

SOAMES OF SPALDING

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If there was a competition to find Britain's lowest profile brewer of the 20th century, Soames and Co. of Spalding, Lincolnshire would be a serious title contender. Their Cowbit Road brewery was in the hands of two families between 1887 and 1949, during which time marketing and publicity was minimal and links with the local print media almost non-existent. Unlike most of their competitors, Soames saw little or no need to advertise in newspapers, and when in extremis a statement needed to be released to prying journalists, the response can best be summarised as very terse.

Yet this was no insignificant brewer running a handful of nondescript pubs. When the business was sold to Steward & Patteson of Norwich in 1949, Soames controlled over 200 houses scattered throughout South Lincolnshire, north Northamptonshire and north Cambridgeshire, with a significant presence in Peterborough and Boston as well as Spalding. The Soames business began as an almost classic tale of paternalistic landowners dabbling in the brewing industry, but family tragedy forced a change of approach, devolving day to day running to local managers. It's a story worth closer examination.

The south Lincolnshire town of Spalding is an old established market centre for the rich arable fenlands in this part of eastern England. The settlement grew up around a crossing point on the navigable river Welland, where a belt of slightly higher ground marked a boundary between the mediaeval shoreline of the Wash and the undrained fens stretching towards Peterborough and Cambridge to the south, and north to Lincoln. In 1792 the town had four brewers, though probably none of them were sizeable businesses.¹ However, by 1804 local businessman Henry Bugg had gone into partnership

with the aptly named Thomas Brewerton of nearby Market Deeping, as brewers and liquor merchants; from 1804 Bugg continued as a sole trader, and in 1809 he opened a brewery on the Cowbit Road, on the east bank of the Welland heading south out of town.² Over the next 80 years, Bugg's business became the predominant brewery in the town, with management passing through the hands of several family members. The family became wealthy, with interests in banking as well as brewing; they moved into Westbourne Lodge, a substantial and elegant Georgian house which fronted the brewery. By 1874 the business owned 31 pubs and probably rented several more;³ in 1881, eleven people were employed in the brewery. The business had passed around 1872 to Joseph Bugg, grandson of the founder, who changed the family name to Burg in 1877,⁴ possibly due to a family dispute.

By the late 1880s Joseph Burg's only son Henry was taking an increasing part in the business, the father probably looking forward to the time when his Oxford-educated son would take over for good. However, Joseph died early in 1887 after 'several weeks' prostration from brain fever',⁵ a Victorian cover-all term for what may have been meningitis. Shortly after his death, the business had a new owner, Soames & Co.; it seems that Burg was a broken man and he abandoned many of his interests, as his obituary many years later indicated.⁶ The date of transfer is also unclear; quite unusually, there seems to have been no advertisements placed in the local press to indicate a change of ownership. Some sources suggest that Soames took over in 1887, but the 1889 *Kelly's Directory* of Lincolnshire still lists Joseph Burg at the Cowbit Road brewery premises (though street directories can be unreliable sources of information). The most likely date for the sale may be 1889, by



Figure 1. A rare exterior view of Soames' brewery in Spalding. The only building which still remains is Westbourne Lodge, the rear of which is the building on the right beyond the overhead pipe. Photo: Michael J. Elsdon.



Figure 2. A view of Soames' bottling plant. Photo: Michael J. Elsdon.



Figure 3. A further view of the view of the bottling plant, with what looks like some of the brewing equipment beyond. Photo: Michael J. Elsdén.



Figure 4. A Soames steam lorry, possibly manufactured by Clayton & Shuttleworth of Lincoln. The Suffolk registration, which dates from around 1910, suggests the vehicle was purchased secondhand. Photo: Ayscoughfee Hall Museum, South Holland District Council.



Figure 5. Soames also owned this small lorry dating from around 1922 by Vulcan of Southport, probably bought new as it has a Lincolnshire (Holland) registration. Its driver seems very smartly attired. Photo: Ayscoughfee Hall Museum, South Holland District Council.

which time a long serving Soames employee, Henry Thompson, is known to have moved to Spalding from Wellingborough.⁷

So who were the Soames and what connection did they have with brewing? Stephen Soames was a London barrister who moved his young family from Hawkshead House, North Mimms in Hertfordshire to Cranford Hall, near Kettering, around 1875; he sat as a J.P. in Northamptonshire.⁸ Two of his sons, Francis and Gerald, went on to have significant brewing interests. Gerald bought the Anchor Brewery in Long Buckby, a few miles away from Cranford Hall, in 1895, but it was Francis who was installed as the new owner and manager of the Spalding brewery. Educated at Eton and Trinity College, Oxford, he was a keen sportsman, but it's not known whether he had any deep knowledge of the industry. He was prepared, however, to move to Lincolnshire to keep an eye on the business. Living on site at Westbourne Lodge was apparently not an option; Joseph Burg was still in residence, as indeed he would be until 1922, when he died there at the age of 88.

Instead, by 1892 Francis Soames had moved to nearby Sleaford, 15 miles to the north-west, where Soames & Co. had a branch agency. His new home was in Lafford Terrace, a highly desirable and attractive Victorian Italianate building which is now the headquarters of North Kesteven District Council. He's recorded in the 1901 Census as 'living on own means', which tends to suggest that he regarded his status as that of a country gentleman rather than a brewery proprietor - or, perhaps, that he saw his income sources as nothing to do with the Census enumerator.

Expansion came quickly for the new business of Soames & Co.; they began buying up a number of licensed premises in south Lincolnshire, including in 1892 the Victoria Brewery in Spalding, just to the north of their own brewery on Cowbit Road.⁹ In late 1893, the Lincolnshire operations of John Taylor Marston were bought, consisting of the Albion Brewery at Sleaford and a further brewery at Market Deeping,¹⁰ as part of an apparent deal with the Peacock family of Greatford near Stamford in south Lincolnshire, some 15 miles east

of Spalding.¹¹ The Peacocks were the wealthy owners of Greatford Hall, a 16th century mansion, and participants in a Lincolnshire bank, Peacock, Willson and Co.;¹² they also owned a number of public houses as part of a property portfolio, several of which were leased to Soames & Co. In 1904 the Holbeach and Long Sutton properties of John Carter were bought, though Soames declined to buy Carter's brewery even though it was offered to them for only £40.¹³ In 1899 Soames bought the White Horse in West Street, Boston,¹⁴ for £8,250, comfortably the highest price they had paid thus far for commercial premises. The hotel had been a free house up to that point and was one of the town's three main hotels.¹⁵

But tragedy was to strike the business. Francis Soames was an extremely keen sportsman; like his brother and father before him, he was a handy all round amateur cricketer, making first class appearances for M.C.C., I Zingari, Northamptonshire and Lincolnshire. He also rode with the local Blankney hunt, and competed in point to point and steeplechase. On 1 June 1903, he was riding in a steeplechase at Cartmel race meeting, in what is now Cumbria.¹⁶ Thrown from his horse, he suffered a fractured skull and never regained consciousness. His

death at the early age of 37 must have badly affected the business. Unmarried, he left an estate of £12,857 - around £1.1m in 2013 prices.¹⁷

Like many other breweries, Soames decided to incorporate early in the 20th century. Soames and Company Limited was formed in 1909, with Francis's relative Captain Robert Soames as chairman and director, Hugh Fenton Gilbert Peacock, J.P., as his fellow director and Bertram James Walker as company secretary.¹⁸ Robert Soames, a retired army officer, was 71 years old in 1909¹⁹ and lived at Scaldwell in Northamptonshire, some 50 miles distant; it is difficult to see that he would have played a particularly active role in the business. Hugh Peacock was considerably younger at 43, clearly appointed to look after the Peacock family interests. Walker, 29, was Robert Soames' brother in law. The company was kept strictly private, with shares allocated only to family members; though the initial allocation is not known, it appears, from what is known about share ownership from later company records, that the Soames family held more than the Peacocks; Walker seems not to have been allocated any.

Early in 1913 the business underwent some internal reorganisation, with Walker assuming responsibility for the brewery, malthouse and motoring department, and Hugh Peacock finances and properties.²⁰ The extent of corporate governance in the business prior to the reorganisation is not known, but major frauds committed against the company by its Boston branch manager, William Vincent Smee, were uncovered by its auditors in late 1913. Smee, aged 47, had been employed by Soames for some 15 years and had previously been Boston agent for Holes of Newark.²¹ The amount of money he had managed to embezzle was staggering. When challenged, Smee admitted to stealing £2,187, the equivalent of around £170,000 at 2013 prices and around a quarter of Soames' annual net profits at the time. He was suspended immediately.²²

Smee was originally from Braintree in Essex, the working class son of a lamp lighter. He was married, with five surviving children, the first of whom was born in 1896; two other girls had died before their first birthdays. He had distinguished himself back in 1899, when he was working for the business as a travelling salesman, when he discovered Soames' trading name was being used without permission in the Skegness area to

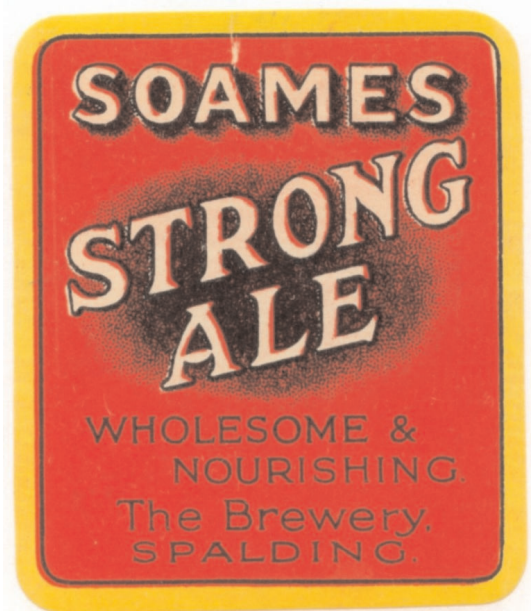


Figure 6. An original Soames beer label. Photo: Brewery history Society.

sell bottled beer; Smee was a key witness for Soames in the ensuing civil litigation.²³ No doubt this helped to establish him as a reliable employee, suitable to be trusted with the remote management of an agency 16 miles from the Spalding head office. Over the years, Smee had joined a number of local groups and societies, adding to his image as a solid member of local society; his name crops up from time to time in the lists of attendees at annual dinners which tend to litter Victorian newspaper reports. His salary is not recorded, but other employees in managerial positions at Soames and Co. were being paid between £150 and £200 annually around the same time, and the directors received little more than that. It might be tempting to perceive his thefts as a reaction to low pay and family pressures, but it's also interesting to note that Smee was listed as a private resident in the 1905 edition of *Kelly's Directory* of Lincolnshire, something which usually required the payment of a fee. That suggests someone with spare cash who wishes to improve their social status.

Although the minutes do not enlarge on the fraud, the amounts involved were so high as to strongly suggest it must have been going on for years. How the directors and auditors failed to detect the extractions for so long is a question which the minutes do not address. There had been a similar case locally only six years previously which should have prompted a review of internal controls: Hunt's brewery in Stamford lost around £2,500 through the embezzlements of their managing clerk Herbert Stanton, who had been with the firm for 13 years. The resulting trial at Stamford Quarter Sessions was headline news during 1907, ending with Stanton being sentenced to three years' imprisonment. It's also noticeable that the internal restructure early in 1913 did not address oversight of the Sleaford and Boston agencies. Unlike the 'Stamford Sensation' (as the local press referred to the Hunt's brewery case),²⁴ Soames preferred to deal with the affair quietly and privately through their solicitors, who recovered £205 - less than 10% of the funds extracted - by March 1914.²⁵ Insurance for key members of staff was commonplace by this time, the paltry recovery suggesting either that Soames had failed to protect their business in this way, or that the insurance company felt that internal controls were inadequate. It is not clear how the losses were dealt with for accounting purposes, beyond the fact that dividends were unaffected; no doubt the auditors were as embarrassed as Soames themselves.

Like many breweries, Soames suffered considerable loss of staff during the Great War. Four days after the United Kingdom declared war on Germany on 4 August 1914, the Board commendably resolved 'to reinstate in their original positions all the firm's employees who had joined the Army, Navy or their branches upon the expiration of their service'.²⁶ But by the end of the year, economies had become necessary; A.S. Marriott, who had been hired only twelve months previously from Russell's brewery at Gravesend as consulting brewer, was given seven months' notice in December, his employment to end in July 1915. Money remained tight throughout the war; delivery of a new steam lorry from Clayton and Shuttleworth's of Lincoln was cancelled during 1915, and staff continued to be called up for war service. Insurance against aerial bombing was taken out in September 1915 to protect the business's most important assets, the brewery premises themselves and the lucrative houses in Boston and Peterborough. The first attacks by Zeppelin airships had taken place in Norfolk as long ago as January 1915, including a raid on nearby Kings Lynn, so Soames had not been very quick off the mark. Nonetheless, the estate seems to have suffered no wartime damage.

Hugh Peacock died late in 1916 after a prolonged illness at the age of 51; his only son was only eleven and there seems to have been no suggestion that his widow or two older daughters should have a role in the business. Bertram Walker was by that time a major in the Army (and was wounded in November 1916),²⁷ leaving the prospect of Robert Soames running the business on his own; as by this time he was nearly 80 it was clear that an alternative had to be found. Approaches had already been made earlier in 1916 to a competitor, Charles MacLeod, to explore whether he would be prepared to take on the management of the Soames business. In May 1916 MacLeod had agreed to take on the job for six months at the remarkably low salary of £75 for that period. Walker and Soames agreed to pay a third of MacLeod's salary each, the balance to be met by the company. In November 1916, shortly before Hugh Peacock died, MacLeod was appointed manager on a permanent basis, though the question of his salary had yet to be finalised.²⁸

Charles Campbell MacLeod was born in 1879 in Melbourne, Australia, the son of Murdoch MacLeod, a magistrate who later retired to Sevenoaks in Kent.



Figure 7. Westbourne Lodge, photographed in summer 2013. Access to the brewery was to the right of the property, now occupied by housing in the new Westbourne Grove. The gates to the left of the building have 'S & P' monograms in the centre. Photo: Author.

Educated at Brighton College, a leading public school in Sussex, MacLeod's career in the brewing industry started with a spell running the Malt and Hop brewery in King's Cliffe, east Northamptonshire, around 1909, which he appears to have acquired from Godfrey Keppel Papillon. In 1910 he bought a brewery in Manning Road, Bourne, Lincolnshire, 15 miles to the north of King's Cliffe.²⁹ The Bourne Brewery had been run since 1902 by Thomas Griffith Thomas, and for some years before him by Joseph Wyles, the son of a Grantham maltster and hop merchant, who had started brewing in Bourne in 1884.³⁰ Wyles' business had collapsed in a sorry mess of litigation and insolvency in 1897, which was repeated in 1901. The Bourne operation was not a particularly large one: when it was sold following the final liquidation of the Wyles business, there were only eleven tied houses,³¹ which were sold at auction in April 1902 to a range of different owners.³² The brewery itself only fetched £1,000, considerably less than some of the pubs. MacLeod acquired a hand-

ful of pubs in and around Bourne and adopted the trading name 'Bonnie Brewery' as a reference to his Scottish ancestry.

Following his move to Spalding, MacLeod quickly proved his ability, being entrusted early on with negotiating glucose prices and negotiating revised borrowing facilities with the bank as the difficult war years dragged on. In April 1917 Macleod was asked to come up with ways of reducing employee numbers, reporting three weeks later that he could 'see his way to dismiss seven men and three women at Spalding, two at Bourne and Sleaford, one at Boston and one man working half time at Boston'.³³ The minutes do not record that these measures were implemented, although the economic state of the company suggest it's very likely that they were: Soames paid no dividend in 1917. But on a brighter note, the Board decided to allocate a bonus pool of £329 in December of that year to be divided between the remaining workforce by way of reward for keeping

the business afloat in the absence of colleagues either released or engaged in military service.³⁴

Many of Soames' staff slowly returned to their old jobs after the war. In May 1919 Henry Border was paid £40 and given a temporary job until he found some permanent employment; having told the military authorities he was returning to Soames after the war, his army pay had ceased and he was out of pocket. Soames clearly felt they should honour the spirit of their agreement at the start of the war to give staff their old jobs back. They were proud of the staff who had served the country; an employee named Emitt was awarded the Military Medal and in March 1919 Soames paid him a gratuity of £5 5s in recognition. In January 1920 a ex-soldier called Stubley was taken on in the cooperage under the King's National Roll, a government scheme to place disabled veterans in employment.³⁵

A more difficult situation arose in June 1919 when Bertram Walker, the company secretary - now Lt. Colonel Walker, having just finished wartime service in the Royal Sussex Regiment - attended his first Board meeting for some years to announce his intention to return to the business. It was proposed that Walker and MacLeod should agree to share their salaries 'as they may agree'; at the time MacLeod was being paid £200 annually and Walker was receiving £800 a year even though he'd had no active managerial role at Soames whilst serving in the Army. Walker failed to attend the next meeting, instead writing to ask that he be given another week to decide whether to return. That Walker was simply keeping his options open became clear in September when he reported that he had been offered a job in the City and asked to be released from the 'position' agreed in June. Walker took no further part in the management of Soames & Co., although the parting seems to have been amicable, the minutes recording that Walker's wartime honours conferred great distinctions on him and the firm - he was awarded the D.S.O. in 1918. Leopold Harvey, a Spalding solicitor, was appointed to the post of secretary in his stead; he had probably been acting secretary since November 1916, since he was paid nearly three years' arrears of salary at the end of 1919 relating to the role.³⁶

By now Soames were developing what we would now call brand awareness, adopting a simple but easily recognised design for all their pub signs whereby the

house name was painted on to a blue and white diagonally divided background. This set them apart from the green colour used by Soulbys of Alford and the red that Batemans of Wainfleet still use today; pictorial signs were not common in south Lincolnshire. Beer brands were developed, too, such as Strong Ale and Bonnie Ale - the latter, at least, no doubt a Charles MacLeod creation with its Scottish overtones.

At the start of the new decade the tied estate numbered around 170 houses and Soames were looking to expand both by buying smaller local breweries and supplying more pubs. Increasingly, they were moving away from leasing houses - their standard trading model before the war - to outright purchase. The acquisition at auction in 1918 of the Four Cross Roads on the main road between Boston and Swineshead was the first sign of this new approach. Two more pubs - one in Peterborough and one in Kirkby Laythorpe, near Sleaford - were bought in 1919, and all three remain open today.³⁷ Then in June 1920 MacLeod inspected Coward's Phoenix brewery at Boston with a view to possible purchase. The business operated ten pubs in the Boston area; the proprietor Montagu Coward had just turned 60 and was intending to retire, having operated the brewery since 1880.³⁸ However, MacLeod was clearly unimpressed by his visit and Soames resolved not to buy the business privately, taking instead a more cautious approach of considering the purchase of any of the houses which came up for auction.

Soames bought three low barrelage Fenland houses in 1921, including the quirkily named Plank, Hook and Shovel at Holbeach Bank. However, a decision was taken in December 1921 to end Saturday working at the brewery and reduce wages for the brewing staff by 5 shillings a week by early January the following year. MacLeod reported that the employees were 'perfectly satisfied as to the reduction', which seems a little unlikely. A further decrease followed in April 1923.³⁹

An interesting episode arose in 1921 when MacLeod reported to the Board that the widow of Hugh Peacock had asked if a position could be found in the brewery for her son, Hugh Myddelton Peacock, who had just turned 16 and had started his 'brewery education', probably as a pupil in another brewery. The minutes record a sniffy response that if a place was available once his education was complete then he might be taken on, but he would

be subservient to Frank Heard, the head brewer, whose position was not to be 'imperilled or in any way interfered with' - was Heard a little prickly maybe?⁴⁰ Five years later, Peacock himself wrote to ask if the firm could find some position for him 'on account of his father's long connection with it'. The firm agreed to him starting at a salary of £200 per annum in February 1927, making clear that 'no accommodation can be found for him at the Brewery house'.⁴¹ By 1930, however, Hugh Peacock was a director.

The company had entered the 1920s in reasonable shape, with nearly all the issued shares in the control of the Soames and Peacock families, either in their own names or in the hands of trusted professionals. However, this did not discourage Samuel Allsopp & Sons Ltd. from expressing an interest in buying Soames in 1923. The approach came through Edward Soames of Framland House, Melton Mowbray, a brother of Gerald and Francis. Leopold Harvey, the company secretary, met with Soames and Major Tuilles of Allsopps in London during May 1923; Tuilles said that he would 'bring the matter before the next meeting of his Directors' but the discussions are not mentioned again.⁴² However, Soames themselves were on the acquisition trail and in 1924 they entered negotiations for the purchase of Horry's Rout Green Brewery in Boston, renewing an approach they had clearly made previously, although the minutes do not enlarge on earlier discussions. Like Coward's brewery, Horry's was a long standing local firm with a small number of tied houses in the local area, and a respectable wine and spirit business. A price of £7,000 was swiftly agreed, although the tied estate was not included.⁴³ One of the former Horry pubs was later bought at auction. Soames & Co. Ltd. issued all its remaining unissued ordinary shares in the following year to pay for the Horry deal and also to finance the acquisition of more pubs.

Soames would have liked to buy the Stamford business of George and Henry Hunt, which came on to the market with 70 pubs in late 1926, but reluctantly decided the likely price was outside their resources. They briefly entertained thoughts of asking Stanley Brotherhood, the chairman of Peterborough engineering firm Peter Brotherhood, for assistance, but without result.⁴⁴ Hunts were already in negotiations with Mowbrays of Grantham, to whom the business was sold early in 1927 for £140,000, though at a significant burden to

Mowbrays who had to issue more shares to finance the deal. The purchase meant that Soames now had a local rival of very similar size, but Soames' profits were booming. Net profits surged beyond £20,000 in 1925 and from a position where in 1920 they had been paying 10% dividend on ordinary shares, the return had doubled five years later. In 1927, just two years further on, a rate of 30% was paid and for 1928 dividends reached 35%. Although these are remarkable returns, Soames were in a strong position to return profits to investors as they were a private company with a small group of shareholders, with many of them still linked to family groups.

An 'amalgamation' with Mowbrays was proposed in 1931. The two businesses were, on paper at least, a good fit, and the economic downturn must have made a merger quite attractive. The two concerns were of similar size, with Soames probably having a slight edge in the number of pubs controlled, though both had over 200. Mowbrays operated mainly in and around Grantham, Lincoln and Stamford, the result of judicious takeovers of smaller businesses. The Grantham firm had smaller numbers of pubs in the towns where Soames were strong, like Boston and Peterborough. However, Mowbrays' houses were, on the whole, more profitable; the firm dominated Grantham, for example, and had fewer low barrelage country pubs. The two companies had got as far as opening each other's books for inspection, with the Soames minutes confidently recording that 'the total anticipated output from the two businesses say 55,000 barrels could be coped with on the Spalding premises with inexpensive alterations', thus implying that brewing would cease at Grantham.⁴⁵ Nothing further is recorded about the merger talks, such as they were, and curiously it is only in the Soames minutes that the discussions are mentioned; those for Mowbray's⁴⁶ are completely silent. But the immediate post-war years would see the issue of mergers firmly back on the agenda.

Soames remained determined to grow the business. They had been prepared to pay up to £36,000 for the Wisbech brewery and pubs of J. & H. Yates in 1932, but negotiations broke down (there was a further abortive approach by Soames in 1939).⁴⁷ Their attentions turned to the purchase of a mineral water business, as other brewing companies were making their similar products of their own. The directors considered purchasing Lee

and Green Ltd., a Sleaford based firm founded in 1881 and incorporated in 1902, with factories in Skegness, Spalding, Bourne and Sleaford.⁴⁸ Lee and Green used Sleaford spring water, meeting a late Victorian demand for aerated and natural mineral waters, including ginger beer, almost certainly the alcoholic version - a drink which is now making something of a comeback. The business had even been exported to the United States, with factories opened at Syracuse and Buffalo, N.Y., in 1900 and 1904 respectively,⁴⁹ though Prohibition put an end to the American venture in 1920. Charles MacLeod first approached Lee & Green in December 1931 to discuss either an outright purchase or a working agreement. The initial response was favourable, but talks dragged on well into the next year, to the point that Soames lost patience and bought their own mineral water plant. In May 1934, a formal process to place Lee & Green Ltd. into voluntary liquidation was started and the following month Soames bought what remained of the business for £1,500.⁵⁰ This may well have been to gain access to the brand name, although in October 1934 the directors resolved to carry on the Lee & Green operation 'for the time being'. Frank Heard, the chief brewer, was given a bonus and Hugh Peacock an increase in salary to take account of their increased work following the purchase.⁵¹

Detailed workforce records unfortunately have not survived so therefore it's difficult to say how many people Soames employed, and in fact only nine Spalding residents can reasonably be identified in the 1891 census as Soames employees, though there must have been many more than that. Some interesting staff relations issues emerge from the minutes: for example, many staff were extremely loyal to Soames. The assistant brewer, Henry Thompson, retired in 1927 at the age of 74, having worked for the company for nearly 38 years. He was given a gratuity of £100 and a pension of £3 a week; he lived to 92. His son Alfred was working for Soames by 1912, when the Board gave him the significant sum of £10 on the occasion of his marriage. Alfred became the firm's Spalding manager in 1919, having previously worked at the Sleaford agency; Soames paid the £15 costs of moving his furniture to Spalding. Much less happily, F. Le Hair was dismissed for dishonesty in 1931. His stepfather wrote to the Board hoping for a change of mind but 'in the interests of the rest of the employees of the firm' his request was rejected.⁵²

Loans were made to employees from time to time, although additional security was usually required; for example, George Walpole borrowed £36 in January 1914, but was charged 5% interest and was required to provide security in the form of a £100 life policy and an interest in his mother's estate worth £400, suggesting that the employee was seen as high risk. Some years later Frank Heard, the head brewer, was given a substantial loan of £1,000 but in October 1938 failed to make his interest payment; the Board predictably left the matter in MacLeod's hands with a suggestion that the payment should be offset against any bonus he should be allotted.⁵³

By 1930 the Soames tied estate exceeded 200 houses, the upkeep of which was a continued drain on the company's finances, and particularly so in the houses to the south of Spalding where shrinkage of the fenlands can cause subsidence. Rival local brewers were already at work modernising or rebuilding entirely existing houses, with some brand new pubs erected particularly in Lincoln, Grantham and Peterborough. Though Soames continued their programme of house purchases during the 1930s, they managed to divert funds to significant projects on the existing estate. In 1934, respected local builder Fred Peck was contracted for £2,349 to completely rebuild the Mill at Boston on an awkward, but commercially attractive sited house to the north of the town, well placed for passing Skegness traffic. The new Mill was constructed for £2,349 as a large roadhouse at right angles to the road, later requiring the addition of a new road frontage.⁵⁴ The pub, now in the hands of Batemans, still shows the signs of its peculiar original layout. The Royal Oak in Spalding,⁵⁵ previously a rather attractive cottage with a thatched roof, was completely rebuilt in 1935, followed in 1937 by two further reconstructions at the Bull's Neck at Penny Hill, Holbeach and the Rose and Crown in Peterborough.⁵⁶ The Coach and Horses, a popular stopping point on the Skegness road at Wrangle, was rebuilt in similar style to the Bull's Neck, with a central Dutch gable, in 1938.⁵⁷ The Chequers at Spalding was extensively renovated in 1939, but the war put an end to further such work.

Soames never did manage to build any entirely new pubs, though they did try. As late as 1946 a site was earmarked in the growing city of Peterborough for a new house in Westfield Road, to be called the Halcyon. Plans were approved in December 1946, but there-

after it proved a long running saga, not helped by Soames' increasing post war inertia, and one which was not resolved until after the business was sold.⁵⁹ The Halcyon eventually opened some years later in 1957, but another planned new house at Friskney, near Boston, designed to catch holiday traffic on the way to Skegness, never saw the light of day.

Soames entered the war years with an increasingly elderly Board of Directors. Charles MacLeod turned 60 in 1939 and Leopold Harvey, by then the Chairman, was 64.⁶⁰ Hugh Peacock and many of the other younger employees had enlisted for wartime service. Peacock served as a major in the Territorials and was taken prisoner in the fall of Singapore in 1942, going on to experience the building of the notorious Burma-Siam railway on which the famous film *The Bridge on the River Kwai* is based. Beyond such setbacks, the company seems to have been little affected by the hostilities, and the tied estate suffered little wartime damage - at least, the minutes do not record any. The early war years saw very little activity at Board level, which was to some extent understandable, but the lack of a younger, more progressive leadership was leading to a lack of clear direction. An approach was made to Harry Bateman, the chairman of the much smaller concern George Bateman & Sons Ltd.,⁶¹ based at Wainfleet, some 35 miles to the north-east of Spalding. Harry was a widely respected figure in the brewing industry, and for many years Chairman of the East Midlands Brewers' Association. He was aged 60 when he joined the Soames Board and in January 1944, which made him only a few years younger than MacLeod. Three years earlier he had joined the board of Mowbrays of Grantham for similar reasons.

A new mineral water plant was installed at Spalding during 1946, which probably saw the end of operations at Sleaford, where the old branch premises were sold to motor dealers Holland Brothers in 1950. Profits began to rise again after the vagaries of wartime trade. Investing in Soames remained a safe haven; the final dividend on ordinary shares for 1945 was 30%, a figure exceeded only by the boom year of 1929. It may have been Soames' stability, allied with concerns about the harsh austerity climate for brewers who saw increases in excise duty and taxes as an attack on the trade, which brought the subject of local alliances back to the fore. In May 1946 Edward Dunkerton, the chairman of

Mowbrays of Grantham, approached Charles MacLeod 'on the subject of some understanding being arrived at between the respective firms'.⁶² The progress of discussions was sluggish, however, and ultimately abortive; by November 1946 the only agreement reached was that the two firms would 'preserve a free hand' in any interactions with other firms. There were brief discussions with Soulby's of Alford, too, that year, but without result.⁶³

But Soames had also been approached by another party, a larger brewer in the next county. Steward & Patteson was the biggest of three sizeable brewing firms in Norwich, and a company with which Soames had some existing connections. In 1928, Peter Finch, the son of S. & P.'s long-serving Chairman, had been taken on as a 23 year old pupil at Spalding under Charles MacLeod;⁶⁴ he joined the S. & P. Board in 1933 and must have known the Soames business well. In February 1949, the Soames Board reviewed their situation. Though profits continued to grow healthily, soaring past £50,000 in 1947 and allowing the payment of a 32.5% dividend in 1946, 1947 and 1948, they took a pessimistic view. The balance sheet needed to be 'reconstructed' (exactly why is not clear, though a shortage of capital for expansion seems a highly probable reason) and the Government's attitude towards the industry continued to be a source of great concern.⁶⁵ The problem of an ageing Board had not been resolved either. Charles MacLeod was 70 and wished to retire; he had raised the question of his pension on a number of occasions of late, and Leopold Harvey was now 74. They decided to sell the business, and to approach S. & P. 'in the first instance'.

Unfortunately hardly anything is known about the negotiations and there is very little detail in the minutes. Much about the merger must have seemed to make sense, though. The Soames and S. & P. estates bordered each other but did not overlap; S. & P. had little presence west of Kings Lynn and Soames' pubs went no further east than the Norfolk border at Sutton Bridge. S. & P. would inherit an estate of nearly 250 pubs across south Lincolnshire as well as a foothold in Peterborough and northern Northamptonshire, making them the largest East Anglian brewers. In doing so they established a lead over Morgans, their Norfolk rivals who had pieced together a smattering of Fenland pubs. For Soames, the stresses imposed on an ageing Board running a brewery

in what seemed a hostile fiscal climate would be ended. News of the merger broke in late May 1949 when the *Financial Times* reported that S. & P. had made a formal offer to acquire the entire issued share capital of Soames & Co. Ltd. The *Lincolnshire Free Press*, the local Spalding newspaper, approached Charles MacLeod for comment but were tersely told 'there is nothing to say at present'.⁶⁶ Soames were never known for courting excessive publicity. Details of the takeover emerged a few days later. S. & P.'s offer valued Soames & Co. at just over £550,000. The London *Evening Standard* cited the deal as an example of 'big prices being paid for some of the smaller Privately Owned concerns'. There were only 19 shareholders in total, eleven of whom were women; most of them did extremely well out of the deal. The *Standard* crunched the numbers, finding that Mrs Constance Peacock, the widow of Hugh Peacock senior,⁶⁷ would receive S. & P. shares 'to the value of £116,500' - approximately £3.3m in 2013 figures.⁶⁸ Leopold Harvey would be presented with S. & P. securities worth about £93,000 (£2.5m in 2013).

The entire Soames board resigned in August 1949, although Hugh Peacock joined the S. & P. board as the first director from outside the controlling families of the Norfolk company.⁶⁹ The Spalding business continued to operate as a separate entity until 1957, when Soames & Co. Ltd. was finally wound up. Board meetings were simply transferred to Norwich, where they took place at S. & P.'s Pockthorpe Brewery. Brewing at Spalding ceased towards the end of 1949 and thereafter the Cowbit Road premises were used as an S. & P. depot (S. & P. monograms cast into the yard gates can still be seen next to Westbourne Lodge, the old brewery house - see Fig. 7).

Terry Gourvish examines the takeover in his book about S. & P., *Norfolk Beers from English Barley*. He notes that the 240 or so Soames houses increased S. & P.'s tied estate to about 870 pubs, and made up some 20% of the enlarged company's net profits, allowing the S. & P. annual reports to highlight the benefits gained by the acquisition. However, turnover at the Soames houses between 1950 and 1952 proved to be sluggish, with an annual average of only 13,915 barrels supplied, equivalent to just over 1.1 barrels a week. As he says, 'it may be argued that all the company did was to add to its already large number of marginal, low barrelage, public houses'.⁷⁰



Figure 8. One of the 'Soames windows' at the Robin Hood pub in Spalding. Only the word 'Bar' is original; the 'Soa-mes' lettering is a replica, though very well executed. Photo: Author.

S. & P. were slow to address these issues relating to the Soames estate, although they realised a number of redundant non-pub assets within a few months of taking control, including the sale of the former Horry brewery at Boston for £9,000.⁷¹ A gradual closure programme for smaller pubs was started; in many cases the poorly performing houses were sited in remote fen locations, and in considering closures S & P may have had an eye to local opinion: they were now the dominant brewer across a wide stretch of the Fens. S. & P. began a policy of buying profitable houses which Soames had leased and, with their greater financial resources, were also able to implement plans for new pubs which Soames had never considered, such as the Woad Man in Boston, which they built to serve an expanding council estate in the south east of the town. By 1955 the average barrelage at former Soames houses had risen to just over two per week,⁷² and ten years after the merger, by 1959, around 40 former Soames houses had closed for good, with a selection of others around Boston sold to Batemans in 1957. The pace of closures was to gather pace in the 1960s, with some celebrated locals shutting their doors for good especially following S. & P.'s sale to Watney Mann in 1963.

Little now remains of Soames & Co. Watneys closed their Spalding depot in 1967; the remaining former Soames brewery buildings there were demolished in the 1980s, although Westbourne Lodge fortunately still survives. A small housing estate, Westbourne Grove, has been built to the rear on the brewery site. In a nice

touch, the Robin Hood pub in Bourne Road, Spalding, retains 'Soames' painted titles on its frosted windows (some of which are replacements - see Fig. 8); and one of Soames' signs survives on a wall at the Wheatsheaf, Moulton Chapel, including an S. & P. era amendment in that it advertises 'Soames Norfolk Ales'. Soames memorabilia of course crops up on online auction websites on a fairly regular basis in the form of labels, beer mats and bottles (much of it overpriced). Fortunately S. & P. and their Grand Metropolitan successors had the foresight to retain many of the old Soames company records which are now held by the Norfolk record office. In particular, the directors' minute book, shareholders' register and details of licensed properties contain a wealth of detail about the Soames business following its incorporation in 1909 which have helped enormously with the compilation of this article.

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2. *London Gazette*, 8 July 1804; Elsdon, M.J. (2001) op. cit.; Wright, N.R. (1973) *Spalding, an Industrial History*. Lincoln: Society for Lincolnshire History & Archaeology.
3. Elsdon cites 31 pubs listed in Henry Bugg the younger's will dated 1874.
4. *Stamford Mercury*, February 2 1877.
5. *ibid.* January 21 1887
6. *ibid.* August 25 1922; also personal information from a relative of the Burg family.
7. *ibid.* January 1 1926, reporting the death of Thompson's wife; also Norfolk Record Office (N.R.O.), BR1/35, Soames minutes, 14 February 1927, noting Thompson's request to retire 'after 37 and a half year' service'.
8. Hawkshead House was owned by Charles Coningsby Sibthorp, the son of the controversial and eccentric Lincoln M.P. Colonel Charles Sibthorp; the Sibthorps had long used the house as their Home Counties base.
9. *Stamford Mercury*, 15 April 1892 and *Northampton Mercury*, 2 March 1894
10. Marston also owned the Dolphin brewery at Poole, Dorset, incorporated in 1897 as Marston's Dolphin Brewery Ltd.; see Barber, N. (2012) *A Century of British Brewers plus plus*. New Ash Green: Brewery History Society.
11. *Lincolnshire Chronicle*, 25 May 1893; *Stamford Mercury*, 27 October 1893.
12. Peacock, Willson and Co was sold to Lloyds Bank Ltd. in 1912.
13. *Grantham Journal*, 23 July 1904; *Stamford Mercury*, 18 November 1904.
14. The hotel was closed in 1958 by Steward & Patteson, and the site was sold to Keightleys Ltd., a local department store; it is now occupied by Dunelm.
15. The other two were the Red Lion in Narrow Bargate and the Peacock and Royal in the market place; all three are now closed.
16. *Lincolnshire Echo*, 2 June 1903; and (1908) *The Eton Register; Part V, 1883 - 1889*. Eton: Spottiswoode & Co., which calls Soames 'a brewer of Lincoln'.
17. Using R.P.I. figures cited at www.measuringworth.com/ukcompare/relativevalue.php
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20. N.R.O., BR1/34, Soames minutes, 7 January 1913.
21. *Lincolnshire Echo*, 6 December 1895.
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23. *Lincolnshire Chronicle*, 25 May 1900.
24. *Grantham Journal*, 3 August 1907.
25. N.R.O., BR1/34, Soames minutes, 10 March 1914.
26. N.R.O., BR1/34, Soames minutes, 8 August 1914.
27. *Straits Times*, 13 December 1916.
28. N.R.O., BR1/34, Soames minutes, 30 May and 21 November 1916.
29. Brown, M. (2010) op. cit.
30. *Grantham Journal*, 11 October 1884. Wyles' daughter, Lilian (b. 1885) became the first policewoman to serve as a C.I.D. officer and played a major role in encouraging women to join the force. Her biography, *A Woman at Scotland Yard*, was published in 1952.
31. *Brewing Trade Review*, 1 April 1902.
32. *Lincolnshire Echo*, 11 April 1902.
33. N.R.O., BR1/34, Soames minutes, 7 May 1917.
34. N.R.O., BR1/34, Soames minutes, 17 December 1917.
35. N.R.O., BR1/34, Soames minutes, 20 March, 12 May 1919, 12 January 1920.
36. N.R.O., BR1/34, Soames minutes, 23 June, 28 July, 8 September 1919.
37. N.R.O., BR1/34, Soames minutes, 11 November 1918, 7 April, 23 June 1919.
38. N.R.O., BR1/34, Soames minutes, 14 June, 12 June 1920. Coward (1859 - 1933) came originally from Streatham in south London. He took over the Phoenix Brewery from T.S. Cooke in 1880: *Stamford Mercury*, 29 October 1880.

39. N.R.O., BR1/34, Soames minutes, 12 December 1921, 9 January 1922, 4 March 1923.
40. N.R.O., BR1/34, Soames minutes, 12 December 1921.
41. N.R.O., BR1/35, Soames minutes, 14 December 1926.
42. N.R.O., BR1/34, Soames minutes, 7 May, 11 June 1923.
43. N.R.O., BR1/35, Soames minutes, 14 January, 11 February, 10 March 1924.
44. N.R.O., BR1/35, Soames minutes, 14 December 1926.
45. N.R.O., BR1/35, Soames minutes, undated entry (probably early 1931).
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49. Smith, J. 'Lee and Green: the American connection', <http://sleafordmuseum.org.uk/site/musings/article8.html>. Retrieved 2 January 2013.
50. N.R.O., BR1/35, Soames minutes, 22 December 1931, 5 August 1932, 11 December 1933, 18 June 1934.
51. N.R.O., BR1/35, Soames minutes, 11 December 1933, 23 October 1934.
52. N.R.O., BR1/34, Soames minutes, 10 September 1912, 17 May 1929; N.R.O. BR1/35, Soames minutes, 14 February 1927, 22 December 1931.
53. N.R.O., BR1/34, Soames minutes, 13 January 1914; N.R.O. BR1/35, Soames minutes, 18 December 1939.
54. N.R.O., BR1/35, Soames minutes, 23 October 1934.
55. Now the Fenway.
56. N.R.O. BR1/35, Soames minutes, 15 July 1935, 21 December 1936.
57. Now a private house.
58. N.R.O. BR1/35, Soames minutes, 18 July 1939.
59. N.R.O. BR1/35, Soames minutes, 23 December 1946.
60. In fact, MacLeod lived to the aged of 75 - he died in 1955 - and Harvey died in 1952 aged 87.
61. N.R.O. BR1/35, Soames minutes, 15 January 1944. Batemans had around 70 pubs at the time, around one quarter of the size of Soames' tied estate
62. N.R.O. BR1/35, Soames minutes, 3 June 1946.
63. N.R.O. BR1/35, Soames minutes, 18 November 1946.
64. N.R.O. BR1/34, Soames minutes, 24 February 1928.
65. N.R.O. BR1/36, Soames minutes, 10 February 1949.
66. *Lincolnshire Free Press*, 30 May 1949.
67. Constance Peacock outlived her husband Hugh Fenton Gilbert Peacock by 46 years: he died in 1916, she in 1963.
68. Using R.P.I. figures cited at <http://www.measuring-worth.com/ukcompare/relativevalue.php>
69. In later life, Hugh Peacock lived at the Ferry House on the Milton Park estate near Peterborough, and was known as an authority on gun dogs and shooting. He died in 1981.
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71. N.R.O. BR1/36, Soames minutes, 15, 19 August 1949.
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