona Brewery, 2009.



Figure 3. The chimney to left of brewing block.



Figure 4. Office with hop store above.



Figure 5. Stables and dray arch.

By 1861 we still see John Jones as the maltster and brewer, together with his wife, three daughters and two sons. Within the brewery, an additional brewer, maltster, drayman, commercial traveller and an errand boy were employed. Also recorded as present, were a house maid, nurse and a dairy maid.

Brewery House has a walled garden and the remains of three glasshouses where the family used to grow peaches and nectarines. Croquet was played on the lawn in appropriate dress, much to the consternation of the locals. Clearly this was a time of prosperity.

In the *North Wales Chronicle* of 16 April 1859 an inquest was held on the body of a youth.

An inquest was held before Mr Wm. Jones, coroner, on the body of the youth who was killed by machinery at the Mona Brewery, Llanfachraeth. The verdict was Accidental Death.

This would indicate the introduction of mechanisation.

Types of beer sold

Various sources indicate the types of beer being sold.

A copy of an invoice to the Castle in Caernarvon drawn up by Margaret Jones in 1881 shows the production of various types of ale and the prices - half barrel

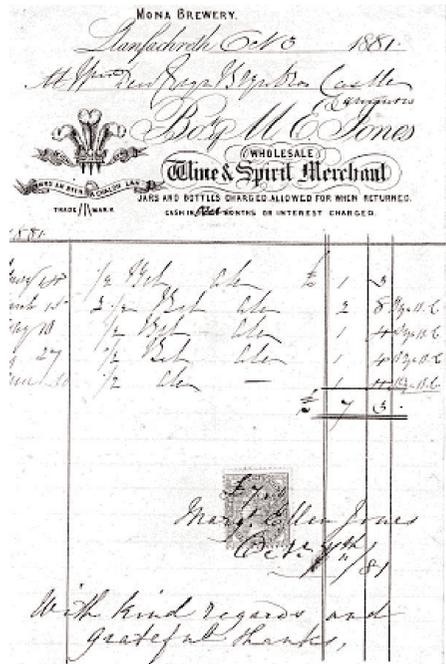


Figure 6. Receipted invoice.

ale £1 3s, two and a half barrels £2 8s, half barrel £1 4s.

The typed invoice allows three months for payment whereas in 1881 Margaret Jones amended it to one month, indicating difficult financial times.

An advertisement in the local street directory for Jones and Co 1868, says that: 'their celebrated ales are highly recommended for purity and excellent flavour.'³

The beer produced was clearly a success and was probably a dark, strongish

mild, a type which was widespread during the period. A family member of one of the later owners of the Brewery said that in a nearby town, a strong and potent ale, known locally as 'red beer', was popular.

Sales and distribution

Evidence of distribution of the beer can be seen in the following reports.

A present resident remembers Miss Williams, born 1884, who in turn recalled seeing the brewery drays on their way through the village during the latter part of the century. These drays were flat wagons with chains round the sides to prevent the barrels falling away.

Although the stables have been converted into accommodation the arch through which the drays passed can still be seen.

In 1873 an employee of the Mona Brewery, Robert Roberts, was fined one shilling and eleven pence - costs for being drunk at the Valley Hotel. It is likely, given the close proximity of the hotel to the Mona Brewery, that the brew was the local one and indeed, one not lacking in potency!⁴

At Valley (Holyhead) Petty Sessions a report in *North Wales Chronicle* 15 June 1857:

Robert Williams, of the Llanfachraeth brewery, was summoned on the instance of

the police with leaving two carts near the King's Head Arms, Market Street (Holyhead) with no one in charge of them. On making a search for the driver he was found in the lobby of the George Inn, according to the evidence of police officer No. 8, 300 yards off. The police officer said that he had repeatedly warned the driver, who said that the man in charge was in a cellar at the time. Evidence was given that the carts had been half-an-hour on the street with no proper person in charge of them.

Fined 2s 6d, and 11s costs.

In the *North Wales Chronicle* 31 October 1863 Henry Humphries of the Bull Hotel in Llangefni, thanked his friends and well-wishers for their contributions following a fire. John Jones of Mona Brewery contributed £4. This suggested that he was a regular supplier of beer to the hotel.

Role of the Brewery in the community

Miss Williams, who was a seamstress and also a churchwarden and carrier of the post, remembered taking food waste to the Brewery for the pigs in exchange for 'barm' (a yeast formed on the fermenting malt liquor) to make bread. The Brewery had a number of pig-stys, with the animals well fed on Brewery waste.

When the Llanfachraeth Board School was opened in March 1876, Mrs Margaret Jones of the brewery made a donation of £710. Consequently Mrs Jones was elected to the School Board.



Figure 7. The Brewery House.



Figure 8. The pig sty.

The school was the first Board School in Anglesey. This was in the time of expansion and prosperity of the brewery. In Betti Williams' book *Llanfachraeth Board School* the school log tells us that in 1876 the land for the school was given by Miss Maria Conway Griffith, daughter of Richard Trygarn Griffiths and associated with the Temperance movement from 1891.

Contact with the school continued through a daughter of the family. When the mistress was dismissed for incompetence Miss Jones assisted with the sewing class.

In 1880 the marriage took place between Maria Emma Elizabeth Conwy Griffiths (40 years of age) to Sir Chandos Stanhope Hoskins Reade, 7th Baronet (28 years of age) born in Madras, India. Margaret Jones name was on the congratulatory scroll from the tenants of the Griffiths Estate. The school log records much rejoicing with illuminations, bonfires and cannon accompanying the arrival of Sir Chandos and Lady Reade.

In September of the same year school attendance had decreased, caused by the corn harvest at the brewery, a pupil teacher was sent to collect the names of the truants.

Demise of the Brewery

At a time when the business appears to be running on a sound and profitable

basis the death of John Jones in December 1870 comes to represent an unfortunate watershed for the stability of the brewery and consequently the family.

Following this, Margaret Jones took over as maltster and brewer, together with two sons in the brewery, a traveller in ale and spirits, a maltster and a drayman. The enterprise was still viable enough to be able to provide three female and two male general servants on the premises.

In 1880 Albert Allinson, an Englishman, was listed as Managing Director of the Brewery.⁵

In 1881 Margaret Jones was still the brewer, together with a son, employed as a traveller and manager. Another son was employed as a gardener. Other domestic staff included a house maid, a kitchen maid and a dairy maid. Within the brewery there was a maltster and a brewer operative, who lived nearby in Mona Terrace.

Margaret Jones ran the brewery for twelve years following the death of her husband but things were to come to an unhappy conclusion for the family as evidenced by this report in the *Liverpool Mercury* of 16 February 1882:

BANGOR BANKRUPTCY COURT- At this court, yesterday, before Mr. Horatio Lloyd, Mr. E. Roberts (Holyhead) applied on behalf of Mr. Robert Gardiner, trustee of the estate of Mrs Margaret Ellen Jones, Mona Brewery, Llanfachraeth, who has filed a petition for

liquidation by arrangement, with liabilities amounting to £3100, for the sale of stock and plant, valued at £1241 18s; the life interest in certain property; and of two policies of insurance for £1000 and £500. Mr Dew opposed on behalf of the debtor's son, who is a reversioner. His honour ordered a sale, subject to the sanction of the bank, who are heavy creditors, the proceeds to be invested pending the decision by the registrar of the rights of the creditors.

There was a sale at the brewery in March 1882, which once again was reflected in poor attendance at the school.

Margaret Jones died in August 1882 aged 63 years.

There appears to have been some continuation of production after her death, because in 1888 the business was taken over by D Williams & Co.⁶ John Jones' eldest daughter, Sarah, had married David Williams and for a short time, they ran the Mona Stores, a retail outlet for the Brewery.

In 1891, Edmund Roberts, the brewery manager, 63 years old and Jane Owen, housekeeper and former servant, 27 years old were the sole occupants of the brewery.

Elsewhere, Steven Jones, a son of the original family, was employed in the village as a blacksmith's striker, having worked previously as a gardener at the brewery. He was boarding with Catherine

Roberts, a widow of 69 years who took in washing and laundry.

Things were clearly winding down, although there was evidence of some activity as D Williams resumed possession.⁷

A descendant of the Williams family tells of the brewery owner belonging to the Temperance Society. When challenged about the contradiction of brewing and belonging to the Society he replied, 'Yes - made the beer but never drank a drop.' However, no beer appears to have been brewed after 1895.⁸

In 1900 an auction took place and in 1901 the brewery was sold. Terms of the sale included plans which were to turn the buildings into farm use, and stipulated no further brewing to take place.

The precarious situation of the brewery was compounded by events within the Griffiths-Reade family. In 1890 the death of Sir Chandos occurred, at the age of 39 years, in Hastings. It is rumoured that the brewery was burnt to the ground by the vengeful widow (Lady Reade), owner of the estate. He had died of alcoholism, a victim of the brewery's produce.⁹

A further restriction to the economic well-being of the brewery was the rise of the Temperance movement. Lady Reade was involved in meetings and initiated the building of coffee houses and reading rooms as an alternative to the consumption of alcohol, although it is understood she was not a total abstainer.

When the leases of public houses expired Lady Reade refused to renew them, either closing them down - The Golden Horseshoe in 1882 and The King's Head in 1890, or changing their function - the Holland Hotel became a reading room for a time. The effect of this was to reduce the number of probable outlets supplied by the brewery.

Clearly the death of John Jones removed the driving force from the business. Margaret Jones was able to use the established production and distribution methods for a time but her death, together with the local temperance activity, had a detrimental effect on the business.

Llanfachraeth and the surrounding area did not have a high density of population. It had an agricultural economy rooted in the landowning Griffith-Reade family and as such the trading area would have had to be able to make use of the wider road and rail connections to extend the sales outlets.

In the 60 years or so of the brewery's working existence there had been great economic and social changes; small locally based companies were exposed to competition from larger concerns. These small providers of goods and services were unique and formed an important and familiar part of the economy of everyday life in Anglesey, providing employment and cultural bonds in the face of the never ending movement towards standardisation. They should be remembered for this and not forgotten.

Epilogue

In 1904, Evan Roberts, the revivalist, held a meeting in the brewery yard where 2,000 people attended in pouring rain, thus bringing the religious association with the brewery full circle.

Sources

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- Hinde, J. & D.W. (1994 & 2000) Transcriptions of the Calvinistic Methodist records for Anglesey. www.genuki.org.uk/

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References

1. Hinde, J. & D.W. (1994 & 2000) Transcriptions of the Calvinistic Methodist records for Anglesey. www.genuki.org.uk/
2. Ebenezer, L. (2006) *The Thirsty Dragon*. Llanrwst: Gwasg Carreg Gwalch.
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8. Wyn Hughes, E. (1987) [1992] op. cit.
9. Ebenezer, L. (2006) op. cit.

Thanks to the owner of the property, local residents and members of Talwrn Archaeology Group for all their help.

Please note these buildings are on private property and are now in a very dangerous condition (2011). There is no access.