

THE HOOK NORTON BREWERY - 1973: A PHOTO ESSAY

JACK HANEY

Rob Woolley writes, this set of eight photographs are the result of a Saturday afternoon's visit to the Hook Norton Brewery in 1973 and were taken by Jack Haney, a keen amateur photographer, who lived in Chipping Norton. During the mid-50s he worked as chauffeur before moving to Smith's Industries in Witney where he spent most of his working life. Jack's interest in photography grew from taking family photographs and, using a spare bedroom, he began processing his own film. Later he experimented with both colour photography and cine film.

I met Jack when I worked in Chipping Norton; he being the father of a friend. Our trip to the brewery was arranged through Mr W.A. Clarke, the grandfather of the current Managing Director, James Clarke.¹ To our surprise, when we met Mr Clarke, he presented us with the key to the brewery, requesting that we lock up and return it when we had finished.

This set of photographs is of interest because they record equipment that was used daily in the brewery 40 years ago. There have been changes and equipment has been replaced or scrapped while others, like the small copper remain silent, reminders of past brewing activity.

Photograph 1: The Copper (page 103)

The photograph shows the base of the copper and part of the hop back which were both installed during the spring of 1899. Heat to boil the copper was provided directly from a fire at its base. The first 'test' fires were held on the 4 and 6 May 1899, but it was not until a year later, on 6 June 1900, that the first brew was put through

the copper. Direct heat was used to boil the copper until 1966, when an oil fired system was installed. (see photograph 3). Smoke from the copper house chimney caused some consternation in Scotland End, particularly on Monday mornings when the day's washing was hung out to dry.

To empty the copper a pipe was screwed onto the aperture on the side of the copper and placed over the side of the hopback. By turning the wheel above, the 'gate' was opened and the hot wort flowed into the hopback.

Photograph 2: The Small Copper (page 104)

The small copper was first installed during the alterations to John Harris's 'old' brewery in 1872 by Henry Pontifex & Co.

During the building of 'new' brewery, designed by William Bradford, it was moved and installed in the corner of the new copper house. Like the main copper it was heated directly by a fire and was used to brew stout. Production of stout using the small copper ceased in 1907 when trading became difficult. It is still referred to as 'the old stout copper'.

Photograph 3: Boilers - 'old and new' (page 105)

The photograph shows two boilers. The one in the foreground was installed when the 'new' brewery was built in 1899 and consists of two furnaces. They were coke fired and provided steam for the Buxton Thornley engine. It was first fired on 19 May 1899. The coke for the furnaces was delivered to the brewery yard and had

to be barrowed to the boiler house. After more than 50 years in service they were in need of modernisation and had become uneconomical.

The boiler in the background was installed in 1966 as a replacement for the coke furnaces. It was a Cradley Steam Packet oil fired boiler supplied by the Turbine Equipment Company and had steam raising capacity of 5,000lb per hour. It was replaced in the late 1990s by a boiler from Randalls Brewery, Jersey.

As far as is known, this is the only photograph of these two boilers.

Photograph 4: Cellars (page 106)

On the left of the photograph is the holding tank which was used for light ale and brown ale. It was here that priming sugars were added before the beer was sent down to the bottling stores for conditioning.

Photograph 5: The Cellar (page 107)

40 years ago the brewery was using both oak and aluminium casks.

Photographs 6 : The Tunnel entrance (page 108)

Building specifications drawn up by the builders Alfred Groves of Milton under Wychwood for additions to the 'new' malt house in March 1894 included the provision for the construction of a tunnel at an estimated total cost of £1,180.

Contemporary plans show the tunnel to be four feet six inches wide, the side walls five feet high with the headroom being five feet nine inches. The floor was to be paved in 'best pressed Blue Bricks' and the arch over the tunnel was to be 'turned [with] 3 rings of seconds blue set in cement'. These were to be alternatively red and blue with a keystone at the centre of the arch.

Photograph 7. The Tunnel, looking into the main cellar. (page 109)

The photograph shows the view from the end of the tunnel looking towards the main cellar. The rails are used to help guide the barrel through the tunnel. There is a short sequence in the film *24 Square Miles* (1946)² of Bill Clarke rolling a barrel out of the tunnel into the cellar.

Photograph 8: The Bottling Plant - The Pasteuriser (page 110)

One of the first decisions made after the Gilchrist family joined the Company in 1951, was to convert part of John Harris's old malt house into a bottling plant. It took a period of about 18 months to fully equip the new facility, with new pieces of equipment regularly being added.

The photograph shows the pasteurising unit, installed in May 1961 and bought from the Uxbridge Brewery for £420. The bottles were loaded into wire cages on trolleys and then wheeled into the pasteurising unit. When full, the door was closed and the bottles pasteurised. Once removed the bottles were transferred into crates.

Photograph 9: Conditioning Tanks (page 111)

These conditioning tanks were part of the bottling plant installed in the early 1950s. They were used to hold, chill and carbonate the beer before filtering and bottling. Each had a capacity of ten barrels. The smaller piece of equipment in the foreground is thought to be a filter.

They were located in the base of the old kiln which linked the two old maltings.

Notes

1. The third and fifth generations of the family involved with the brewery.
2. Available on DVD. '40s Britain.PDC 4003.

















