

JOHN WACKRILL: THE BREWER WELLINGTON FORGOT

ROB WOOLLEY

It was a sunny Thursday when Alfred Barnard arrived in Wellington. Being market day the Shropshire town was busy as the farmers and townsfolk hurried about their business. Barnard and his companions made their way through the bustling melee to their hotel. The town did not impress him. Nevertheless Barnard and his party took the opportunity to explore the district and 'secured a conveyance' to the 'far famed' Wrekin, a nearby hill about two miles distant from the town standing 1,335 feet¹ above sea level. There they surveyed the 'magnificent' views of the county that stretched out before them. Their excursion over, Barnard and his party moved on to keep their appointment with John Wackrill, the proprietor of The Shropshire Brewery, situated on the Holyhead Road, also known as Watling Street.

Wellington may not have impressed Barnard, but during the nineteenth century the town had gone through a process of industrialisation that brought in new businesses on a scale previously not seen before and as a consequence derived 'some importance from its situation with regard to other towns'.² The industries included a large timber yard which had grown out of the Wellington's timber related trades as well as a number of engineering firms specialising in agricultural implements and industrial machinery. As part of this industrial expansion Richard Taylor opened The Shropshire Brewery in 1851.³

The Taylor family were publicans in Shrewsbury before the railway era, running both the 'Lion Hotel' in Shrewsbury, probably the most prestigious hotel in the town and 'The Haygate Inn'⁴ on the Holyhead Road in Wellington. Both were coaching inns and served by 'The Wonder', a carriage service, which claimed to complete the journey to London in sixteen hours.⁵ The

most common way of entering the brewing trade was through involvement in an associated business. William Bass, for example, began as a carting contractor moving casks of beer in Burton, before becoming a brewer in 1777.⁶ Like others before him, Taylor moved from innkeeping into brewing, opening The Shropshire Brewery in 1851, trading as Richard Taylor and Sons. Their business ran for more than 20 years until Taylor's death, possibly in early 1877.⁷ The brewery was acquired by Robert Anslow, an agent for The Queen (Fire & Life) Assurance Company who described himself as a brewer, but his business soon ran into financial difficulties. In July 1878 John Wackrill joined the company as a partner.⁸ An advertisement in the 1879 edition of the *Wellington Directory* (Fig. 2) provides evidence of Wackrill's influence with the addition of new outlets in Leamington, Warwick and Coventry in an effort to improve the company's position.

The financial situation, however, did not improve and Thomas Agar was appointed to oversee the 'liquidation ... of [Anslow's] affairs'. On the 11 October 1879 Messrs Barber and Son, local auctioneers, placed an advertisement in the local paper announcing to 'Brewers, Capitalists and Others' the impending sale of the Shropshire Brewery with all its plant, stock and goodwill to be held at the Wrekin Hotel during November. Included in the sale were seven freehold licensed properties and 'Parville', Anslow's house in Vineyard Road.

The day of the auction arrived and the local paper set the scene.

The large room of the hotel was crowded and the bidding for some of the lots was exceedingly spirited. The whole property

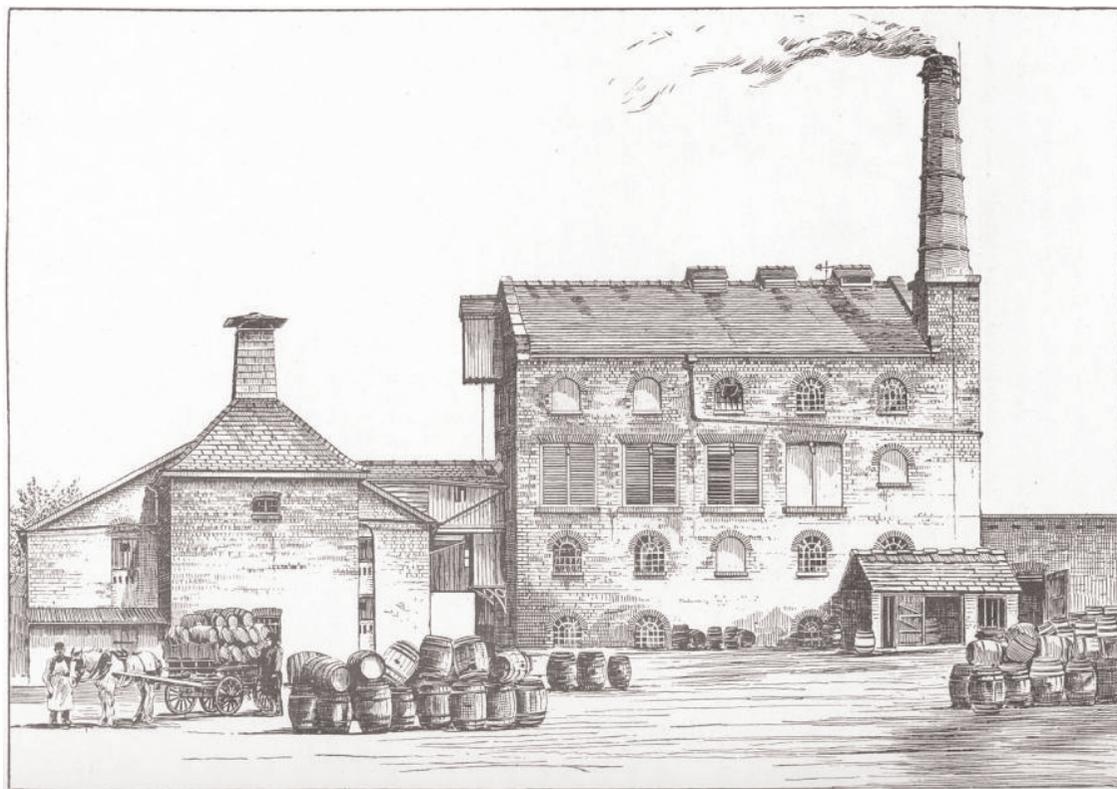


Figure 1. General view of the Shropshire brewery, Wellington.

Source: Barnard, A. (1891) *The Noted Breweries of Great Britain & Ireland: Vol. 4. London: Causton & Sons.*

(with the exception of 'Parville') was first offered in one lot, but there being no bidders, it was withdrawn.

Instead, the auctioneers offered the properties in ten separate lots, beginning with the brewery. Bidding began at £3,000 and proceeded in £100 amounts until £3,600 was reached, thereafter £50 bids were offered until the price reached £4,000 at which point the lot was withdrawn with Mr Southam of Shrewsbury being the last bidder. The newspaper reported that 'negotiations with reference to this are still going on, there is a good prospect that the brewery being speedily sold.' The auction continued with the sale of the licensed properties and Anslow's house 'Parville'.

It is not clear why the bidding was stopped, perhaps it failed to meet a reserve. The nature of the ensuing negotiations is also unknown, until an edition of the

Wellington Journal published an advertisement for The Shropshire Brewery on 6 December. This was identical to adverts placed during the previous month, except for the additional words, 'Orders to Mr J.G. Wackrill'. Wackrill had acquired the brewery, but the purchase price was not made public. For Christmas 1879 the brewery offered eleven different beers in both 9 and 18 gallon casks at prices ranging from 12/- to 28/-.⁹ Undoubtedly he sold his beer in Wellington and the surrounding area but there is no documented evidence to indicate the extent of the brewery's trading district.

John Wackrill was an unlikely brewer. He was 48 years old when he joined Robert Anslow and had no experience of brewing at all. He brought with him at least 17 years of business experience gained with his brother Samuel in Leamington Spa, where they ran a very successful silk mercers and drapers shop, 'Wackrill

THE
SHROPSHIRE BREWERY

W E L L I N G T O N .

(Established 1852.)

PROPRIETORS:

MESSRS. ANSLOW & WACKRILL.

Strong, Mild,

AND

Bitter Ales, Stout, & Porter,

In 54, 36, 18, and 9 Gallon Casks.

Price Lists on Application at the Brewery, or to the following Local and District Agents:—

Shrewsbury Stores: 30, Bell Stone,
MR. THOMAS THORNES.

Ludlow Stores: Old Street,
MR. R. EDWARDS, GOLDEN LION HOTEL.

Leamington Stores: Bath Place,
MR. FREDERICK BIRD.

COALBROOKDALE: MR. JOHN DORSETT,

COLD HATTON: MR. JOHN WEBB, Seven Stars Inn.

DAWLEY: MR. JAMES WARDELL, Royal Oak Inn.

ST. GEORGES: MR. G. F. BUTTER, Dun Cow Inn.

MADELEY: MR. W. W. MARRION, Crown Inn.

NEWPORT: MR. CHARLES BRADBURY, Beech Grove.

SHIFNAL: MRS. MEYRICK, Market Place.

OSWESTRY: MR. ENOCH EVANS, King's Head Inn.

COVENTRY: MR. J. W. OSWIN, Fleur de Lis Inn, Smithford St.

WARWICK: MR. G. FRENCH, Rose & Crown Inn, Market Square.

Figure 2. Advertisement for the Shropshire Brewery.

Source: Wellington Directory 1879. p.17.



Figure 3. Tower of Union Brewery; the last remnant of Wellington's brewing past. The buildings behind the tower have in the past served as the Workhouse, Union Brewery and the Library. They are now all up for sale. Photograph: Rob Woolley.

Brothers', in Bath Street.¹⁰ When John decided to leave the business and move to Shropshire to invest in The Shropshire Brewery, their parting was amicable, with Samuel buying out his brother's share in the Leamington shop.¹¹ Within the year John Wackrill had assumed complete control of the brewery business. With per capita beer consumption being at its peak during the second half of the 1870s, the brewing trade was a good business to enter.¹²

The Shropshire Brewery was unlike the tower of the Union Brewery in Walker Street in the centre of the town or the semi gravitational variation in Hook Norton in Oxfordshire, but it did employ gravity to move the wort between each stage of the process and was said to be 'of very economical working'.¹³ By carefully reading Barnard's description, it is possible to build up a picture of how the brewery functioned.

Barnard's intention was to provide his reader with a detailed account of 'the substance of what [he] saw' during his journeys. Built up on a daily basis the reader was presented not only with an account of each brewery, but

information that would place the business within in its topographical setting. As he explained, the accounts of each brewery visited were,

Not a treatise on the art of brewing, but simply a tourist's description of some noted Breweries, where the "National Drink" is well brewed, and the malt manufactured from whence that beverage is produced.¹⁴

Having welcomed his guests, John Wackrill introduced them to Francis Wade, his head brewer and brewery manager, the most senior of the eleven men employed at the brewery. Wade was to be the tour guide for Barnard's party. They began the tour by climbing a steep ladder to the fourth floor at the top of the brewhouse. Here were situated both the cold liquor (water) reservoir, holding 1,800 gallons and the hot (water) tank with a capacity of 1,500 gallons constructed of iron and resting on 'massive oak pillars'; heated by steam coils. The 'inexhaustible supply' of water came from an Artesian well sunk to depth of 207 feet beneath the brewery. The first 73 feet of the well was seven feet in diameter with the upper part lined with brick and the lower section

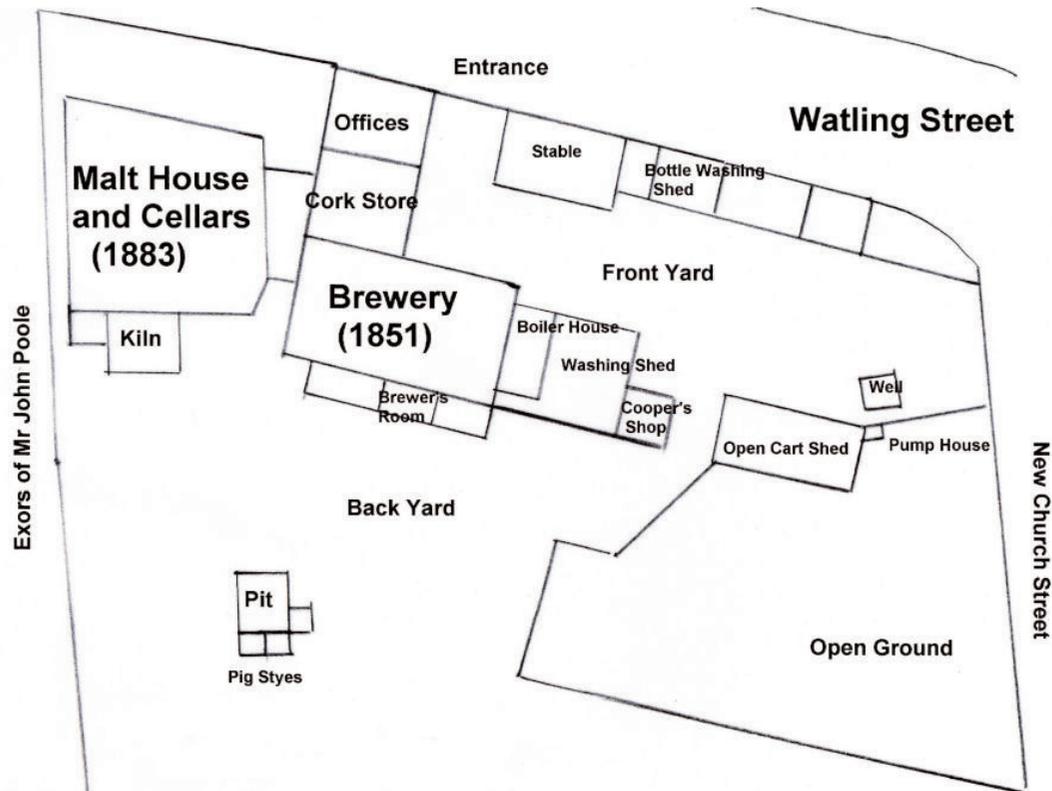


Figure 4. A plan of the Shropshire Brewery in 1893

Source: Sale Details. 1893

with iron cylinders. The remaining 134 feet consisted of a 5 inch bore through the red sandstone beneath the brewery. The water, as Mr Blunt, the County Analyst had reported, contained excellent qualities which made it ideal for brewing.

This is a thoroughly pure and wholesome water, containing no trace of sewage or other organic matter, it is therefore, well adapted in this respect for brewing; it is also specially fitted for that purpose by the considerable amount of salts of lime and magnesia contained in it and its consequent hardness. It is clear, colourless and free from smell.¹⁵

Descending a flight of stairs, Barnard and his party arrived in the mashing room on the third floor. This he estimated was 60 feet square and open to the roof above. Situated in the centre of the floor was the mashtun, made of oak and twenty seven feet in diameter and with

a capacity of 10 quarters. The malt was delivered to the mashtun from a hopper on the upper floor, having been first crushed by the malt mill situated in the corner of the mashing room and transported to the hopper above by means of a Jacob's ladder. Throughout the mashing process, the overhead sparger and revolving mashing rakes were driven by steam and when this process was completed, the wort passed through draining plates and onto the copper.¹⁶ The spent grain meanwhile was discharged from the mashtun through an 'underlet' into a shoot passing through the outside wall over the yard. The spent grains were later fed to the pigs housed in the two 'styes' situated in the backyard.¹⁷

The copper was positioned on the north side of the brewhouse and on the same floor as the mashtun. Barnard described it as being 'a splendid domed copper, fitted with a copper fountain and holding 1,818 gal-

lons'.¹⁸ It was heated by 'naked' steam passing through a steam jacket controlled by a wheel valve. The plumbing took the steam from the boiler, through an 'anti-priming pipe'¹⁹ and as 'dry' steam entered the steam jacket at the base of the copper. The system was so arranged, that this steam could be returned to the boiler to start the circuit again. While the steam used to heat the copper was dry, that given off during the boiling process was not and a circular shaft was constructed above the copper leading to the roof removing the unwanted steam emissions from the brewhouse.

Wade took the visitors down to the second floor, where the cast iron hopback was situated. When boiling was complete, the wort passed through the hopback where the spent hops were removed; held back by the slotted iron draining plates. The hops were later put through a 'powerful hop-press'. At the west end of this floor stood the 'cooling room', housing a flat or open cooler which measured 40 feet by 18. A strainer was fitted to the 'tinned copper main pipe' feeding the cooler, but it appears that the hop back was not fitted with any mechanism to aerate the wort as a 'delivery jet' was fitted to the main pipe to fulfil this role. The wort having been cooled it was passed through a patent refrigerator at a rate of 20 barrels per hour to reduce the temperature further, before being run into one of the fermentation rounds on the first floor. These were made of red deal, No.1 having a capacity of 24 barrels, the remainder holding up to 40 barrels each.²⁰ All ten were fitted with attenuators to assist with the control of the fermentation temperatures. A jacketed slate tank held the pitching yeast and was situated in the centre of the room.

Descending again, the party arrived in a 'lofty' racking room with a brick paved floor. Here stood two large racking squares constructed of slate each with a capacity of 42 barrels and a third vat for storing and maturing porter, for which the brewery had acquired quite a reputation. From this area they visited the No.6 cellar, a large room used for racking pale ales. Moving on through the lower levels of the brewhouse they passed further cellars devoted to the storage of mild ales, eventually arriving at 'a great cellar' situated underneath the maltings with the capacity of holding 1,500 barrels.

Having completed their tour of the brewhouse Barnard and his party were shown the external facilities. Close to the well they examined the donkey engine used to pump

water up to the reservoir on the fourth floor and in the cask washing shed, casks were dried with hot air supplied by a second engine. After visiting the cooperage, a large dray shed and the stables they retired to the engine house, situated in the basement of the building, where they examined the 12hp vertical engine and a Cornish Boiler. Their tour complete the party retired to the offices to sample the beers. Barnard's verdict was enthusiastic.

Here we tasted the No.1 stout of this brewery, which is sold, both in cask and bottle throughout the locality. It is a nutritious full-bodied drink, and well worthy of its fame. We also sampled the XX guinea ale. This is a recognised 'guinea' ale for the 18 gallons, than which no better is to be obtained for the money in the country. For brightness, purity and flavour, it would be hard to beat anywhere, even at Burton.²¹

Barnard's account is interesting and by using it in conjunction with the 1879 Sale Catalogue and the illustration Figure 1, there are enough clues that help to position the internal layout of the brewery. Barnard tells us that over the copper 'is erected a circular shaft leading up through the roof ... for taking off the steam from the brewhouse'. On an examination of Figure 1, it will be seen there are three vents set in the ridge of the roof on the right hand side. It would appear that the copper and perhaps the mashtun were situated beneath these vents. The flat cooler, however, with its need for a constant flow of fresh air would have been situated near the three large slatted windows.

The world of brewing that John Wackrill operated in was vastly different from that found in London and described by Mathias and others; where brewers had displaced the brewing victualler as a principle producer of beer almost completely by 1831.²² (Table 1)

	England & Wales	London
Common brewers	54%	95.4%
Brewing victualler	34.3%	1.0%
Beerhouse keepers	11.3%	3.6%

Table 1. Percentage of Malt used by all brewers 1831.

Source: Sigsworth, E.M. (1967) Borthwick Papers No 31. University of York.



Figure 5. John Wackrill.²³

Photograph: J. Anderson.

In Shropshire the licensing records for 1896 provide a very different picture. Although these records were collated three years after Wackrill's death they reflect a brewing trade with which he was familiar. Shropshire was divided into 17 licensing districts during the last decade of the nineteenth century, with Wellington second only to Shrewsbury, and being responsible for the licensing of 185 properties. Of these, a third were owner-occupied,²⁴ the remaining two thirds being tenanted. The distribution and ownership of licensed properties in the Wellington division reflect the situation in the county as a whole and unlike London, there was no dominant common brewer, with the ownership spread across a diverse cross section of society.

Indeed there were 20 different brewers serving 41 public houses in the Wellington district alone, including The Shropshire Brewery²⁵ which owned the largest share, twelve. Two other Wellington breweries, The Wrekin and the Union accounted for a further eight houses. Only three other brewers owned more than one property; Pearce & Co., the Market Drayton Brewery, and Soames & Co. from Wrexham. Two Shrewsbury brewers, Trouncer & Co. and Thomas Southam & Sons, each had a single house in the town, as did William Hall's brewery in Wem. The remaining brewers were from outside the county and included Crossman & Paulin, Salt & Co, Thompson & Co. and the Burton Brewery Co. all from Burton on Trent, the Edgbaston Brewery from Birmingham, Showells in Oldbury, Mitchells at Cape Hill and the Greenall Brewery, Warrington.

The majority of the remaining public houses were owned by private individuals, from all walks of life. The landed gentry, the clergy and landed estate owners all had properties. Of this group Sir Thomas Meyrick at Apley Castle had the most, with five. The largest single group of licence holders, however, were entrepreneurial individuals. There were 92 of them, with a gender split of 60 males to 32 females. The majority of them lived in Shropshire, but some were absentee owners like James Leigh of Newcastle under Lyme, or Benah Shepherd from Birmingham.

The methods by which they operated their houses varied greatly. Some ran them as free houses installing a manager to oversee the day to day business, others either leased them or tied them to either a brewery company of wine and spirit merchant. One of Sir

Thomas Meyrick's houses, the Queen's Head in Wellington was tied to W. Slaney & Co., Wine and Spirit Merchant and the 'Laburnam House' belonging in 1896 to the executors of the late J.H. Slaney, was let to the Shropshire Brewery, while Henry Mitchell leased the 'Crown' at Dawley from William Franklin of Sheffield.²⁶

Leasing was a procedure all too familiar to John Wackrill. In 1883 he was leasing the 'Rose & Crown' beer house in Bell Street, from Mrs Maria Morris, a widow, paying her a rent of £8/15/0d per quarter, paid by cheque drawn from his account at Lloyds Bank. Ten years later, eight of the 15 properties served by The Shropshire Brewery were either leased or on yearly tenancies, but the 'Rose & Crown' was not one of them. Four of these properties were public houses, three were beerhouses and one was an Off Licence run by a William Woolley. The cost of renting these properties was £291, while the brewery's seven freehold properties yielded £199 in rent.²⁷



Figure 6. Photo of Rose & Crown, Bell Street Wellington as it is today.

Photograph: Rob Woolley.



Figure 7. The King's Head public house. Part of John Wackrill's tied estate in 1893.

Photograph : Rob Woolley

Barnard estimated that country brewers relied on the private trade for half their business.²⁸ This formed a large part of The Shropshire Brewery's trade, supplying beer to customer's homes. To develop the business, as Barnard explained, Wackrill expanded the business by following the national trend and introducing bottled beers and stout, which 'considerably increased the popularity of the brewery'.²⁹ (Fig. 7). By using the system of travellers and agents the trade was extended to the whole of Shropshire.³⁰ Agents were usually grocers or wine and spirit merchants who worked on a commission and sold the company's beer through their retail premises. If successful an agent could generate a large private trade through his business. The biggest worry, however, for the brewer, was the possibility of bad debts accrued by a negligent agent. A network of agencies nevertheless became an important part of the business structure for many brewing ventures. The nineteenth century writer C. Howard Tripp wrote a series of articles in the *Brewer's Journal*, which were later published as a book, recommending that when a brewer appointed an agent he should look for someone who was smart, 'of good education, had temperate habits and above all, affable in manner, as well as [being] strictly conscientious and straightforward'.³¹

In the absence of any contemporary brewery documents, a snapshot of the day to day running of the business can be gleaned from the evidence given in Quarter Session cases relating to The Shropshire Brewery. The case of George Butter provides an insight

into how the private trade operated through an agent and points up Howard Tripp's advice on the selection of a good and reliable agent, although in defence of Anslow and Wackrill that advice was not written until 15 years later!

George Butter was an agent for The Shropshire Brewery, taken on in February 1877, by Robert Anslow to act on behalf of the company. He was paid 25/- a week and received 2½% commission on sales he made. When John Wackrill arrived 18 months later he continued in the brewery's employment and on these same terms. His role was to acquire orders which he would deliver to the customer's homes. Butter notified the brewery of the transactions he had completed and invoices were later sent out by post from the brewery office, initially by Anslow but later by Wackrill. 'Every alternate Saturday' Butter collected the monies owed and paid them into the brewery. The system worked smoothly enough even though there was a hiccup during July 1879 when there were customer complaints about the timing of their invoices. On 2 April 1880 Butter arrived in Wackrill's office, with a troubled conscience, confessing that he had been misappropriating the company's money,

I can no longer conceal from you that I have been misappropriating monies belonging to the brewery. I have been trifling with you since you joined the brewery. I have kept monies I have received from time to time from different people and when I found it difficult to conceal it any longer I collected the monies I had first received. I know you are now sending out Bills again and I can conceal it no longer. I want to arrange with you to let me pay off as much every fortnight until the deficiency is met.

Wackrill enquired how much was owing to which Butter responded there was 'over £20' outstanding and explained the problem had arisen 'from a misdemeanour which cost him £65.' Wackrill took a hard line and informed Butter 'that he had no confidence in him'. The following day Butter delivered a letter to the brewery outlining the monies owed; totalling £62/16/0d. Butter acknowledged that he had stolen that amount and offered to repay the brewery at the rate of £2 a month from his salary. Wackrill refused, wanting a £20 down payment first. On 13 April 1880 Butter was arrested and appeared at the Quarter Sessions. He pleaded not guilty and commented, 'I did not expect Mr Wackrill to be so

hard on me'. He was found guilty and sentenced to imprisonment for 21 days with hard labour.³²

When John Wackrill acquired The Shropshire Brewery it appears it had no malting facilities of its own and consignments of malt were bought in from local maltsters to meet brewing requirements. To rectify the deficiency Wackrill engaged George Inskipp a partner in the firm of Davison, Inskipp and Mackenzie, brewery architects, to enlarge and build a new maltings for him in 1883.³³ The new maltings were built of red brick and stood to the left of the brewhouse above existing 'underground stores' which Barnard had identified as a 'great cellar'. (see Figs. 1 & 4) It incorporated two growing floors, each with an area of about 60 square feet. A double kiln had been installed and there was a 'steeping capacity' of 26 quarters. Having examined the kiln and its furnace Alfred Barnard was particularly impressed by a new patent draught excluder fitted to the heating chamber. This could be controlled by the 'movement of a finger', commenting, 'it is most effective'. The new maltings provided the brewery with the facilities to produce all its own malt and had been so designed to allow continuous malt production for a period of nine months each year. With the volume of malt being produced, Inskipp provided ample storage space for the malt, in the maltings, above the offices and in the brewery. To prevent the malt becoming damp or contaminated with dust the walls and floors of the stores were lined with sheets of zinc.

Locally grown barley had gained a reputation for being suitable for malting, as Barnard recounted. Consistently during the second half of the nineteenth century 34% of the farm land in the vicinity of Wellington was put down to barley each year; spawning an active local malting industry. In 1879 there were eight independent maltsters operating in the town and this number did not include the malting facilities of The Shropshire Brewery.³⁵ The focus of trade for the farmers and maltsters alike was the local weekly Monday Smithfield Market, which had been located next to the railway since 1867 and it was here that Wackrill conducted business when he wanted to buy in fresh stocks of barley.³⁶

Another snapshot of how this process was undertaken can be gleaned from the account of a case brought at the County Court in January 1893. On the 31 October the previous year John Wackrill was at the Smithfield

market where he met a Mr Bromley, a farmer from Isonbridge, a hamlet between Wellington and Shrewsbury. The two men fell into conversation and Bromley produced a sample from a bulk of malt, which he wished to sell. After some discussion the two men came to an understanding and Wackrill agreed to take 520 bushels of Bromley's barley at five shillings a bushel. The following day one of Bromley's men called at the brewery and collected some sacks and informed the brewery the malt would be delivered the following day.

Delivery day was wet when Bromley's wagon arrived in the front yard of the brewery. One of the damp sacks was opened by the foreman who examined the condition and quality of the malt. He found it 'had a bad and musty smell and was much out of condition'. Wackrill was sent for and asked to bring the original sample for comparison. Accompanied by Francis Wade and the two maltsters they compared the original sample with the load and declared the latter to be unfit for use. As a consequence Wackrill refused to accept the delivery and it was returned to Bromley.

For Wackrill this may have been the end of the matter, but Bromley, having ultimately sold the barley at a loss, decided to claim compensation for an alleged breach of contract. The case was heard in the Wellington County Court on 13 January 1893 and 'excited a great deal of public interest'. Both parties submitted their versions of events, Bromley conceding that the malt 'was not in the condition and to some extent it did smell', but insisted it was the same bulk from which the sample had been taken. The case rested on two basic questions; did the sample come from the same bulk delivered to the brewery and was there sufficient evidence that the malt had been accepted. At this point, as a matter of law, the deputy judge, Mr John Amphlett, pronounced that as Wackrill had taken the barley onto his premises that 'was sufficient to constitute a binding contract, not withstanding the fact that he had only taken it in to compare with the sample and rejected it immediately'. After a short withdrawal, the jury returned and found in favour of Bromley. Wackrill was presented with a bill for £21/2/6d; the difference between the price he had agreed and the resale price Bromley had accepted. Wackrill would have none of it and appealed, having been refused a retrial. The appeal was based on the argument that the original judge had misdirected the jury.

The argument was rejected and the appeal dismissed, with Wackrill left with Bromley's bill and costs.³⁷

Barnard makes no mention of any actual brewing taking place; though it may be that they weren't brewing on the day of his visit. Neither does he make any mention of the frequency of brewing, but it is possible to elicit from his account details the suggestion that The Shropshire Brewery brewed all the year round and did not operate a 'brewing season'.³⁸ That the brewery produced malt for a period of nine months each year strongly suggests they were regularly using it in brewing and stocks needed to be maintained. Further, that all the fermentation vats were fitted with attenuators;³⁹ indicating that they were able to control the fermentation process, even in the summer.

The absence of any contemporary documentation from the brewery makes it difficult to objectively assess the success of the business. Barnard writes that 'the output of the brewery has doubled and the business is still rapidly expanding' and the local paper commented that John Wackrill had 'conducted [the business] successfully'. The only snapshot of the brewery's business credentials come in 'The Shropshire Brewery Sale Particulars' issued after Wackrill's death in 1893 which details that 4,206 barrels were produced in the year ending 30 June. Production was expressed in barrels and the 36 gallon beer barrel became a standard unit of measurement for brewers. The information does not, however, explain whether these figures referred to 'standard' barrels or 'bulk'⁴⁰ barrels 'Standard' barrels represented the total quantity of beer brewed at a given gravity and was used for calculating excise duty. (See Table 2)

Production	£s
4,206 barrels of beer	8,572
318 quarters of malt	639
Grain, malt dust, etc.	196
Total	9,407

Table 2. *Shropshire Brewery: End of year production to 30 June 1893.*

Source: *Sale Details 6/11/1893*

The pertinent point is, that, whether or not the barrelage was 'standard' or 'bulk', it earned the brewery £8,572 during Wackrill's last full brewing year. The 'Sale Particulars' also state the average sales for the previous five years had exceeded £9,000. The figures for 1893 put it on a par with this average and the return would have been judged successful. The views of Alfred Barnard and the local newspaper do not seem to be an exaggeration.⁴¹

Brewers operated their brewing year to suit their circumstances. It was the brewer's financial year and The Shropshire Brewery's year appears to have run theirs from the 1 July to the 30 June. In Hook Norton, the brewing years was changed in 1895 from the calendar year to bring it in line with the agricultural year; October to September. There is an interesting comparison with the brewing years operated by these two breweries. While they operated different 'brewing years', the common factor was that they each finished at the end of their respective malting seasons when their supplies of barley had run out.⁴²

One piece of legislation that would have directly affected John Wackrill's business was the decision by Gladstone's government to reintroduce duty on beer in 1880 after 50 years of 'free trade'. The new Excise duty was to be calculated at 6s 3d per standard barrel of 36 gallons that had a specific gravity of 1057° brewed from two bushels of malt.⁴³ In 1889 specific gravity was reduced to 1055° which meant Wackrill paid 2½d more in duty per standard barrel.⁴⁴

When John Wackrill and his family arrived in Wellington in 1878 they moved into a house in New Church Street, close to the brewery.⁴⁵ With his wife Clara, and his five daughters aged between nine and eighteen years the house may well have been crowded and something bigger and more in keeping with his position as a brewer was required.⁴⁶ About 500 yards from New Church Street there was a piece of land known as 'The Big Enclosure'. Wackrill approached the land owner, Thomas Groom, a local timber merchant and a deal was struck. Wackrill acquired the land for £970 but agreed to the proviso that he could only build 'a villa residence with coach house, stabling and other necessary outbuildings of no less that £40 annual value' at the north end of the plot. Building commenced in 1880.⁴⁷ It was a house designed for the needs of a large



Figure 8. John Wackrill and his family at Sunnycroft. L to R: Gertrude (seated), Edith, Clara, Florence Emily, John, Evelyn, Amy (seated). Photograph : J. Anderson.

family and incorporated all the latest conveniences, running water, gas and ‘sanitary arrangements ... of a most efficient description’. The house was called Sunnycroft and had six bedrooms, a bathroom with hot and cold water, an inside lavatory, dining room, drawing room, breakfast room and a small library and stood in about three acres of land. The house was divided into two parts, not upstairs and downstairs but front and back. The front portion of the house provided the family with their living space, while the back was devoted to the ‘domestic offices’; the domain of the servant, which in 1891, was 43 year old Jane Holbrook. The two parts of the house were separated by a door with a glass panel.⁴⁸ It was a house that reflected Wackrill’s status, not only as a successful brewer, but as an important member of the town. Brewers traditionally became involved in the affairs of their home town; the Bass family were particularly active with their charitable activities, including

bestowing on Burton two large churches and its municipal offices.⁴⁹ John Wackrill was not in this class, but nevertheless he maintained the tradition, and although not a Wellington man, actively involved himself in the affairs of the town. Sadly these have not been recorded and it is necessary to rely on the recollections of others. It was said of John Wackrill, that ‘it was always a distinct pleasure to him to assist in good and charitable work’. He regularly attended Christchurch (Wellington) and was involved in seeing through ‘many improvements’ in the church over a period of years, including the two when he was churchwarden. He seems to have been well thought of and, when his health began to falter during 1893 friends and those close to him became concerned for his well being. By late August his health was ‘in a precarious condition’ due to a deteriorating heart condition and shortly before 8am on Sunday 27 August 1893 John Wackrill passed away.⁵⁰

The local paper reported his death, reflecting on the loss of a well respected member of the town.

Many readers will have learned with feelings of regret of the death of Mr J G Wackrill, of The Shropshire Brewery, which took place at his residence Sunnycroft ... By his strict integrity, his straightforwardness in business, his universal kindness of manner and his willingness to help in all good and charitable work affecting the town and neighbourhood, he earned the high esteem and respect of everyone.

John Wackrill's deteriorating health had brought his brother Samuel to Wellington and it was he, who registered the death the next day.⁵¹ Samuel also took charge of the arrangements for the funeral, which was to be held the following Friday in Leamington Spa, but before the cortège left for Wellington station, a short service was held at Christchurch, attended by local tradesmen, and John Wackrill's friends and family. The service was taken by the vicar, the Reverend T. Owen and included a reading, psalm and the hymn 'Peace perfect peace'.

After the service a procession formed outside the church led by his widow, Clara, his brother, Alderman Samuel Wackrill and the Miss Wackrills. Brewery workers, tradesmen and people from the town followed, as the coffin, carried by employees of The Shropshire Brewery, passed through the town to the station, where it was placed on the 11.11am train to Leamington.⁵²

The executors of his will lost no time in putting the business up for sale, placing an advertisement on the front page of the local paper announcing the 'Sale of Shropshire Brewery', giving details of both the brewery and the house. They were both to be sold by auction as separate Lots by Messrs Alfred Thomas, Peyer & Miles⁵³ at The Mart, Tokenhouse Yard, London, on Monday 6 November 1893. As a condition of the sale, the purchaser '[was] required to take at a customary evaluation' of the existing stock, equipment and the book debts owing to the business as on 23 December. Promptly at 2pm the auction began with Lot 1, the sale of 'The Shropshire Brewery with Malthouse and



Figure 9. Sunnycroft. Photograph: Rob Woolley.

Premises'. Bidding started at £5,000 and went up in £500 bids.

Having reached £8,500 the bidding proceeded firstly in £250 increments and then in £100 amounts. After 16 bids had been received the hammer finally fell; the brewery was sold to Mr H.L. Potter for £9,600. The local paper reported the sale.⁵⁴

Sale of Shropshire Brewery - Acting under instructions from the executors of the late Mr J G Wackrill of Wellington. Messrs A Thomas & Peyer and Miles submitted for public competition in London on Monday, the Shropshire Brewery Wellington, with 10Qtr plant, 26 Qtr malthouse, 16 Public and beer houses⁵⁵ and several cottages. Mr H L Potter of Putney became the purchaser at £10,748. Of course there are many things besides, such as rolling stock etc to be taken into valuation. Sunnycroft [Lot 2], the late residence of the deceased gentleman did not sell. The vendor's solicitors were Messrs Wright & Hassall of Leamington.

After John Wackrill's death, life for Clara Wackrill and her daughters continued as they prepared for the wedding of Amy, the youngest of the Wackrill girls. Just

three weeks after her father's death, Amy was married to William Francis Tucker, the eldest son of Mr Frank Tucker at Christchurch on the 20 September.⁵⁶ It was not until after Christmas that another attempt was made to sell the house. The sale was placed in the hands of the local estate agents, Messrs Barber & Son.⁵⁷ An advertisement was placed in the local newspaper giving a full description of the house with details of the accommodation and the facilities available to a purchaser.

It is clear from the advertisement that Clara wanted an early settlement so that she and her four remaining daughters could reconstruct their lives away from Wellington.⁵⁸ Perhaps not surprisingly, they moved back to Leamington Spa and in 1901 Clara and three of her daughters were living in the town at 7, Church Hill. Interestingly though, their domestic servant, 19 year old Sarah Cartwright came from Priors Lee, in Shropshire.⁵⁹

History has not been kind to John Wackrill. While the sites of his two brewing competitors, the Wrekin and Union breweries have plaques on the walls of buildings marking their past existence, there is nothing to mark the site of The Shropshire Brewery, following its demo-



Figure 10. The Wickets Public House, another of John Wackrill's tied estate in 1893. Photograph: Rob Woolley.



Figure 11. New Church Road, Wellington today, the site of The Shropshire Brewery. Photograph: Rob Woolley.

lition in 1969 to make way for housing. Local folklore held until recently that John Wackrill had sold the brewery and joined the temperance movement following the death of a worker who allegedly fell into a boiling vat. The origins of this story are unclear and why Wackrill's name is associated with it is equally puzzling. An accident of this nature may well have happened, but a search through the Inquest Reports at Shropshire Archives for the years either side of Wackrill's death failed to locate any deaths relating to breweries. Authors of articles about Sunnycroft have been equally dismissive, portraying Wackrill as minor and an insignificant contributor in the history of the house, noting that he built the house, before going on to glorify those who followed him. The house underwent a large and impressive redevelopment in 1899, 'in accordance with the conventional taste of the time', and an impression has been created that on the completion of this redevelopment a new property had been built, ignoring the fact that parts of the original house still remain.⁶⁰

The words of an anonymous contemporary, writing in 1893 about industry in Wellington aptly sum up John Wackrill's contribution to the town.

Mr Wackrill's production in mild, bitter, pale and strong ales, porter and stout are noted for absolute purity, brilliancy,

delicacy of flavour and nourishing properties - indeed, it is by maintaining their qualities at the highest degree of excellence that he ensures a large and continual flow of orders. The trade done extends for many miles around Wellington - many public houses and private families are supplied. Mr Wackrill gives the business his close personal attention and is justly regarded as one of Wellington's most enterprising and worthy businessmen.

Perhaps it is time for history to reassess John Wackrill's contribution to Wellington.

Acknowledgements

Mrs J. Anderson, John Wackrill's great grand daughter, for providing the photographs of John Wackrill and information about his family. The photographs remain her copyright.

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Barnard's *Noted Breweries of Great Britain and Ireland* Volume 4. 1891.

My family for their constructive suggestions during the writing and editing of this article.

References

1. This is the modern measurement of the Wrekin's height, Barnard quoted 1,320 feet.
2. Barnard, A. (1891) *The Noted Breweries of Great Britain & Ireland: Vol. 4*. London: Causton & Sons. pp.275-6.
3. www.british-history.ac.uk British History Online: Wellington Economic History - Trades & Industries. pp.12-14. accessed 10/8/2005. Wellington was noted for its chair making industry. In 1842 there were at least 16 men trading as chair makers in New Street.
4. Now the Old Orleton Hotel.
5. Frost, A. (2008) *Breweries and Bottlers of Wellington*. Stroud: Tempus. p.20; Lloyd, L.C. (1976) *The Inns of Shrewsbury*. Shrewsbury: Shropshire County Council. p.29.
6. Mathias, P. (1959) *The Brewing Industry in England 1700-1830*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. pp.255-7.
7. *Wellington Journal & Shrewsbury News*. 22 November 1879, mentions Richard Taylor's death; freebmd.org.uk, no Richard Taylor died in Shrewsbury between Jan 1876 and December 1879. A Richard Taylor died in Shifnal in the Spring of 1877 (accessed 1/9/212).
8. Details of entries in Shropshire Quarter Sessions QR546/5 Regina.v George F Butter 1880 - evidence of Robert Anslow; *Mercer & Crocker's Directory of Shropshire* (1877) - Taylor & Son, Shropshire Brewery, Watling Street. p.64.
9. *Wellington Journal & Shrewsbury News*. 11 October, 8 November, 22 November, 6 December 1879.
10. There is a document in Essex Record Office (T/B 165/32) that suggests they may have begun their retail careers earlier in their native Chelmsford before moving to Leamington Spa in 1861; 'Blue Plaque for Samuel Thomas Wackrill.J.P.', *CLARA Newsletter*, Spring 2009; Samuel Wackrill (1828-1907) had a distinguished career in Local Government in Leamington Spa and was the first Mayor of the town.
11. Email correspondence with Janet Anderson 4.8.2012.
12. Gourvish, T. & Wilson, R. (1994) *The British Brewing Industry 1830-1980*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p.30, Table 2.3. The per capita consumption for England & Wales between 1875 and 1879 was 40.5 gallons.
13. S.A. MI 6246/1 Sale Particulars: Shropshire Brewery

Wellington. 6 November 1893; By the 1870s books were being published suggesting how and where brewing equipment should be placed. Contemporary works by George Scammell (1871) and William Bradford (1889) describe the layouts of the tower/ semi gravitational breweries. The 'Three Tuns' Brewery at Bishop's Castle is a tower brewery; See also: Pearson, L. (1999) *British Breweries An Architectural History*. London: Hambledon Press. p.43.

14. Barnard, A. (1891) op. cit. p.ii.
15. *ibid.* quoted in text, p.278. The depth quoted by Barnard differs from the 1879 sale details which only mentions 134 feet.
16. Sale Particulars Shropshire Brewery 18 November 1879. A smaller, 9 quarter mashtun is quoted in the particulars.
17. Mathias, P. (1952) 'Agriculture and the Brewing and Distilling Industries in the C18th', *Economic History Review*. Vol. 5, Issue 2, December. Available online; Using spent grains to feed pigs was common. Mathias mentions London brewers sending spent grain to their farms in East Anglia, and Nancy Pargetter recalled paying 6d for bushel from the Hook Norton Brewery to feed the family pig. Trevor Woodall took spent grains from his aunt's brewing to feed the family pigs in the Black Country during WW2
18. S.A. MT 6246/1. Shropshire Brewery Sale description November 1893 gives the copper having a capacity 42 barrels (1,515 gallons) Barnard's figures suggest 50.5 barrels. In 1879 the brewery had a 30 barrel copper.
19. The antipriming pipe removes some moisture from the steam, www.industrialsoft.mysitespace.0lx.net/report/boiler2.htm, accessed 2.8.2012.
20. Sale Details Shropshire Brewery 1879. Shropshire Brewery Sale description provides information about the capacity of the fermentation rounds.
21. Barnard, A. (1891) op. cit. pp.279-280.
22. Woolley, R. (2005) M. Phil. Thesis, University of Wolverhampton, p.13; Mathias, P. (1959) op. cit. pp.63-66, 72-76; Sigsworth, E.M. (1967) 'The Brewing Trade During the Industrial Revolution. The Case of Yorkshire', *Borthwick Papers*, No. 31. University of York. 'In London excise collection only 31 of 4,393 victuallers brewed their own beer.'
23. This photograph is a copy an original glass daguerreotype.
24. The Wellington District did not identify which of owner/occupier pubs brewed their own beer.
25. Then run by H L (Frank) Potter
26. Woolley, R. (2004 ongoing) Analysis of Shropshire Licensing Records 1896. Maria Morris was still the owner of the Rose & Crown in 1896.

27. S.A. QR 557/14. Regina v Emma Morris, April 1883; S.A. MI 6246/1: Sale Particulars for The Shropshire Brewery. 6 November 1893 Summary of Lot 1.
28. Gourvish, T. & Wilson, R. (1994) op. cit. p.66.
29. HNBC Archive. Sales 1895-1911; Woolley, R. (2005) op. cit. Bottled beers were introduced in Hook Norton in 1892. Sales increased by 105% in the first decade. p.120.
30. Barnard, A. (1891) op. cit. p.276; Advertisement, *Wellington Directory* 1879. p.17. See agents listed on advert.
31. Tripp, C.H. (1892) 'Brewery Management', *Brewer's Journal*. p.67.
32. S.A. QR 546/5 Regina v George Frederick Butter 1880. Such cases of appropriation of company monies were not unknown. In 1908 a traveller for the Hook Norton Brewery admitted to not paying over all the monies he had collected. There was no trial but he lost his job, his cottage and his furniture which was sold off to make good the deficiency.
33. Pearson, L. (1999) op. cit. pp.162-3; The 1879 sale particulars do not make any mention of a maltings and the Wellington Directory for that year does not mention The Shropshire Brewery as a producer of malt.
34. Barnard, A. (1891) op. cit. p.277. Malt production probably ran from October to June.
35. *ibid.* p.276; www.british-history.ac.uk British History Online :Wellington Economic History - Markets & Fairs, p.8, accessed 10/8/2005; *Wellington Directory* 1879, p.24.
36. The site is now occupied a Morrison's Supermarket and car park. Photographs of the market in action are displayed in the shop.
37. *Shrewsbury Chronicle*, 20 January 1893., p.7 column 5&6. The cost of the barley was £130; *Shrewsbury Chronicle*, 21 April 1893, p.8
38. Woolley, R. (2005) op. cit. p.76. The 'brewing season' was inherited from the London porter brewers and ran from September to early June. Burton brewers traditionally ran a shorter season. Lack of control over fermentation temperatures meant brewing could only happen during the winter months.,
39. Gourvish, T. & Wilson, R. (1994) op. cit. fn.85 p.56.
40. The term Bulk barrels refers to the number of casks sold in a year and in 1893 John Harris Exors in Hook Norton sold 4,695 barrels and increase of 100 on the previous year taking £8,145 in the financial year ending 30 September 1893.
41. Barnard, A. (1891) op. cit. p.276; *Wellington Journal and Shrewsbury News*, 2 September 1893, p.5; S.A. MI 6246/1: Sale Particulars for The Shropshire Brewery. 6 November 1893; Gourvish, T. & Wilson, R. (1994) op. cit. p.318.
42. Woolley, R. (2005) op. cit. p.116.
43. Monckton, H.A. (1966) *The History of Ale & Beer*. Oxford: Bodley Head, p.205 Appendix B.
44. Gourvish, T. & Wilson, R. (1994) op. cit. p.24 and Table 5.4 p.195.
45. Census return, 1881; www.iWhipple.org. accessed 13 August 2012.
46. A son, John Graham Wackrill, born in Leamington, died aged 20 weeks on 10 May 1871.
47. National Trust: Introduction to Conservation Plan for Sunnycroft; Raikes, S. (2000) *Sunnycroft Guide Book*. Swindon: The National Trust; Evans, G. (2004) 'A gem in our midst.' *Wellington News*. August. p.13.
48. S.A. MI 6246/1: Sale Particulars for The Shropshire Brewery. 6 November 1893. It was the servant's area that was extensively re-modelled in 1899 by Mary Slaney to form the impressive entrance visitors see today.
49. Gourvish, T. & Wilson, R. (1994) op. cit. p.219.
50. *Wellington Journal & Shrewsbury News*. 2 September 1893. p.5; Death certificate gives the cause of death as 'cardiac asthenia', which is 'weakness and decrease in the power of the heart's contraction, leading to reduction in cardiac reserve and ultimately to congestive heart failure.' <http://medical-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/myocardial+asthenia> Accessed 15/8/2012.
51. Death Certificate of John Wackrill. 28 August 1893.
52. *Wellington Journal & Shrewsbury News*. 2 September 1893. p.5.
53. This is the same firm that prepared the Prospectus for the Hook Norton Brewery in 1900 when it was incorporated.
54. *Wellington Journal & Shrewsbury News*. 21 October 1893, Frontpage Column 1. In 1912 he was referred to as Frank Potter.
55. This an error. Only 15 are listed in the sale details.
56. *Wellington Journal & Shrewsbury News*. 23 September 1893. p.5. & 11 November 1893 p.5.
57. The firm is still in business in the town.
58. *Wellington Journal & Shrewsbury News*. 20 January 1894, pp.4 & 6.
59. Priorslee is now part of the Unitary Authority of Telford & Wrekin; Clara was 71; Edith 41, Florence 38 and Gertrude 35. They were 'living on own means'.
60. Raikes, S. (2000) op. cit. p.14; Sunnycroft is open to the public. See: www.nationaltrust.org.uk/sunnycroft/; Bullard. R. 'The Sunnycroft Connection.' *Wellington News*; Evans, G. (2004) op. cit. p.13.
61. www.Wellingtonhistorygroup.files.wordpress.com Industries of Wellington c.1893. Accessed 28/8/2012.