

## ‘ALPHA AND OMEGA’

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*On Friday 20 April 2012, during the Brewery History Society's A.G.M. at Fuller's Brewery, Chiswick, Professor Peter Mathias was made the Society's first honorary life member for his seminal contribution to brewing history. This is the text of his speech.*

I was asked by the Chairman to say something at the A.G.M., as a new honorary member of the Society. I happily accepted, as the first opportunity of thanking the Society for electing me. I also want to say a few words on two themes: how I first came into contact with the brewing industry and then about the special issue (No. 145) of *Brewery History* about the Anchor Brewery of Barclay Perkins, which all members will have received. If this is just a little longer than the Chairman expected, blame the temptation of offering a superannuated academic this platform. The occasion for me harks back to a beginning and will be a conclusion: alpha and omega.

### **Beginning research**

Hoping to start research after graduation in June 1951, I was well aware of the importance of the brewing industry in the eighteenth century through its raw materials (more particularly barley); central to the national finances through the excise; with bigger industrial units in London than any others in any industry in the country (apart from a naval dockyard or two); fascinating for its technology, managerial controls and accounting for such large-scale enterprises. And with no serious academic study at all of its recent history - it was clearly a wide-open field of major research for a beginning

graduate student. But ... and it was a very large but, economic history was then, if no longer, identified in the public mind as a radical subject (rightly so, in the main, with R.H. Tawney at the London School of Economics and a clutch of well-known Fabians as practitioners). The brewing industry was then totally dominated by family firms, small and large, on the defensive against the temperance movement and all left-wing politicians. Anyone wanting to investigate their history was likely to be looking for ammunition to use against them. So access to their business and family papers (a precondition for serious research) I was told by many people in Cambridge, would be quite impossible.

What was the answer? Two letters unlocked the door for me. By family good fortune, my mother was a second cousin to the Fussell family, modest local brewers at Rode near Frome, in Wiltshire. My grandfather, Tom Love, lived in a tied cottage at Wingfield, a neighbouring village to Rode, having been a servant of the Caillard family at Wingfield House, subsequently a court-usher for a Caillard who became a county-court judge. My mother was living at Wingfield with her parents, my father being away in the Navy. We used to cycle over to Rode occasionally for tea and were invited to the annual Fussell Christmas party at the George Hotel, Trowbridge, which Fussells owned. Henry Sidney Fussell wrote to the Warden of the Brewers' Company for me to say that I was 'alright'.

The second letter came from closer to home in Cambridge. Jesus College, where I was, owned local property, including one or two pubs belonging to Dales Brewery. My mentor in Jesus, Charles Wilson, who was also Bursar, arranged a meeting, in fact a

bibulous lunch, with Colonel Guy Dale, the expansive owner of the Brewery. This concluded with Guy Dale agreeing to write on my behalf to the Brewers' Society.

These two letters, brewer to brewer, were the 'open sesame' to every set of brewery papers I had hoped to see, and in some cases to discover, often with an invitation to lunch included. No welcome could have been warmer.

### **The Anchor Brewery**

This text embodies my opening remarks about this being for me, an alpha and omega occasion. After graduating in June 1951 I began research principally at the Anchor Brewery of Barclay Perkins, but also establishing a bridgehead in Chiswell Street at Whitbreads. I was able to do just a year's work before heading off to Harvard and M.I.T. on a Rotary International Fellowship for the academic year 1952-3, leaving all my research on this side of the Atlantic. I returned in September 1953 and must have written the text in the next three months (you will see that the preface is dated 1953 at Jesus College). So it was very much juvenile.

I wrote it to clear my own mind and as a courtesy for Barclay Perkins letting me loose on their records. There was no suggestion at all that it might be published - and so it stayed as a pristine manuscript in the Barclay Perkins archives (where did they go I wonder when the brewery in Southwark was demolished); there for almost 60 years until Mike Bone of the Brewery History Society brought it to the editor's attention, with the present result. My first essay in research all that time ago and now doubtless my last research publication, certainly about the history of the brewing industry - alpha and omega.

I had put all my research in the brewing industry into the barrel before 1959 when Cambridge University Press published the book, which was too long for most people to read and too dear (at 4 guineas, no less) for anyone to buy, but it launched me on an academic career. So I owe much gratitude to the Brewery History Society, of which I am now so pleased to be an honorary member, for retuning me to my original research roots, and reminding me of so much kindness and consideration received from brewers great and small, who helped a young academic by the inestimable gift of access to their records.