

## HIGSONS BREWERY LIMITED: 1780 -1980

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### Early days

#### *Preface*

The history of a business is different from that of a family in one very important respect. In tracing the origins of a family, one is concerned with the pursuit of blood relationships. A business, however, may be bought and sold a number of times in the, course of its life, its owners in 1980 having no family connection with the people who started the concern. The story of Higson's is the history of a business in Liverpool; its beginnings and progress, the people who have been involved with it, its trade and pubs, and the firm's place in the life of Liverpool.

#### *The early brewing industry in Liverpool*

In the Middle Ages, when ale and beer were the main beverage, home-brewing was probably fairly common. Liverpool then was a small fishing village, its port being subordinate to Chester, and its commerce and industry were on a very small scale compared with today's. There is mention of brewers (*braciatores*) in the Court Rolls for Liverpool and West Derby for 1324-25, when four people were fined 4d. each for illegal brewing. In the Poll Tax returns for 1379, a number of inhabitants had brewing as their occupation. They may have been in business on their own as ale house keepers brewing for themselves and some may have been brewers for the larger households, such as the Crosses of Cross Hall. Brewing and baking were strictly controlled in the Middle Ages under the Assizes of Bread and Ale. These were a medieval form of consumer protection as well as guarding against tax evasion on the products.

Alefounders were appointed locally to ensure that the regulations as to quality were kept.

#### The Eighteenth Century

By the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Liverpool had increased in population and the built-up area was growing steadily. The town was becoming a prosperous, commercial centre, following the decline of Chester as a port and the expansion of England's international trade. In the town, counting houses, warehouses, manufactories, taverns and shops jostled one another, the pattern interlaced with gentlemen's or burgesses' town houses, and weavers' or cowmen's cottages. New industries, such as brick-making and sugar refining, had come to Liverpool and the local pottery industry was to reach its peak in this century. Watch making, printing, and file making were practiced in the town; there were surgeons and milliners, lawyers and book keepers, sailors and chandlers, merchants and builders. There were also several banks to meet the needs of the commercial firms and many small industries. Beyond the streets lay the Town Fields. As the town grew the new streets were generally called after the owners of the strips of land on which they were built. It is against this background of a small, noisy, rough, commercially and civically self-conscious town, interwoven with a rural element, that the foundation took place of what was to be known as Higson's Brewery Limited.

#### *Liverpool brewing - the retail trade*

The increasing population of Liverpool and the activity of its port provided a steady market for wines, spirits, ale and beer by the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century. Traditionally, there

were three types of retail outlet; ale houses, where beer and ale were brewed and sold on the premises, taverns, where wine also was sold, and inns, which provided food and accommodation. Nicholas Blundell, the Squire of Little Crosby, writing in the first quarter of the century, mentions a number of Liverpool inns and taverns in his *Diary*. The Woolpack was one of his regular haunts, where he dined with his lawyer, the Crown in Water Street is mentioned, and the Golden Fleece ‘... where I treated them with Perry’. When John Gore began printing his Liverpool *Directories* in 1766, there were several hundred people in the town connected, in various degrees, with the drink-trade; brewers, wine and spirits merchants, beer and ale dealers, liquor sellers, victuallers, inn-keepers and taverners. Small breweries and distilleries tended to be dotted around the town - in the 1760-70s, there were three breweries in Harrington Street alone. Towards the end of the century, the surgeon, William Moss, in his *Liverpool Guide*, refers to the public breweries (as opposed to brewing victuallers) as about 40 in number and the ale as being of ‘indifferent quality’.

#### *Developments in the industry*

The closing years of the 18<sup>th</sup> century saw the emergence of the brewing industry as something of an applied science. Two leading elements in this were the introduction of the hydrometer (and its offspring, the saccharometer) and the application of steam power in breweries. The hydrometer measured the specific gravity of ‘a length’ of beer ‘drawn’, the saccharometer permitted the evaluation of malt and beer in relation to the raw materials. Liverpool had its part in the field of innovation; a firm of instrument makers in Mount Pleasant put forward a design for a hydrometer to the Board of Excise in 1802, and, in 1795, Taylor’s of Liverpool ordered one of James Watt’s stationary steam engines for their brewery. As Liverpool’s population increased and building spread outwards, more breweries were established in the new communities; this trend becomes very evident in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Probably one factor which protected the small, local brewery for so long was the absence of significant innovation in short-distance transport facilities; even at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the method of transit for beer from the brewery to the public house was essentially the same as in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

#### *Liverpool breweries*

On the map of Liverpool for 1803, at least 13 breweries appear north and north-east of Dale Street. Among those shown are Turnough’s in Cheapside and Orme’s in Smithfield Street. Not listed on the map is Fairclough & Harvey in Cheapside; it is, however, with the Harvey family that Higson’s Brewery Ltd. has its origin.

#### **The Harveys**

William Harvey is shown as a brewer at 64 Dale Street in *Gore’s Directory* for 1781 - this means that he was there in 1780. An interesting, but unpublished, little book by W. Heaton Wakefield, written in 1931/32, suggests that William Harvey’s brewery was behind the Golden Fleece coaching inn on Dale Street. Since the inn was numbered 6 and the brewery was 64 Dale Street, this surmise seems shaky. Like many brewers of that time, William Harvey was then a part-time brewer, and was a builder and bricklayer by trade. His career illustrates the high degree of social mobility of the age.

The Harvey family with which this history is concerned appear on the Liverpool scene around the start of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. William Harvey, brewer, seems to have been called after his grandfather, his father being Thomas, a bricklayer and builder. William’s mother was named Margaret. The family were firmly Protestant and William was born around December, 1755. He was christened at the Unitarian Chapel in Key or Kay Street, Liverpool. The family then lived in Lawton Street, running between Ranelagh Street and Renshaw Street, behind where Lewis’s store now stands. The bend leading to Ranelagh Street is Fairclough Street. Henry Fairclough was also in the building trade, being a plasterer and slater, and is listed as of 44 Ranelagh Street in the 1777 *Directory*. On the 1709 map of Liverpool, a brewery is shown in this street (Lawton/Fairclough Street) and the Harvey/Fairclough experiment with brewing may go back even before 1780.

William seems to have been named after his uncle; a William Harvey, bricklayer, of Liverpool is mentioned in the grants of Administration for Wills in 1771. Thomas died about 1774/75, Letters of Administration being granted in 1775, and William, as the eldest son, seems to have taken over the business. He does not



Figure 1. A 1911 postcard showing the Robert Cain brewery, Stanhope Street, purchased by Hignons in 1923. Courtesy of Lynn Pearson.

appear as brewer, after 1781, until 1805 in the *Directories*. The Harvey family included at least eight children, six of them male. It was the youngest son, Enoch, who is listed in *Gore*, in 1796, under the firm of Fairclough & Harvey, Brewers, 60 Cheapside. It seems likely that after his solitary appearance as brewer in the 1781 *Directory*, brewing, for William, became a sideline, he appeared only under his main trade - builder. However, he probably took young Enoch on at the Dale Street brewery. Then, when he was of a suitable age and experience, Enoch started his own business in co-partnership with Fairclough, whose family were neighbours and in the same business as the Harveys. The indication is that Enoch separated from William about 1795 and established the Cheapside business as a brewer by trade. The Fairclough connection ceased about 1804 and the capital withdrawal seems to have been remedied by William joining Enoch as co-partner. Two of the other brothers, James, a cooper by trade with a cooperage in Argyle Street, off Paradise Street, and Samuel, a tallow chandler and soap boiler, had taken up residence with Enoch in Cheapside. In the 1805 *Gore*, William, Enoch

and James are shown as residing at 56 Cheapside, the brewery being number 55 (next door); Samuel lived on the other side of them at 57 on his business premises. Picton in his *Memorials of Liverpool* mentions that William and Enoch established a brewery on an extensive scale. Their Cheapside brewery was probably built by William; the Harveys' building business seems to have been one of the biggest in Liverpool, and William's lime-kilns gave Lime Street its name (formerly Lime-kiln Lane) according to Picton.

William's mother still seems to have been alive in 1790 and her address was 41 Ranelagh Street. From the 1790s to the early 1800s, the brothers are shown as residing at 53 Renshaw Street, probably between the mother's death and the completion of all the Harveys' Cheapside premises. In 1790, William's home was shown as in Lime-kiln Lane, together with his brother John, a hatter with business premises in Castle Street and Ranelagh Street. John pre-deceased William, who seems to have had a special affection for him and his children, judging by his will. The Harveys were a very closely-knit fami-

ly and the business activities of the brothers in Cheapside were not as disparate as might appear at first sight. Both brewing and tallow-chandlers required casks which James, the cooper in the family, could provide. This was very important when a substantial amount of a brewer's (or tallow-chandler's) capital could be tied up in cask requirements. The ability to supply one another's needs from within the family circle suggests a constant circulation of money among the brothers; capital outlay on casks would flow from the brewers and Samuel to James whose business would be the constant link between the other two. A lull in demand for brewers' casks might be offset by a rise in demand for tallow casks. In an age when barter played a significant role in trade, and Liverpool's foreign trade was expanding, beer might be exported with payment received in staves or tallow. This is surmise for the Harveys but a strong barter traffic was carried on by John Walker Wilson of Burton with the Baltic. The tight unity of the Harvey brothers would make similar business operations feasible, especially in the early years of the business.

#### *The Harvey era: an age change*

The Harvey involvement in brewing lasted from 1780 until about 1846. This period was very important for the nation as a whole, running, roughly, from a Britain in the birth-pangs of the Industrial Revolution to a Britain at the height of its prosperity, as 'the Workshop of the World'. The port of Liverpool also flourished in this period, especially with the rise of the Lancashire cotton industry. Irish immigration added substantially to the population, the Town Fields gradually disappeared under bricks and mortar, and the surrounding townships became dormitory suburbs. It was the age of the entrepreneur; concentration of population in towns, the growth of the banking system, the new emphasis on the applied sciences and the relative absence of social legislation - all favoured the man of vision seeking a handsome profit.

In the brewing industry, the application of scientific knowledge to the brewing process and the wider dispersal of particular products, such as Bass and Guinness, which the introduction of a national railway network eventually allowed, meant, within limitations, that the local breweries were faced with outside competition. Tastes became less by the local firms parochial.

Changing conditions could be met by the local firms in two ways; firstly, by agency agreements with the larger concerns for the local sale of 'national' products and, secondly, by a greater attention to a variety of brews and to quality on the part of the smaller brewery. An advertisement in the *Liverpool Mercury*, 23 March 1838, reads as follows:

A person in the practice of brewing Ales on the Scotch and English systems, and Porter, Stout and Double Stout on the London and Dublin systems, would take an engagement on a moderate salary in a respectable Brewery in Liverpool.

Over the period 1780 - 1850, many small breweries rose and fell in Liverpool as the new, industrial economy became more complex. In the competitive atmosphere of the age, however, long-term survival tends to be the best guide to a firm's efficiency in the absence of records.

#### *The Harvey business*

Apart from the long duration of the Harveys' involvement in brewing - over 60 years - and Picton's reference to 'a brewery on an extensive scale', the only guide to the prosperity of the business is the wills of the Harveys engaged in brewing, together with the family's rise to social prominence. It is possible that the brewery declined in prominence among Liverpool breweries as the 19<sup>th</sup> century went on. In some instances, brewers, having made a comfortable and fairly rapid profit from the business transferred their main interest to property, and William Harvey held substantial properties in and outside Liverpool. However, the brewery was still a going concern when he died in 1838. His will was proved at under £50,000 and he bequeathed, among other provisions, £500 each to the children of his sister, Margaret, and to the children of his brother, Samuel. Each seems to have had seven children. He left the brewery, house and warehouse in Cheapside to his brother, Enoch, together with his share; as co-partner, of any debts due from publicans or others. To his nephew, Robert Ellison Harvey, he left his interest in the '...Vats Pans Boilers Cisterns Casks Brewing Utensils and Implements' and 'Ale Beer Porter and other Liquors stock in trade and effects'. William's property on which the brewery was built extended from Cheapside to Hatton Garden, all of which passed to the Post-Master

General in 1913/1914. William Harvey's Walton residence seems to have been on the corner of Orrell Lane and Rice Lane, where a church now stands. William owned the land on which the Black Bull now stands and also properties in Aintree and Melling.

As well as their trade with publicans, the Harveys may have dealt with the beer-shop keepers in the 1830s - 1840s. They may not have been wine and spirit merchants, since their description in *Baines's* 1824 directory shows them as 'Ale and Porter dealers' only. 'Other Liquors' in William's will may refer to 'foreign' ales or Stout. Probably they had a good class of trade with private customers in and around the town; professional and the new commercial households, with large families, servants living-in and a certain amount of entertaining to be done. There may have been some ships stores trade or exports.

#### *The brewery*

Nothing is known about the Harvey brewery at 64 Dale Street, apart from the reference to it in *Gore*; the origin of the sketch of it is uncertain. It may be a detail from Herdman. The Cheapside Brewery stood from its probable construction by William Harvey around the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century until about 1914/15, when it was demolished to make way for the new Post Office sorting complex. Picton seems to be wrong describing it as having been 'swept away' and it remained in the hands of R.E. Harvey's executors until 1913. Here were brewed Liverpool's famous 'Cheapside Ales' and on when it was built, it was probably one of the largest breweries in Liverpool. However, the scale of brewery operations developed in Britain in the 19<sup>th</sup> century while the Harvey's business probably remained fairly static from the 1830s. Certainly the early records of Daniel Higson Limited give no indication of the firms being more than a moderately sized local one. Conversely, in relation to the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, one writer states: 'Liverpool, like London and Norwich, was dominated by big brewers ...'. There are no details of the number of employees at the brewery, but Clapham states that 30 or 40 men could work a very considerable brewery of the old type. If the brewery employed that many in 1851 then the firm would be classed as the third largest type of brewing concern in England and Wales. Most breweries at that time employed less than ten men.

A possibly unreliable article in *The Century's Progress*, 1892, mentions upwards of 40 hands being employed there. However, the scale of operations remains in the realm of conjecture.

#### *More about the Harveys*

Neither William nor Enoch Harvey married. Robert Ellison Harvey, their nephew, took over the business after Enoch's death in 1843. He had a varied career, first appearing as a broker, then sugar refiner, merchant, brewer and gentleman, residing at Walton Priory near where Anfield Cemetery now stands. He was born about 1790 and is buried in the graveyard of Walton Parish Church. He seems to have been the son of William's younger brother, Thomas, and Ann Ellison. James Harvey, the cooper, seems also not to have married. Samuel, tallow chandler and soap boiler has been mentioned; his residence was also in Walton-Aintree, almost opposite the Black Bull. Tallow chandling and soap boiling were not unheard of in connection with other brewers. In Thomas Greenall's partnership of 1786, one member, Thomas Lyon, was head of his family's soap boiling business; at Bath, Samuel and John Palmer ran a tallow-chandler's business, a factory processing whale-blubber and a brewery in the late 18<sup>th</sup>/early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The Harveys were an interesting and remarkable family. Their principal object seems to have been to accumulate sufficient wealth from their respective trades to retire as gentlemen. In this aim, they were singularly successful.

The family seem to have been connected with the Unitarians, an offshoot of the Presbyterians, since the early 18<sup>th</sup> century. First mentioned is William Harvey, bricklayer, father to Alice, Ann and Mary, in the baptismal registers for Kay (or Key) Street Chapel. He was probably the father of Thomas Harvey, though the latter's baptism is not recorded. This Thomas was the father of William and Enoch, brewers. The Harveys' social circle seems to have been very much centred on the Unitarian Congregation and they were closely connected with the Renshaw Street Chapel from its beginnings in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The congregation included many of the leading names in 19<sup>th</sup> century Liverpool - William Roscoe, the Rathbones, Gladstones, Holts, Heywoods, Mathers, Ellisons and Jevonses. The Harveys inter-married with the Mathers, Ellisons and



Figure 2. The Stanhope Street brewery. Photo: Lynn Pearson.

Broadbents. Enoch Harvey's servant, Mary Baines, sang in the chapel choir. The congregation, including as it did the leading merchant and business families in the town, would provide an excellent social connection for an ambitious and industrious family such as the Harveys. The origins of this family are obscure, but it may have been a Protestant refugee family from the continent in the 1700s. Alternatively, the Harveys may have come from central or eastern Lancashire. The obituary of James Eugene Harvey, Timber Broker, died 1911, refers to him as of a family which had 'resided in Liverpool since 1702'.

The Harveys were not interested only in business success. They played an active part in the Renshaw Street Congregation, being represented on various committees; Robert Ellison Harvey was president of the Liverpool Domestic Mission Society in 1846. Apart from their involvement with the Congregation, however, or, perhaps, because of it, the Harveys were very active in Liverpool politics. As would be expected, they

were known as keen supporters of the Liberal cause. In the Parliamentary election of 1806, Picton reports that 'the five brothers gave each a plumper for the Liberal candidate' (a plumper meant coming down firmly for one candidate only). Two of the brothers were behind the nomination of Dr Crompton and Mr Leyland, the Liberal candidates, in 1820; Dr Crompton as a partner in a brewing business. Robert Ellison Harvey maintained the family tradition. With William Rathbone he played a leading part in getting the Municipal Reform Bill of 1835 through Parliament, campaigning vigorously with Rathbone against the vested interests opposing it. Eleanor Rathbone, in *William Rathbone; a memoir*, mentions how the two men spent a large part of each Parliamentary session in London to achieve their goal. After the Bill had become law, the two men received '... services of plate in commemoration of their labours' from their fellow-townsmen.

Among later Harveys to earn distinction was Enoch Harvey, a solicitor, born in 1827. He was the son of



Figure 3. The Stanhope Street brewery. Photo: Lynn Pearson.

Thomas Harvey, also a solicitor, whose uncles were William and Enoch, brewers. Enoch Harvey, solicitor, attended R.E. Harvey's funeral at Walton in 1858. Both Thomas and Enoch seem to have been Presidents of the Liverpool Law Society; both were active in the Renshaw Street Chapel and Enoch was Secretary and Law Clerk to the Burial Board of Anfield Cemetery. He was a Commissioner for Taking Bail in Admiralty and a Commissioner in Chancery. He was solicitor to the Bank of Liverpool (formerly Heywood's, later Martin's). At the time of his death in 1890, his firm was Harvey, Alsop, Stevens and Harvey, which is now represented by Alsop, Stevens, Bateson in India Buildings. Enoch seems to have been the source of their maritime law connection.

Robert Ellison Harvey's mother, Ann, was an Ellison. His sister, Margaret married into the Kearsley family who came from the Manchester area. R.E. Harvey and his wife, Margaret, seem to have left no children and Robert sold the brewing business, but not the premises,

about 1845/46. The property finally vested in Major Robert Wilson Kearsley, as his executor, who disposed of it to the Post Master General. It is interesting to note that the firm of solicitors which handled William Harvey's affairs, and those of various other members of the family, is still in existence in Liverpool - Laces - though with no partners of the original family.

#### *Thomas Howard*

Robert Ellison Harvey seems to have married into his mother's family, the Ellisons, as Miss Mary Ellison is mentioned in his will as his sister-in-law. He and his wife, Margaret, were childless and his estate, including the Cheapside Brewery, passed to his nephew, Edward Tertius Kearsley (later knighted), subject to provisions for his widow and nieces. In 1845, R.E. Harvey would be in his mid-50s, however, possessed of substantial wealth from his various business interests and without an heir. He then ceased brewing and leased the brewery

premises to Thomas Howard. This would be in 1845/46 - T. Howard appears as brewer and wine and spirit merchant at 30 Cheapside in the 1847 *Directory*.

Howard was the product of an old Liverpool family, long involved in the brewing and retail trade and, like the Harveys, with its roots in the Unitarian Congregation of Kay Street chapel. The registers for 1734 show the baptisms of John and Thurstan, sons of John Howard, brewer. He lived in the Edmund Street - Lumber Street area, which adjoined Kay Street. It was probably his grandson, John, who appeared in the 1824 *Directory* as a brewer, living in Bond Street, off Vauxhall Road. For 1834, he is shown at Boundary Place, off London Road; the family seem to have had interests in both districts. Thomas Howard, Victualler, possibly a brother of John, also occurs in the 1824 *Directory* at The Square & Compass, 61 New Scotland Road. The early private ledgers of Mellor's, Higsons' subsidiary, show Thomas Howard in Scotland Road in the lists of debtors at this period. By 1841, he was being described as a wines and spirits merchant and brewer in Cunliffe Street, the brewery being at 27 Cunliffe Street. For a brief period in the 1830s, he seems to have been in business as Howard & Joplin, Brewers. Cunliffe Street (now Cunliffe Place) is next to Cheapside.

Whether Howard purchased the Harvey business - its trade debts and goodwill - or merely took a bare lease on the brewery as a brewer with an expanding trade of his own is not clear. Only a thorough investigation of the newspapers for 1845-6 would indicate the position. I am inclined to accept the termination of the Harvey business by R.E. Harvey, with a bare lease of the premises to Thomas Howard. Certainly, when Daniel Higson Ltd. had to vacate the brewery in 1914, the utensils and equipment belonged to the firm, not to the lessor. This reduces the link between the Harvey and Howard business to one of bricks-and-mortar succession.

The Census return for 1851 does not give details of the number of employees at the brewery. Thomas Howard's nephew, Thomas, is shown as clerk to wine merchant and living on the premises. He was born at Ormskirk. A housekeeper and servant are also recorded, both from Cumberland. Howard himself did not live on the premises; later, he is shown as residing at Field House, Wellington Road, Oxtou, Wirral. The picture which

emerges of him is that of a man from a brewing family who has concentrated on the retailing side of the trade and the development of a wines and spirits business. He may have been a brewer-victualler who wished to become a common-brewer and take advantage of the beer-shop trade.

### *Daniel Higson*

Although Howard remains somewhat obscure, one thing which he did do is certain. He engaged a young bookkeeper named Daniel Higson as his cashier and office manager. The origins of Daniel Higson are not clear. A surviving member of the family knows little of him and the baptismal registers which have been examined show no record of him. He was born in 1830 and may have been the son of William Higson. Daniel's elder brother was named William Birch Higson. This William Higson was the second generation of a prosperous Liverpool family engaged in the merchandising of wines and spirits, as well as dealing in porter and ales. They lived in the Bedford Street - Upper Duke Street area and had warehouses down at Canning Place and, later, in Hanover Street. Daniel is said to have been employed by Bartlett's Brewery before he was acquired by Howard, but this may be a fanciful surmise based on the proximity of Howard's London Road premises to Bartlett's Brewery.

Howard is said to have been married but his will suggests otherwise. In 1865, he visited Harrogate, presumably to take the waters, and died there. Immediately before his death, he revoked all former wills and drafted a new one in favour of '... my Manager and Cashier, Daniel Higson of Liverpool ...' to whom he left his entire personal estate and effects. Thus did the Cheapside Brewery become associated with the name of Higson.

### **The Higsons and the business**

Daniel Higson took over the business of Thomas Howard as Executor. The executorship closed in 1875 and, in 1888, the firm was registered as a limited private company, Daniel Higson Limited. This title lasted until the winding up of the company in 1937 to create Higson's Brewery Ltd.

The year 1830 was important for the brewing industry in England. Firstly, the heavy duty on beer was replaced (until 1880) by a tax on the malt used. Secondly, the system of restricting the retail sale of beer for consumption on the premises to public houses only was abolished. Restrictive licensing did not return until 1870. The result was the rise of beer shops, especially, in the larger towns after the 1830 legislation and an increase in the number of brewers, generally, in the towns. In Manchester, the most noticeable feature was the great increase in the number of Brewer-Victuallers. However, in Liverpool, they declined. In Liverpool, like London, the Common Brewer was dominant. The following table indicates the trends.

		Common brewers	Brewing victuallers
Liverpool	1824/5	64	48
Manchester		26	624
	1831/2	56	36
		29	619
	1840	74	20
		84	1,002
	1850	88	24
		99	956
	1860	73	19
		?	?
	1870	80	8
		102	161
	1880	70	9
		94	84
	1890	39	4
		64	12

Table 1. Number of brewers in Liverpool and Manchester, 1825 - 1890.

Public house licenses were granted by the Licensing Justices at the Brewster Sessions. Beer houses required only an Excise Certificate between 1830 and 1870. In 1854, the Select Committee on Public Houses found that licenses were readily granted in Liverpool, but in Manchester the increase in public houses had been rigidly restrained. The Report gives the number of pubs in Liverpool as 1,450 as well as 1,000 beer shops. The *Brewers' Journal* in 1875 mentions a figure of 2,253 as the number of licensed houses in Liverpool - an apparent decrease since 1854. Liverpool again was unusual because of its tied trade. Robertson Gladstone told the 1854 Select Committee '... that the brewers of Liverpool have become possessed of a vast number of licences in their own hands'. J. Wybergh told the Committee that the number of Free-Houses in Liverpool was not great. In 1890, Liverpool had 1,297 licences concentrated in the hands of 97 persons, Birkenhead 178 in the hands of 17 persons. In Liverpool, Peter Walker & Son Ltd. held 143, Daniel Higson Ltd. only 16 (as owners of premises) and in Birkenhead, The Birkenhead Brewery Co. Ltd. held 42 licences as owners, Higsons held 15.

The *Brewers' Guardian* in 1874 noted that the number of spirit houses was much greater in Liverpool than Manchester. A picture of the Liverpool drinking scene in 1875 occurs in the following statement. 'These gin-palaces, with their flaming barrel-lamps and other external decorations, are in some respects peculiar to the port'. This was the year when Liverpool licensed victuallers stopped serving beer and porter in jugs. Liverpool pubs were notable for 'the long pull'.

*Brewers and retail trade nationally, 1870 - 1914*

Thus was the Liverpool brewing scene between 1830 and 1870. From 1870 to 1914, the national trend was towards a contraction in the number of brewers, an increase in the size of firms through property acquisitions and, from 1886, a rise in the number of breweries as public companies. The number of public houses in towns tended to decline, despite increasing population leading to the growth of towns; the Temperance movement was influential, often, at a local level. From the

1890s there was a falling trend in beer consumption which was reinforced by the general economic conditions of the 1890s and early 1900s. After the brewers' bonanza in the property market, many found themselves with too much property, and many pubs were in the worst areas. Refusal to renew licences grew on the part of the Magistrates and a compensation system, based on a levy on the brewers, was introduced in 1904. When the industry was recovering, the First World War started bringing its own problems for brewers and others. All of these matters are reflected to some degree in the history of Daniel Higson Limited.

### **Daniel Higson Limited**

#### *Trade in the early days*

Information about the firm before 1888 when the Minute Books commence is sparse and has to be culled from widely scattered, general sources. In the Liverpool Ale-house registers for 1872/73, Daniel Higson is listed as the owner of Nos. 61 and 63 Beatrice Street, and as licensee of 44 Waterloo Road. In the Birkenhead registers for 1880/01, he is shown as follows.

Owner.

Didston Hill Hotel, Borough Hotel, Star Hotel, Pacific Hotel and Swan Hotel, all Birkenhead.

Beer-house licences.

5 Vittoria Street and 61 Old Chester Road, Birkenhead.

The Crown, Birkenhead, one of the earliest Higson houses, acquired before 1892, bears inside the legend 'D. Higson, Wine & Spirit Merchant, Brewer, Cheapside Brewery, Liverpool'. Daniel Higson may have had a substantial amount of private trade, together with a wide free trade in wines and spirits - he does not seem to have owned many pubs in the pre-1890 period. It was a small firm, in this respect, and bore no comparison with the local 'giants', such as Walkers, Threlfalls, Dents or Birkenhead Brewery. Barrelage is not known before the 1920s, but was probably about the same as Joseph Jones. Even where reported, 19<sup>th</sup> century barrelage figures are notoriously optimistic. Higsons registered office was the Cheapside Brewery in Liverpool; in 1896, their Birkenhead address is given 128 Conway Street (The Crown).



*Figure 4. The Stanhope Street brewery. Photo: Jeff Sechiari.*

#### *Jones's*

Two other small, local 19<sup>th</sup> century breweries which were later to be acquired by Daniel Higson Ltd. under W.E. Corlett may be mentioned here. In Knotty Ash was the firm of Joseph Jones & Co. (Knotty Ash) Ltd. Joseph Jones commenced brewing at Upton, near Birkenhead, before 1867. In 1869, the business was registered as a limited company, and Knotty Ash Ales enjoyed a good reputation in Liverpool and the country around. Like Daniel Higson Ltd., Jones's was a family firm and was bought by W.E. Corlett in the 1920s. It seems to have been very much a country brewery on the rural edge of an expanding town, and the old glass may still be seen in the windows of former Jones pubs. The family were well known in the Knotty Ash - West Derby area, and Joseph Jones junior was on the Board of Guardians. A barrelage of 'one thousand barrels per week' for 1890 in the *Liverpool Courier* seems somewhat high. The brewery buildings still stand, but brewing ceased in 1928/29.

## *Spraggs*

The other brewery was Richard Spraggs's Wallasey Vale Brewery, in Leasowe Road, Seacombe. It was built about 1856 and demolished around 1924. It was acquired from Spraggs by W.E. Corlett in 1919. Spraggs had about seven pubs or inns in Wallasey and the Wirral, some very old.

## *Directors*

The directors of Daniel Higson Ltd. in 1888 were Daniel Higson senior, Chairman, and his sons, John Hewitt Higson, Managing Director, and Daniel Higson junior, Secretary and solicitor to the Company. The capital was £100,000 in 200 Preference shares and 800 Ordinary shares. Daniel Higson senior held 793 of the Ordinaries, the balance being held by his wife and six children. The brewery was not owned by the company, but only leased from the Executors of Robert Ellison Harvey's will, the lease being renewed every seven years, generally.

## *The firm's structure and trade*

In the early Minute Books, the main reference is to property purchases and leases, and the award of contracts for painting and decorating houses. The Liverpool expansion of the firms tied estate appears to have focused on the north-end - Walton, Bootle, Waterloo - though there were acquisitions, such as the Bleak House, Toxteth. Premises on Mann Island were leased from the Mersey Docks and Harbour until the early 1900s.

An employee whose name becomes prominent in the early Minutes was W.E.P. Dinn. In 1889 he was given power of attorney by the company to deal with licensing matters in Cheshire. Later, he appears as outdoor manager. A George Dinn is shown as licensee of Daniel Higson's Beatrice Street premises in 1872/3 and was most likely W.E.P. Dinn's father.

References to suppliers of raw materials and other goods occur. In 1891, forward malt contracts were made with J. Thomas of Oswestry, and F. & B. Smith Ltd. The first was for 2,500 quarters at 39/- per Imperial Quarter

delivered Liverpool; the second was for 1,000 quarters at the same price. In 1897, there is a note about a contract with the Liverpool Mineral Water Company for aerated waters to be supplied over three years.

## *Impact of the Temperance Movement*

The last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century saw the advance of the Temperance movement. The national body was the United Kingdom Alliance and there was a vocal Temperance pressure group in the Liberal Party. While legislation by the first Gladstone administration had been milder than the Alliance desired, it had been too much for the brewers. After Bruce's Licensing Bill got through Parliament in 1872, the brewing interest in Parliament tended to transfer its support from the Liberals to the Conservative Party. The 1872 Act provided for the closure of public houses in areas too generously supplied with these establishments, and the limitation of opening hours. Previously the main restriction on opening hours had applied to the time of Divine Worship on Sundays. The most effective activity of the Temperance movement was at local level. In Liverpool, a map was drawn up in 1875 by the Liverpool Permissive Bill Association displaying the areas most congested with public houses in four sectors of the town. In Birkenhead, the Vigilance Committee was set-up in 1899 and their Minute Books make interesting reading. Several clergy were leading members of the group, and the Committees solicitor was able to advise on how best members could bring pressure to on the authorities through the legal framework. Drink-maps were distributed, premises were visited and possible prosecution opportunities noted; M.P.s and councillors were lobbied, and examinations of share ownership in breweries by local worthies were undertaken. Such associations, whilst not universally popular, were knowledgeable and very effective at times. Their members were frequently prominent citizens and their voice could not be ignored too much by ambitious Chief Constables.

As public houses were increasingly closed because the renewal of the licence was refused on 'redundancy' grounds, the plight of many brewers worsened. A.J. Balfour, who became Prime Minister in July 1902, was Member for East Manchester, a seat which was reputed to be in the gift of certain local breweries, and the chair-

man of the committee is said by one historian, to have been 'the leading representative of the liquor trade in the public life of Manchester'. Balfour's Licensing Act of 1904 embodied the principle of compensation for closures.

By 1900, the Victorian age was drawing to a close. Daniel Higson's business life had almost spanned that era. Although he seems to have continued as Chairman until August 1911, the influence of his sons, John Hewitt Higson, Daniel, Howard and William Timpron Higson is increasingly obvious. The years preceding 1900 had seen the clusters of small public houses owned or leased by Higson's in areas such as Everton or Walton. The new reign and the following one were to see many of these closed.

The first Higson's houses to be closed under the 1904 Act seem to have been the Beatrice Street and Towson Street premises. Compensation for the licences was £1,175 and £1,187 respectively, the manager of the first being awarded £25, the tenant of the second, £115. The Birkenhead houses were predominantly tenant houses and there was opposition from the Licensing Bench towards plans to turn the houses into managed houses. The Liverpool houses were normally managed, but the Wallasey Bench favoured the tenanted house system, probably because it gave the licensee greater security. By now the licence was in the name of the publican, not the brewer as earlier. Higson's decided to give notices to quit to certain tenants to counter any opposition to the changeover to managed houses from the Magistrates. This scheme, understandably, raised certain problems with reluctant tenants. Trade was poor and there was no Social Security system. For an older man or widow employment would be difficult to obtain. In some cases, former tenants became managers but, generally, the post went to Head Barmen, 'employees of long service with the Company ...' as the Minutes record. There was difficulty over the renewal of the Clarendon Hotel's licence. The Crown and Cushion in Market Street, Birkenhead, appears on the Vigilance Committee's black list in the early 1900s. In Liverpool, a Minute of 1906 indicates the uneasy relationship between brewers and Bench at this period: it was expected that 'in view of the present feeling of the Licensing Magistrates ... some of the Company's houses would be referred for compensation'. The Wynnasty Arms, Hibbert Street, and the Nelson Vaults, Regent Road, were closed under the 1904 Act.

In some cases, the trade recession helped the change over to the managed system. In 1909, the tenant of the Crown, Birkenhead, wished to surrender the tenancy '... owing to the depression of business and the proposed change in the cost of licences ...'. He was made a manager elsewhere. The tenant of the Sandhills Hotel, Liverpool, sought a reduction of his rent for one year because trade was bad; it was agreed. Liberal social legislation reduced profits. The Minutes of 1907 record that £100 was transferred to the Suspense Account 'against claims and contingencies under the Workmen's Compensation Act of 1906'.

The accounting year for the firm had been changed in 1902 from year-ending 31 December to year-ending 30 September. A 5% dividend was paid on the ordinary shares for the last half-year, but there seems to be no further mention of ordinary dividends after this up to the War in 1914. Repairs and alterations to property continued, and electric light was installed in some houses. Once, Daniel Higson junior complained of the shabby appearance of some of their Wallasey houses. A bright moment was provided by the Coronation festivities for King George V; in Wallasey, £30 was spent on pub decoration, and £40 on three houses in Birkenhead.

From September 1911, until September 1912, the Minutes are signed by J.H. Higson as Managing Director. On 19 September 1912, a Special Meeting of the Directors was held. Present were J.H. Higson, Daniel Higson junior, Howard Higson and W.T. Higson. It was resolved that in future there should be an ordinary Directors' Meeting fortnightly, with a quorum of three. J.H. Higson's salary as Managing Director was to be £900 p.a., H. Higson was appointed sub-Managing Director at £300 p.a., and W.T. Higson as cashier received £300 p.a. Employees mentioned are T.H. Williams, Outdoor Manager, who seems to have succeeded W.E.P. Dinn, £400 p.a., C.W. Wright the brewer and married into the Higson family, £200 p.a., and R. Unwin, clerk, 12/6d. per week and dinner money.

The two years up to the outbreak of the War in August, 1914, witnessed a fresh energy in the company's direction as well as a trade revival. There was, however, a certain amount of bickering between the brothers which emerges in the Minutes. J.H. Higson seems to have been cautious and dutiful, but lacking his father's prestige. Howard Higson gives the impression that he felt he was

being unfairly kept down, and may have lacked the temperament for the delicate, but firm, infighting at Board Room level. In 1913 there was a dispute over conveyancing fees for the Brewery to be paid to Pennington and Higson. After an argument about the Taxing of a Bill of Costs, Howard expressed his intention of resigning from the Board and asked D. Higson to notify the shareholders to that effect. In June 1913, he suggested advertising the firms of contractors who had worked on the new brewery, in the public houses. J.H. Higson firmly limited advertising to the firm's own products. Howard was told to seek the advice of Mr. Williams '... who was more experienced than he ...' in such matters. In October he expressed dissatisfaction with the supervision of the bottling stores with no result. In July 1914, however, the provision of the new bottling plant was left to him. Perhaps responsibility came too late.

### *The brewery*

In 1909, the lease on the Cheapside Brewery was renewed for only three years. In 1912, the brewery was sold by Major Robert Wilson Kearsley, the sole surviving executor of R.E. Harvey's will, to the Post Master General and the site was used for Post Office development. A temporary extension of the lease was obtained from the P.M.G. but another brewery was now a matter of some urgency.

The Company's first idea was to inquire about the purchase of the Windsor Brewery in Upper Parliament Street. This belonged to Duncan, Gilmour & Co., a Sheffield firm and brewers of Hop Ales ('non-intoxicating'). The vendors required a higher price than that which Higsons was prepared to pay, and the matter was shelved for the moment. It was next resolved to find a site and construct a brewery; the Minutes for January 1913, record that Mr Alfred Burroughs be asked '... to prepare plans for the erection such as would meet the requirements necessary for the purposes of the Company's business'. Liverpool was preferred to Birkenhead because of the water. In the meantime, negotiations were re-opened with Duncan, Gilmour & Co. and agreement was reached on a purchase of £8,000. An interesting point is that the Upper Parliament Street brewery, like Stanhope Street brewery, had originally been Robert Cain's. The terms of the Contract of Sale were ratified by the Higson Board in

January 1913, and Daniel Higson wrote to that effect to the share holders.

Preparations for removal to the new brewery occupied much of 1913. It was decided to retain the name 'The Cheapside Brewery' for Upper Parliament Street, and a notice board with the title was erected on the premises. Alterations to the buildings were needed, electric power and lighting were installed, and some new plant and equipment purchased. The old plant and machinery from Cheapside was sold to Daniel Flynn & Co., 10 Great Crosshall Street, Liverpool, for £500. The possibility of obtaining a second-hand Non-Deposit plant from Birkenhead Brewery Co. was considered. The telephone number of the new brewery was ROYal 2638.

The Post Office gave the company notice to vacate the Cheapside premises by 31 January 1914, and on that day Daniel Higson Limited moved into its new home.

During 1913/14 the company under the Chairmanship of J.H. Higson started to adjust itself to the trade revival. New ideas were mooted; Daniel Higson junior raised the matter of motor wagons for the company's deliveries. It was resolved '... to ascertain the makes of various motor wagons used by several of the Liverpool brewery firms', an attitude which was common among brewers and particularly dominated price-fixing. It was decided in August of 1913 that a stock taker would be necessary on a full-time basis, and Thomas Leigh was engaged for the position. The Dundee Street and Waterloo Road premises were making a loss; they were to be sold as soon as possible. Possibly the first writ to be issued by a brewer against a Picture Palace Company was issued in connection with the premises adjoining the Stanley, Rice Lane. In 1914 the same pub was the object of a police complaint over inadequate toilet facilities, and the Clarendon, Birkenhead, was singled out for an inside toilet.

The trade improvement was followed by requests for wage increases. The assault was spearheaded by the managers of several houses, then the Coopers' Union moved in with a strike threat; the firm did not pay Union rates. The rates were agreed to with a corresponding withdrawal of informal concessions. Not to be left out, the office staff put their case forward. Robert Unwin's salary was raised to £1 per week, while that of the stock taker, Thomas Leigh, rocketed to £2 per week.



Figure 5. The Stanhope Street brewery. Photo: Jeff Sechiari.

By August 1914 the lamps were going out all over Europe. Howard Higson, perhaps seeking, as many probably did, release from an irksome, frustrating and routine life, enlisted in September. Thomas Leigh, the stock taker, preceded him in August. Both survived the War. A strong commitment to the company by the active directors was impeded by the demise of Daniel Higson senior, on 31 August 1914 at his home, 'Coningsby' Blundellsands. Perhaps the Disraelian overtones of his address symbolise the Victorian entrepreneur, the man who climbed to 'the top of the greasy pole'.

#### *A Liverpool brewer and the Great War*

The First World War had a strong and lasting impact on the brewing industry and the licensed trade in general - for instance, the State Breweries and the afternoon closing period. The Minute Books of Daniel Higson Ltd., as do those of J. Sykes & Co. Ltd., cast light on the problems of the time and the tragedies which war brought. It would seem best to consider both sets of Minutes together in view of the relationship which was forged between the two firms in the latter part of 1918.

A consideration of Higson's fortunes in the 1914 - 1918 period involves two events. Firstly, there is the social history of the time which the Minutes illustrate. Secondly, there is the sale of the company to W.E. Corlett. The impact of the War on each company dif-

fered, because their nature, composition and history were different. Sykes's was a new, vigorous company, Higson's was a 19<sup>th</sup> century family concern, gradually getting to grips with the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Both companies had problems, accentuated by the War; Sykes's had many public houses, widely dispersed, and no brewery of their own. Higson's had their own brewery and a concentration of public houses, but the Board was weakened by internal dissent, and its numbers reduced by the departure of Howard Higson in 1914 then, in 1916, by the death of J.H. Higson through illness.

War came at the height of the holiday season; enlistment was encouraged, especially by Sykes's, an attitude which was to change somewhat as the War dragged wearily on through the mud of the Somme, and staff and materials shortages became acute.

Far from being resisted, Howard Higson's departure was met manfully by his brother, W.T. Higson, who intimated that if the resignation were not accepted, 'he, personally, would resign'. The stock taker's enlistment created more practical difficulties as a replacement was difficult to find, despite inflated wages as the War ground on.

The Minutes for Sykes are, in some ways, richer in social material than those of Higson. The manager of the Coach & Horses, Wolverhampton, was one of the first employees to answer the Call to the Colours. In December 1914, J.A. Sherry, the Outdoor Manager, enlisted and was later mortally wounded. J.S. Sykes, assistant company secretary, joined up in 1915, possibly as a reaction to a rejected claim for a pay increase. In 1917, a letter was received by the Board from Black, a former employee, now at the front, expressing gratitude for 'the treatment meted to his wife by the firm, and on his return, he hoped to show his gratitude'. Perhaps the saddest case is that of A. Thurlow, whose brief career from office boy in 1913, at 5/- per week, to 35/- per week clerk can be traced in the Minute Books; he was called up in 1918 and reported killed in August of that year. By this time, however, the desire to win glory in battle had declined. After conscription was introduced and the daily casualty lists had become a gloomy part of ordinary life, appeals by employees for exemption were normal. For the Boards of both companies, war created many problems of which staff shortages were only one. Hops, malt and sugar were

hard to obtain and prices were up, inferior materials and substitutes were used in part of the brewing process at Higsons. Wines and spirits supplies were scarcer and dearer as the War rolled on, and Sykes bought £800 of Canadian whisky in 1916. Beer gravities were reduced by the Government and quantities brewed were curtailed. The mood of Sykes in 1916 lacks that patriotic zeal of 1914. Not all was gloom, however, and the Sykes Minutes of September 1917, recorded welcome news: 'It was reported that we were getting an extra supply of Ales for Lancashire'. The area had been designated an Ale Supply Muniton Area. A further cause of pleasure to Sykes's must have been the news of the arrest of a gentleman, trading as F.A. Porter & Co., Salford, in 1915. He was sentenced to six months hard labour and had obtained whisky from Sykes's, among others, under false pretences.

Both firms decided to keep the jobs open for employees in the Forces, and, in general, the promise was kept. An exception was Higson's pre-war brewer, a relation by marriage to the Higson family. By the time he returned, the shop was under new management. As far as pay for employees serving with the Colours, policy tended to vary over the period and with the employee. In general, service pay was made up to what the man would receive normally, the difference being allowed to his dependents. On Death in Action discretion was also exercised; the mother of J. Rankin, ex-barman, was granted 5/- for three weeks, the widow of James Hartley, Chester (25 years service) received £1 a week for six months. Thurlow's mother was given his pay of three guineas a week for two months, then a final sum of £10.

The initial impact of Government economic policy was felt by the licensed trade in the Emergency Budget of November 1914 and the general price rises which followed. In a country used to a high degree of price stability, and in a trade regarded as highly sensitive to price increases, firms tended to be reluctant to lead with a price increase. Both sets of Minutes reinforce the idea of a strongly oligopolistic element among Liverpool brewers. In 1917, Higsons felt so strongly about the new prices set by the Liverpool Brewers' Association that the firm was ready to reduce its prices unilaterally if the plan were not rejected. The general attitude to price rises, right up to the Second War, was 'see what the rest of them do'.

Direct controls over pub opening times were felt from the beginning. Sykes's Minutes for December 1914 read; 'It is reported that during the Christmas week there will, by order of the Military authorities, be early closing in the Liverpool district of licensed houses'. In 1915, when anti-German feeling was at its height, and many people suspected of German origin had themselves or their property attacked the Minutes record; 'It was reported that, in consequence of recent riots towards Germans, all licensed houses in Liverpool should close at 6pm for the present week'. Mr Streatford, manager of Sykes's Talbot Hotel, Ormskirk, was accused by local people of being German by origin. He published a denial in the local press.

Under Defence of the Realm Act, pubs could remain open in the hours when the sale of intoxicants was forbidden if they wished to sell food and non-alcoholic beverages. Walkers and Bents rejected the idea so Higsons decided it was not worth while trying. Sykes seem to have been attracted to the idea. A Minute reads as follows; 'The matter of supplying the Company's houses with OXO was considered and it was resolved that so long as the OXO is an enemy alien company we must decline to transact business'; (such trading had been forbidden at the start of the War), however 'it was decided that BOVRIL be substituted for OXO'. Another Minute reveals an impressive agreement with the Bovril company whereby Sykes should have '... 20% discount allowed instead of receiving clocks, hair brushes etc...'. Non-alcoholic ales were also tried in Sykes's houses for a time.

Despite the restrictions and shortages, many breweries did not do too badly out of the War, especially in the munitions districts. High wages at home encouraged spending, and scarcity tended to produced highly inflated prices for wines and spirits; an officer returning to the trenches with a few bottles of Scotch would be sure of a welcome.

#### *Higsons: the passing of family control*

As suggested already, Daniel Higson Limited had internal conflicts on the Board, as well, it would seem, as financial difficulties heightened by the War. The decision to sell the business as a going concern had been taken before the death of J.H. Higson in September

1916. There were now only two directors, Daniel Higson junior and W.T. Higson. The factors influencing the Board's decision to sell out were probably partly personal, partly circumstantial. The move to the new brewery was costly, and the War just afterwards was a heavy burden for a weakened Directorate. Daniel and Howard Higson seem to have had the most enthusiasm for the business, in some ways; both were of an innovative turn of mind although they did not always see eye to eye. Both were opposed to the sale, as were other members of the family. John Higson may have been ill for some time before his death, wanting to rid himself of the burden of the company. W.T. Higson seems to have had no strong feelings on the matter, but favoured the sale.

Judgement was given in favour of the sale in the Court of Chancery on 3 November 1916. A Court Order was granted in December. A temporary chairman was appointed, William Crossman Spencer, an accountant, and Louis Nicholas, also an accountant, was appointed director under the Order, with effect from 23 November 1916. The aim was to straighten out the Company's finances and ascertain its properties prior to its sale.

In March 1917 two offers were reported to the Board; Walkers had suggested £80,000 with stocks at valuation, and Allsopps had made a conditional offer in the region of £100,000. An enquiry had also been received from Bremner Sons & Corlett, solicitors. Sykes lacked a brewery, Higsons were selling one. This would also enable Sykes to reduce their dependence on Bass, Ratcliff & Gretton. Probably W.E. Corlett was already friendly with Louis Nicholas when the latter was appointed to the Higson Board. The Sykes Board authorised W.E. Corlett to seek a controlling interest in Higsons at a sum not to exceed £53,000, and he seems to have acquired his first shares in February 1918. In May, a copy of the Balance sheet and Accounts for the previous year was passed in confidence to Bremner Sons & Corlett, and, in June, W.E. Corlett was empowered to purchase all the Higson shares at a sum '... not exceeding £121,800 ...'. They were purchased for £117,000 approximately according to the contract terms in July; the 10% deposit was due in 30 days, and completion of the deal in six weeks.

The Sykes minutes for 23 July 1910 record the appointment to that Board of Louis Nicholas of Higsons. The final price to Sykes of the Higson purchase was

£118,500. The Sykes Board were nominated directors of Daniel Higson Limited, and James Burns of Sykes was appointed company secretary.

The Board meeting of Daniel Higson Ltd. on 8 August 1910 was the last attended by W.T. Higson (Managing Director) and Daniel Higson junior (Secretary). W.E. Corlett and James Burns were present 'by permission of the Directors'. Thus ended another stage in the history of Higsons Brewery.

### **W.E. Corlett and the business**

When William Ernest Corlett bought Daniel Higson Ltd. the end of the First World War was only three months away. Despite the high hopes which the cessation of hostilities raised in many people, the period from 1919 to 1937, when the company, together with Sykes and Joseph Jones, was wound up and its assets used to form a public company, was a time of great difficulty for business in general.

After the boom of 1919-20, there was a general decline in world trade and the British economy, tied as it was to the older staple industries, was particularly hardly hit. The war years had accustomed people at home to high wages, and the stronger Unions were not prepared to surrender ground which they had gained. As the 1920s continued, businesses collapsed and unemployment rose, culminating in the three million unemployed of 1932. Business opportunities decreased because of the falling purchasing power of the population as a whole, a situation which was reinforced by the wage and salary cuts which came into operation, both in the public and private sectors, in 1931. The trend in business was towards rationalisation and concentration - mergers and streamlining. Only with the approach of another war was the economy to revive significantly in the more depressed regions of the country, of which Merseyside was one.

The reasons for the decline in the number of breweries in the U.K. over the inter-war years are complex; probably the traditional vision of the brewing industry as highly price sensitive was over-emphasised; social tastes were changing and there were too many breweries to meet them. There was a trend towards taste-standardisation. Small firms lacked the capital and, often, the

young, vigorous leadership for a new era. Losses in the War for the middle-classes had been high. Many firms were sold because there was no one to take over and to reduce death duties. Some small breweries could not adapt themselves to a new business era. Single-minded determination became necessary for survival in this post-war period, and the reduction of the number of firms within particular industries was encouraged by government policies.

#### *W.E. Corlett takes control*

After the purchase of Daniel Higson Ltd., W.E. Corlett (W.E.C.) emerged as the dominant figure on the Sykes Board. Now that Sykes possessed their own brewery, the time was ripe for W.E.C. to eliminate the Bass interest, together with the Sykes Chairman, F.R. Garrard, and transfer control of the organisation to himself.

The first meeting of Higsons as a subsidiary of Sykes was held on 15 August 1918. In September, W.E.C. had himself appointed Managing Director of Sykes and Higsons, despite the opposition of the Chairman. His allies in this manoeuvre were Louis Nicholas and T.B. Sykes. For the remainder of F.R. Garrard's term as Chairman he faced a steady opposition from the other members of the Board, because he was Bass nominee. The battle was not always dignified. When the Board - F.R. Garrard dissenting - voted to extend the redemption date of the First Mortgage Debentures, the Chairman refused to release the key of the Company seal. Thereupon, '... it was resolved that the lock be broken. Mr. Garrard then produced the key ... .' Afterwards, the rest of the Board decided that F.R. Garrard, who was strategically absent at the next meeting, thus requiring the actual breaking of the lock on the seal, should have no key to the new seal. In the legal wrangle with Bass, Ratcliff & Gretton which followed the Board's decision on Debenture repayments, the Chairman was refused information on share and Debenture to holders. On 7 July 1919, Bass notified the Company of F.R. Garrard's withdrawal as a Director - no doubt this was a relief to the gentleman himself. W.E.C. was immediately appointed Chairman and a letter was sent to F.R. Garrard in appreciation for his services. The Bass argument was settled out of Court, and a bill of costs from Bremner Sons and Corlett for their work in the action was passed by the Board.

#### *The board*

The Directors of the Sykes group in the 1920s were W.E. Corlett (Chairman and Managing Director), Thomas Bailey Sykes (Vice-Chairman), A.J. Parkinson, Louis Nicholas, Roderick Williams and, later, C.F. Price. Frank Sharps was appointed in the 1930s.

W.E.C. was the son of Robert Corlett, a builder, joiner and contractor, who resided first in Kensington and then in Fairfield, both in the 1860s and 1870s respectable districts of artisan and lower middle class dwellings. The family originated in the Isle of Man, and there seems to have been another son, Robert, a joiner like his father. William was born in 1867 and was at school in Conway, North Wales. On leaving school, he took articles in a solicitor's office and was admitted as a solicitor in 1887. He became a partner in the firm of Bremner and Sons, and married into the family.

The picture of W.E.C. which emerges from the Minute books is that of a hard, shrewd man who saw his opportunities and seized them. He appears as a master of collusion and an expert in the use of the apparent concession. When he fought, he fought to win. His handling of the Bass-nominated Chairman, isolating the man from the rest of the Board, shows him at his strategic best. His capacity seemingly to step down on an issue, accepting only part of what he wanted and then, when he had consolidated his forces, moving in and obtaining the rest, is shown at this time and later. On being appointed as Managing Director, he conceded the time stipulation, then, shortly after, complained about his insecurity of tenure. When he guaranteed an overdraft to the Company in 1919/20, he first agreed to 5% of the Company's net profits for the year as his consideration and then, shortly after, expressed his dissatisfaction with the terms. His salary was therefore, raised from £1,000 p.a. to £1,500 as Managing Director, and his share of the profits to 10%.

His grandson, the present Managing Director of Higsons, sees W.E.C. as a man who accumulated his wealth primarily from property, a Liverpool version of Charles Clore. It was his knowledge of the property market, and his grasp of Company Law, which enabled W.E.C. to develop and integrate the Sykes organisation to the stage when the group's assets could be used to float the concern as a public company in 1937. It was his single-minded determination, foresight and ability to get



Figure 6. The Stanhope Street brewery. Photo: Jeff Sechiari.

his own way that ensured the survival and prosperity of the business in the very difficult inter-war period. John Cottam, a former Director and Company Secretary, describes W.E.C. as ‘the making of the Company’.

W.E.C., ‘a businessman of the old school’, as his grandson calls him, worked daily at his solicitor’s office in Dale Street, opposite the old Sykes headquarters. At noon he would march across Dale Street, the policeman on traffic duty halting the flow, and enter his other domain. He would normally lunch on oysters and Guinness while transacting any Sykes/Higsons business by means of telegrams and brief, precise letters. He is remembered as very much an autocrat, with a keen business sense and a Victorian belief in the virtue of hard work. ‘He worked hard and played hard’ says his grandson. W.E.C. was a keen cyclist and mountaineer, and in his earlier days held the Matterhorn record for a period. Time was a commodity to be used, and as if to emphasise its importance all the clocks in the office ran five minutes fast. Something of a legend in business circles during his lifetime, his steam yacht and Daimlers are still remembered by those who knew him. Whilst woe betide any who upset him - he frequently threatened staff with the sack, three of these later becoming Directors - he rewarded those who served him well. John Cottam recalls ‘a slap-up dinner’ given at the North Western Hotel in 1924 when barrellage and Christmas takings exceeded the target set. One of his first acts on becoming Chairman of Sykes and its subsidiary was to raise staff salaries.

The other members of the Board in this period are more shadowy. Roderick Williams was a solicitor and a friend W.E.C. from before the First World War. He was a party to W.E.C.’s appointment as a Director of Sykes in 1912, and the two went cycling and mountain climbing together. Louis Nicholas, who, like Roderick Williams, disappears from the Board in the 1930s, was an accountant and financier; in 1937 he was a director of the London Issuing House involved in the floatation of Higsons. Louis Nicholas and W.E.C. were rivals as well as friends. They lived in large houses opposite each other on Bidston Hill. During the Blitz, Louis Nicholas collected several bombs on the gardens and left the area in disgust. His retreat made W.E.C. all the more determined to stay - at least he’d show that he wasn’t frightened. T.S. Sykes resigned in the early 1930s and A.J. Parkinson, an early member of the Sykes Board, died in 1935. Alfred Lingham Corlett joined the Board in the 1920s, and Norman Bremner Corlett, W.E.C.’s other son, was appointed in the 1930s. Claude Forshaw Price became Secretary to the Company in the 1920s. He was related to Forshaws, the brewers, and married into the Bremner family. He joined the group from Bass, Ratcliff & Gretton because he wanted a smaller company and more challenging environment. He later combined the office of Secretary with that of General Manager, then Managing Director. In the course of time, he became Chairman. Lastly, in the 1930s, Frank Sharps, the Head Brewer was appointed to the Board. During the 1920s, Higsons seem to have had difficulty retaining their brewers, although in some cases they did not resign but were sacked. One man seems to have been as capable as W.E.C. at exploiting his position; when he eventually resigned, his salary was two and a half times more than he started on. Another seems to have done well, though not on so formal a basis. The story goes that, being an expert at Crown and Anchor, on pay nights he would insist on the brewery staff working overtime, beguile them with the intricacies of this game and collect their overtime as his reward. He was sacked.

Frank Sharps, who joined the Company in 1931, represented a return to stability and served as a Director until his death in 1960, the same year in which W.E.C. died. Thus when Higson’s Brewery Ltd. was formed the Directors were W.E.C., A.L. Corlett, N.B. Corlett, C.F. Price and F. Sharps. The 1920s was a period of expansion in terms of property. The acquisitions took three forms; Companies, the brewery and blocks of licensed property.

## *Companies*

Two firms were bought. The Wallasey business of Spraggs was acquired in 1919 and its brewery augmented the supply from the Upper Parliament Street brewery until 1924. Some of the firm's pubs, all in Wellasey or Wirral were retained, some were closed and sold, such as the Jolly Sailor, together with some unlicensed property. A retired employee of Addy's remembers making deliveries from the old mid 19<sup>th</sup> century brewery there. The more important purchase by the Sykes group was that of Joseph Jones & Co. (Knotty Ash) Ltd. 1927. The firm was still a family business and had about 70 licensed houses. These, not the brewery, were the inducement to purchase. Very much a country brewery, the last Jones Minute Book provides a delightful picture of arrangements for the firm's annual picnic in the Lancashire countryside, with an ancient charabanc collecting the staff, together with hampers of tasty food-stuffs and, doubtless, bottles of the locally famous 'Knotty Ash' Ales. Thus pubs like the Wheatsheaf, Prescott Road, and the Broad Green Abbey (now deceased) floated into the Higson net. The Abbey was mentioned in the *Liverpool Daily Post* in 1865 as the Broad Green Abbey Hotel: 'Gentlemen can be accommodated with excellent apartments at moderate charges, in every respect as quiet as a private house, and only one minute's walk from the railway station'. Some Jones' staff were retained by Daniel Higson Ltd., to whom the houses passed, after the brewery was closed in 1928. The purchase of Joseph Jones & Co. (Knotty Ash) Ltd. by Higsons made headlines in the national and local press, the deal going through for half-a-million pounds. The nominal capital of the company was £150,000.

## *The brewery*

From the time when he took control of the Sykes consortium, W.E.C. concentrated on the expansion of the Higson business. If the number of houses owned by the firm was to be increased substantially, then a brewery of greater capacity was necessary to supply them. In 1923, negotiations were completed with Peter Walker (Warrington) and Robert Cain and Sons for the purchase of Cain's Stanhope Street Brewery in Liverpool. Cains amalgamated with Walkers in 1921 and the Liverpool brewery was to be closed. The purchase price of the Stanhope Street Brewery was £100,000 and the prospec-

tus for Higson's Brewery Ltd. in 1937 described the productive capacity as being 5,000 barrels per week - a figure far in excess of annual out-put, even now, if multiplied to give a yearly figure. Bottling seems to have ceased after the Company moved from Upper Parliament Street to Stanhope Street, Higson's bottling being done from about 1930 onwards by outside contractors. This situation lasted until 1955.

Another hiving-off of the group's activity had occurred in 1919. Apart from Higson's pubs, deliveries had to be made to the Sykes houses and these were somewhat dispersed - Sheffield, Hull, Preston Shrewsbury and the Potteries. (The Saracen's Head in Hanley is believed to figure in one of Arnold Bennett's Five Towns stories under another name.) The group's transport requirements were placed in the hands of James Addey & Co., a family business in Liverpool started after the War. The arrangement was on a contract basis but Addeys eventually became a subsidiary company of Higsons.

## *Licensed properties*

The 1920s and early 1930s saw some reduction in the licensed properties of Daniel Higson Ltd. outside Merseyside - for instance, the Hull and Preston houses were dispensed with. More important, however, was the great increase in Higsons outlets which took place in Liverpool and district. Groups of pubs were bought up by the Company, as well as individual houses. In fact, Higsons had more pubs between the wars than today, though most were small by modern standards. The acquisition of the Joseph Jones houses has already been mentioned. Other blocks of licensed properties purchased were as follows: Thorneycroft's properties, about five; Burtonwood Brewery's, 14; Rigby's, 17; Mumford's, nine. Some Walker's houses also seem to have been acquired, as well as various other pubs. One block of property, which included several licensed premises, owned by Higsons in this period was the Rigby block in Gale Street - Hackins Hey. Some of the properties acquired in this period were later sold as uneconomic - the Jones houses in the Wigan area, for instance. Many pubs and beer houses were shabby places, with inadequate facilities and in run-down districts. Some were to go through refusal to renew their licences, others in slum-clearance schemes. A number of leaseholds or copyholds were converted to freeholds in this period.

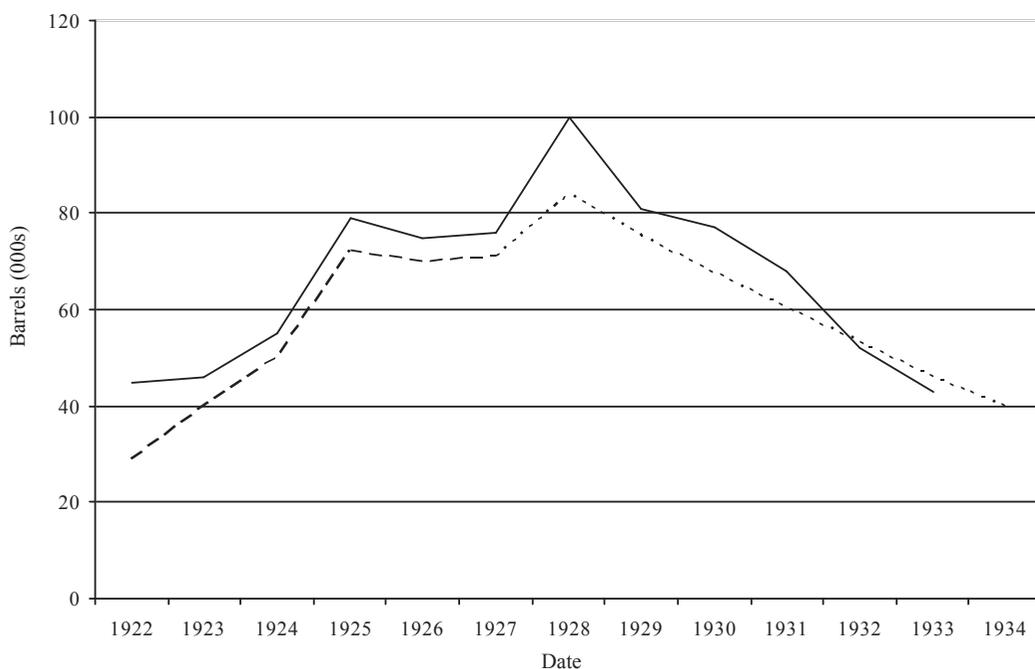
In general, the fortunes of the Company in the 1920s and 1930s reflect the pattern of economic activity for the period. The barrelage figures for the 20 years ending in 1939 are incomplete, but combined with the records of supplies to houses and customers a graph can be constructed as below.

The beer deliveries path follows the peaks and troughs in the industrial sector in the 1920s, then the onset of the great Depression in the early 1930s. The Higson barrelage echoes this, as well as reflecting the move into the Stanhope Street Brewery in 1923/1924.

Britain's economic collapse in 1931 brought wide scale wage and salary cuts in the public sector which were reflected in private businesses. In October 1931, W.E. Corlett's appointment as Managing Director of Daniel Higson Ltd. was terminated, and it was decided to sus-

pend Directors' salaries from 1 October 1931. In February 1932, Walter Smith's engagement as Company Manager was ended, and C.F. Price, the Company Secretary, took over as General Manager. Cuts in staff salaries commenced, being normally a 10% reduction, but there seems to have been no large scale sacking of office staff. The 1930s did witness a vigorous hire-and-fire policy by the Board among public house managers, however.

Profit as a percentage of sales for Higson's own beers remained significantly higher in the 1930s than it was in the early 1920s, running at between 30% and 32%. This level is higher than in the post-1945 period. This may reflect a reduction in costs of production with the new brewery and falling raw materials prices. It must also be viewed against the accounting practice of the time and the relative absence of social legislation involving



Graph 1. Barrelage figures, 1922 - 1934

Key. Solid line = Supplies to houses and consumers (number of barrels delivered - all beers)  
 Dashed line = beer produced annually (Higson's beer)  
 Dotted line = Probable path when figures are missing for intervening years.

heavy Reserves provisions. The profit per barrel on Mild and Bitter in the 1930s was also greater than in the 1920s, but profits on bottled beers were consistently below the 1920s level. This was probably because of falling sales, bottled beers being more expensive. Profit margins on wines and spirits fluctuated throughout the two decades. In any analysis of profit as a percentage of sales between the wars, it should be remembered that Higson pubs were more primitive than they are today, and running and maintenance costs tended to be lower in real terms.

As trade in the north-west of England gradually emerged from the slump, with the revival of the building industry and, later, the stepping-up of an armaments programme, Higson's fortunes improved.

In 1934, salaries were partly restored to their pre-1932 level and W.E.C. resumed his position as Managing Director at a salary of £1,250 per annum. The 1930s on Merseyside was an era of large-scale suburban development, and the Dovecot area was being opened up to Corporation and private building. The Jones pubs were mainly based on East Liverpool, being operated by Daniel Higson Ltd. with capital costs borne by the subsidiary, Joseph Jones & Co. (Knotty Ash) Ltd. The Greyhound, a little country pub on the edge of Knotty Ash, was rebuilt to meet the growing population of the district, and, in the same year, 1934, the Royal Oak in West Derby village was closed. The plan was for Jones's to meet the cost of the new Royal Oak to be built on a site in Muirhead Avenue East. After re-building the Greyhound, Jones's could not bear the cost of the second project and it was undertaken by Daniel Higson Ltd. The land was mortgaged to the Westminster (Liverpool) Trust Co. Ltd. secure a £1,000 loan. The licence was a transfer from the Waverley Hotel, Waterloo Road, and the purchase price of the land was £466.13.4d. The house caters for the large and thirsty Norris Green housing estate, and, in 1973, its clientele enjoyed a total delivery of 1,743 barrels of Higsons beer, topping the firm's tipping chart for the year.

Apart from the Company's public houses, there was trade with a number of clubs in the inter-war period. One was the Egremont, a social club in which the Company had an interest and which adjoined the Ferry Hotel. Other clubs supplied by the Company included

The Seaforth Fellowship, the Buffaloes Club in Wavertree and Clockface (Royal) British Legion Club in St. Helens. In the 1920s, W.E.C. had inaugurated his in advertising programme on hoardings, trains and in the local press, in an imaginative bid to boost the Company's sales. One thing, however, which Higsons seem not to have wanted was a price increase. When the working population was largely uncushioned by State benefits, redundancy payments unknown, casual labour still extensive and Merseyside unemployment high, beer sales were likely to be far more sensitive to prices than today. The Company resigned from the Liverpool Brewers' Society over this matter in 1932 and did not rejoin until 1934.

The Depression had been difficult for Higsons and for the Sykes group as a whole. The mortgage/trading agreement with Bass had probably aided the Company to some extent in the period, but the main assistance to the group came in the form of loans. The Royal Insurance Company and the Westminster (Liverpool) Trust Co. Ltd., provided loans on the security of properties, Bremner Sons and Corlett made various loans, some being met by the issue of 6½% First Mortgage Debenture Stock. Personal loans were received from W.E.C. and his friends, and raw-materials suppliers also gave some assistance to the Company in the difficult years. The prospect of a trade revival from the mid-1930s, with the need for greater capital expenditure to meet changing tastes and social patterns with maximum advantage to the business, led the group into going public. Spraggs had already been wound up in 1930. Now, in 1937, Sykes, Higson and Jones were wound up, the assets being used to float a public company called Higson's Brewery Limited which was incorporated on the 12 January 1937. The total number of fully-licensed properties belonging to the three firms was 183. The *Financial Times* reported that the purchase price of the firms' assets would be £1,613,750, the combined assets being valued at £1,906,800. The paper's then existing rival, the *Financial News*, was more cautious; it pointed out that there were existing mortgages and Deeds of Covenant in favour of Bass, Ratcliff & Gretton Ltd. for securing sums amounting to £39,750, together with trade ties in respect of certain properties. The Directors were to be William Ernest Corlett, Chairman and Managing Director, C.F. Price, Manager and Secretary, A.L. Corlett, N.B. Gorlett, and Frank Sharps, the Head Brewer.

The new Company was to have an Authorised Capital of £1,000,000 in 550,000 5% Cumulative Preference shares and 450,000 Ordinary shares. There was provision for the issue of £700,000 worth of 4% Debenture stock. The subscription lists opened on 19 January 1937, and were heavily over-subscribed. J. Sykes & Co. Ltd. was reconstituted as a subsidiary of Higson's Brewery Ltd.

New building in the 1930s by Higson's Brewery Ltd. included the Jolly Miller, West Derby, named from the windmill which used to stand nearby. With its panelled 'Men Only' room and garden lounge, this was a suburban prestige pub.

Despite a variety of local protests in Childwall, permission was eventually obtained for the construction of another prestige pub at the Childwall Five Ways, the licence being a transfer from The Prince of Wales, Dalton Street. At the hearing before the Liverpool Licensing justices in March, 1939, Higson's were represented by Mr Hartley Shawcross (as he then was), K.C., later to hold office under the Labour Government. Building commenced shortly before the war, but completion was delayed until afterwards. The Bridge Inn, Gateacre, was re-built in this period, the old house dating back to about 1710. Other construction included the Marine Hotel, Waterloo, and the New Dock Hotel, Birkenhead, the latter on a new site. The Bridge Inn was originally intended to be a road-house, with a tearoom and other facilities. The architect employed by Higson's during this time was Alderman Harold Davies of Dovecot Baths fame.

By the time war broke out again in 1939, Higson's was well-placed for steady expansion. After the trough of the early 1930s, brewery production was back towards 60,000 barrels per year. Re-construction of old houses, general modernisation and the building of new public houses to take advantage of urban development paved the way for future profitability, given the steady recovery of Merseyside's trade. Even at the first ordinary general meeting of the new company in November 1937, the chairman could point to a substantial increase in the company's profit, over that of the previous year's combined profits. In 1938, despite a trade recession in the area, a poor summer, the sale of some houses and the fact that the full effect of new trade had not yet filtered through, the company had exceeded the 1937 figure. In

1939, gross profit stood at £109,714. The dividend for the year on the ordinary shares was 8%, compared with 6% for 1938. Now, however, the 'Phoney War' had started and ushered in an era of great social and industrial change.

### **War and post war, 1939 - 1954**

Britain's experience of the Great War meant that the nation was better prepared, socially and economically, for total war than in the former conflict. Conscription legislation had come into operation before hostilities broke out, reserved occupations had been agreed and food-rationing plans were ready. Since aerial bombing would play a more sinister role in the new conflict, evacuation plans for children were in hand and the building of air-raid shelters had been undertaken.

For the brewing industry, the initial impact had been felt in 1938 with the National Defence Contribution levy imposed on business. After war was declared, Excess Profits Duty was again imposed and the Beer Duty was raised. For 1937, Beer Duty was £57,318,585; in November 1939, the chairman of Mitchell & Butlers Ltd. stated that the Exchequer anticipated £93,500,000 from this Duty. Controls over barley, hops and sugar for brewing came into force early in the war. The Brewers' Society worked in conjunction with the official Controller, regulating quotas of raw materials for the industry. A minor aspect of the Battle of Britain seems to have been the havoc which it wrought in the Kentish hop-gardens.

As was the case with many brewers, Higsons had encouraged their staff to join the Territorials; A.L. Corlett and N.B. Corlett were both Captains and joined their regiments in 1940. The Board was reduced to three active Directors for the rest of the war.

The Temperance interest pressed its case during the war, but had little effect. Revenue from the brewers was of great importance to the Exchequer, and beer and spirits had their role in morale, both for troops and beleaguered civilians. Beer carrying Typhoons gave noble assistance to the Normandy advance. Materials shortages and bombing had their impact on the licensed trade, and beer-gravity was reduced by 10%. The black-out did not make pub-crawling easy, and beer supplies might have

run out on the prospective customer's arrival; scotch might be reserved for a favoured few and cigarettes hard to come by. In Liverpool the Blitz resulted in a 9.30 p.m. closing time - something all the efforts of the Alliance had never achieved, but the trade refused to be down-hearted. Mr White, chairman of the Liverpool Licensed Victuallers Association, glowed with the Dunkirk spirit. In October 1940 he stated that he was confident that his members would '... keep their chins up and smile, for that was the only way they could help to beat Hitler'.

Barrelage figures for Higson's during the war years are missing. Liverpool, as a port, was well placed to benefit from the boost to beer sales given by the war to areas of high population density, swollen by a large, transitory element. Selected, comparative figures for beer barrels supplied to houses are as follows:

	Mild		Bitter	
	1933	1943	1933	1943
The Abbey	111	455	59	118
Caledonia	62	192	20	28
Court House	69	350	-	43
Crown, Birkenhead	171	405	25	53
Merton Arms	140	564	12	63
New Dock, Birkenhead	400	1,463	23	185

As in the first war, so also in the second, incomes of tradesmen and munitions workers were comparatively high and this gave an additional boost to trade. The above trend applies also to most of Higson's houses outside Merseyside. Women factory workers seem to have played a part in the licensed trade's prosperity during the war years according to contemporary reports, with relatively high, disposable incomes. Sales of beer were considerably helped by the absence of imported wines and the scarcity of spirits. On the whole, it was not sur-

prising that the L.V.s, could 'keep their chins up and smile'.

In 1940, Higson's gross profit was £135,965. By 1942, gross profit had increased to £232,868. The *Daily Telegraph* saw Higson's as '... a further striking indication of the prosperity of breweries in the provincial centres'. The dividend on Higson's ordinary shares for the ten years from 1939 to 1948 is as follows.

1939	8%	1944	18%
1940	8%	1945	20%
1941	10%	1946	25%
1942	14%	1947	30%
1943	15%	1948	30%

A list of 14 provincial breweries in the *Investors Chronicle* (1942) rates Higson's well up with the leaders, with a yield of 5½% at a current market price of 51/3d. based on trading results. In 1941, the shares stood at 28/9d.

The wines and spirits subsidiary of Higson's, J. Sykes & Co. Ltd., lacked the Navy rum contracts which they held in the Great War. A problem was the embargo on imports of wines and spirits, 'except certain quantities of rum', which applied to vessels leaving their port of loading on or after 20 January 1941. A circular from the firm to its customers in March 1941 draws attention to the difficulty in replacing stocks and the need for a rationing system. Monthly supplies to customers were to run at 65% of the 1940 level for proprietary brands of whiskies, and 100% for the firm's own wines and spirits. By 1944, the whisky situation was so difficult that more expensive grain and malt whiskies were being used in the company's blends. This pushed the price for bulk whisky up by 3/- per gallon. In November 1944 the firm recommended the following retail prices for whisky and rum.

Bar price:	small whisky or rum	1/6d	Large, 3/-
Saloon/lounge:		1/7d	3/2d.
Bar price:	gin	1/4d	Large, 2/8d.
Saloon/lounge:		1/5d.	2/10d.

Beer at this time was 8d - 10d a pint.

Circumstances favouring the local brewery during the war would be the difficulty of long-distance transport and the excess capacity which such breweries tended to possess. The national demand for beer probably gave a new lease of life to many family firms, as well as enabling companies such as Higson's to take advantage of the boom. The company's contribution to the war effort may not have been so spectacular as, for instance, Mitchell & Butlers' who possessed their own private fire brigade and Home Guard company; nevertheless, Higson's beer must have been some consolation to men setting-out or returning on Russian convoy operations.

A number of Higson's pubs suffered bomb damage. Eventually, seven houses were declared total losses under the War Damage Act of 1941. These were;

The Grapes, Prospect Street, Liverpool.  
The Malakoff, Pudsey Street, Liverpool.  
Royal Standard, Fox Street, Liverpool.  
Royal Oak, Upper Frederick Street, Liverpool.  
No.13, Limekiln Lane.  
No.2a, Burnaby Street.

During the war, closures on redundancy grounds of public houses in Liverpool continued. This was a source of annoyance to brewers, as there were restrictions on repairs to bomb damage in force.

The Minute Books for this period are nothing like as detailed as those of the First World War. However, the picture which emerges of the period is one of staff and brewery workers facing overtime, air-raids - the brewery is very near the old south end docks - fire-watching, and generally coping with labour shortages with loyalty and competence. With men away in the forces, there was an increase in the number of female employees, especially in the office. The period provided an annual war-bonus which worked out at about 60% of one month's wages or salary. John Cottam recalls that a monthly inflow of sweets, destined for the Tudor Rose in Wirral, officially, further brightened the lives of Higson's staff.

As the war drew to a close, the administrative structure of the company saw some changes. In 1944, John Cottam, who had joined the company in 1922, was appointed Assistant General Manager and Assistant Company Secretary. He succeeded Horace Brandon

Mills, who retired through ill-health. A.W. Rigby, Outdoor Manager, and Mr Fulcher, Staffordshire District Manager, retired for the same reason in 1945, being replaced by A.G. Swift and J.J. Morris respectively. These retirements may be indicative of the stress which wartime condition placed on employees in responsible positions. With the conclusion of hostilities, A.L. Corlett returned from the Army, being followed shortly afterwards N.B. Corlett. The Board was now back to its full, active strength.

The early post-war years were a quiet time for Higson's. The national scene in the years immediately after the war was clouded by business uncertainty in the face of a nationalising Labour Government, import, export and building controls, and the continuation of food rationing. Fuel crises, industrial unrest, foreign exchange controls, Socialist fiscal policies and the bad winter of 1947/48 added to the gloom. As wine imports from the Continent re-commenced, and more whisky was released for the Home Market, the pattern of activity for the Licensed Trade underwent a gradual change. Except for the inflated demand for beer, with, on the whole, the blessing of the Government during the 1939 - 1945 war, the trend in production had been falling since 1915. In 1945, production was 31 million Bulk Barrels, nearly double the national average for the years 1935 - 1939. By 1955, production had fallen to 23.6 million Bulk Barrels. The decline in beer consumption in these years mainly reflects the increasing range of consumer goods which gradually became available. The main drift was away from draught beers while bottled beer sales improved. The way seemed to be prepared for a return to the inter-war fluctuations for brewers.

The post-war era opened badly for Higson's. In the summer of 1946, Norman Bremner Corlett was sailing in Liverpool Bay with some friends when the vessel capsized. He was drowned aiding one of the party. His tragic death, after surviving five years of war service, was a great shock to W.E.C., now approaching his 80s. A local life-boat was subscribed to by the family to commemorate N.B. Corlett. As far as the firm was concerned, he had always taken an active part in the control of the business and his death left a generation gap on the Board.

When considering the fortunes of a particular firm, it is important to note that national trends may lag behind in



Figure 7. The Stanhope Street brewery. Photo: Jeff Sechiari.

particular areas. The trend towards bottled beers before the war seems not to have been representative of the depressed north-west. Even with the trade revival, incomes tended to be lower than the south. In the same way, it seems likely that the post-war change in drinking habits was slower to take effect in the Liverpool area than in some other parts of Britain. In 1948, Higson's barrelage was 80,650 barrels and, from 1946 to 1948, average net profit per barrel seems to have increased sharply, possibly because of refunds of Excess Profits Tax to repair or replace damaged properties.

By December 1949, the falling trend in brewery profits had reached the north of England. *The Economist* pointed to a bigger fall in the north than elsewhere. Higson's trading profit was down by 38%, though two other Lancashire companies had fallen by only 6½ and 14% respectively. The reduction in Beer Duty in April 1949, was probably merely the recognition of the falling trend in beer consumption at a national level. Higson's barrelage fell to 56,321 barrels for 1950 and remained in this region until the later 1950s. Average net profit per barrel also fell sharply, representing a reduction of between 28% - 30% on the 1948 figures. Profit as a percentage of sales of draught beer between 1949 - 1959 was at all times substantially below the 1930s figures; at one stage the return was only half that of 1935. The rate of return on 'own' bottled goods showed a marginal improvement, but the significant improvement was delayed until after 1955 when the bottling plant came into operation. Apart from fiscal measures, the period

from 1939 - 1954 was one of high prices for malt, hops and sugar for brewing.

On the wines and spirits side, profit margins rose strongly immediately after the war, probably in response to a long pent-up demand, and then returned to a fluctuating pattern. Margins were, on average between 1945 - 1954, substantially higher than for any ten year period pre-war.

Following a growing practice among companies, Higson's £1 ordinary shares were converted to 5/- ordinaries in 1947/48, to be issued as ordinary stock units. This increased the number of units and enhanced their market value. In the same period, the First Mortgage Debenture Stock was redeemed, the Bass mortgages and Deeds of Covenant being finally cleared by 1954.

The immediate post-war years were characterised in Britain by stringency greater, in some ways, than in wartime. Building was particularly subject to controls, and the date for Excess Profits Tax refunds to meet deferred repairs and ordinary maintenance of properties was extended to 1952. The problems facing the brewing industry would be those arising from industrial relations, anti-monopoly pressures (and, in the case of the smaller breweries, the growth of large units) planning legislation, inflation and the dismemberment of the British Empire. If firms were to survive and prosper, then they had to learn to live in the framework of a diluted capitalist system. Higson's had an aging Board faced with a rapidly changing, technologically orientated society; new blood was needed.

### **Higson's progress, 1955 - 1980**

#### *The board and administration*

Gerald Lingham Corlett, the present Managing Director, popularly known among the staff as 'Mr Gerry', joined the Board in 1955. He and his brother, Dennis, were educated at Rossall School in the Fylde and Gerald had Army service in India. Like his grandfather, Dennis qualified as a solicitor and entered the family firm of Bremner Sons and Corlett. He joined the Board of Higson's in 1960 and is Vice-Chairman of the company.

By 1955, membership of the Board had increased to six as opposed to five Directors between the wars. Except for Gerald Corlett and Lindley Harrison, composition of the Board was the same as pre war. William Ernest Corlett was to hold the reins for another few years. Alert and autocratic to the end, he died in harness in 1960 at the ripe old age of 93.

The death of W.E. Corlett and the appointment of Dennis Bremner Corlett as Director reduced the average age of the Board. In view of his experience as General Manager and Secretary to the company, C.F. Price naturally enough became Chairman and Managing Director. To assist him in the increasingly onerous task of running an expanding company, G.L. Corlett and John Cottam were appointed Assistant Managing Directors. The latter had replaced C.F. Price as Company Secretary. In this same year (1960) Frank Sharps, Head Brewer and a Director for many years, also retired and died shortly afterwards. He seems to have come to Higsons when they took over Joseph Jones of Knotty Ash in 1927.

In 1967 Claude Forshaw Price retired and the position of Chairman passed to A.L. Corlett. In his speech to the shareholders that year, the Chairman referred to C.F. Price as the man who, with W.E. Corlett, was 'responsible for moulding the company into what it is today'. From 1964, Gerald Corlett had been Joint Managing Director with C.F. Price. The age of the Chairman, the pressures and complexity of modern business and the need for the younger generation of the family to obtain adequate commercial experience made it desirable to separate the office of Chairman from that of Managing Director. When his father became Chairman, C.L. Corlett was appointed Managing Director. In 1967 the Board was further strengthened by the appointment of K.R. (Roy) Mackenzie as a Director. A Chartered Accountant, he is partner in the firm of Wilson de Zouche & Mackenzie in Liverpool; he represents the Corlett family interest on the Board and his father, Kenneth, was a trustee and financial adviser to the family.

Alfred Lingham Corlett died in May 1974. He was the last link with the pre-war Board and had served as a Director for 54 years. He had seen the family fortunes firmly established and taken an active part in the expansion and consolidation of what was to be the only Merseyside brewery still independent in 1980. Roy

Mackenzie succeeded him as Chairman, a post which he currently (1980) holds.

Other changes in the Board in the period under review were the death of Lindley Harrison in 1968, and the appointment of John Mellor in 1964 and J.W. Kellaway in 1973. The former is the Managing Director of James Mellor & Sons Ltd., the latter was previously a Regional Director of the Midland Bank Ltd.

Even among the small brewing firms which still remain under family control, predominantly, post-war legislative, fiscal, financial and technological pressures, as well as the need to maintain and increase trade have tended to dilute family power on their Boards. After all, a small brewery means 'small' by today's standards, not those of 50 years ago. Beyond this, industrial relations pressures and the need for more highly trained staff as jobs become more involved have created a need for greater status on the part of the executive class which has gradually developed. In 1968, Higson's Articles of Association were amended to permit the appointment of Assistant Directors. These were to form an Executive or Management Board. It is composed of the heads of the key sectors of Higson's organisation - brewing, trade, estates, accounts and administration. The subsidiary companies have their own Boards which control their affairs. At lesser levels, matters such as marketing and staff training have become important features of the company, The days when the owner of a brewery could also act as brewer, his brother or son as accountant/cashier, have passed, even for 'small' firms.

In 1965 Higson's opened their now offices at 127 Dale Street, Liverpool. A dignified building, six storeys high, prominent on the sky-line near the first Mersey Tunnel entrance, it was designed by Ormrod & Partners of Rodney Street, Liverpool. It provides for the staff of Higson's and subsidiary companies, and includes canteen facilities and a bar-staff training school. The complex extends along North Street. Part of the site of the former Bent's Brewery, now gradually being demolished, has been used for the development of a new duty-paid wholesale warehouse for wines and spirits.

The office atmosphere is a friendly one, enhanced by the accessibility of the Managing Director. The impression which it conveys to an outsider is of team-spirit and a staff who take a pride in their jobs.

### *The brewery*

A similar impression is given by the brewery. Here also, there is a small clerical staff, and some head-office employees commenced their careers in the brewery. A retired staff manager recalls that when he left school before the 1939 - 1945 war, a boy had to obtain his parents' permission before starting work at a brewery.

The brewery is situated in Stanhope Street, near the old south-end docks, in the section running from Beaufort Street to Grafton Street. The brewery premises extend to both sides of the street. The area has been associated with industry since the 18<sup>th</sup> century when an Oil Works, near Greenland Street, processed whale blubber.

Stanhope Street Brewery is an interesting Victorian building, though the demolition of one wing for improved facilities is a pity. Constructed about 1850, and added to as need arose, it belonged to the Liverpool brewer, Robert Cain, until his business merged with Walker's of Warrington in the early 1920s. Predominantly of red brick with a central tower (the upper stages are no longer used in the brewing process), the exterior of the building has some interesting decorative work. The copper room, with its three huge copper vessels dating back to the early years of the century, is a particularly impressive sight. It is lofty, patterned with decorated tiles and ornamental motifs.

Over the last 25 years, there have been alterations to the brewery complex, to meet changes in demand. The old cooperage was lost to the city planners. The first major post-war building was the bottling stores, constructed in 1955. This was to take advantage of the swing towards the more expensive and profitable bottled beers which was a feature of the 1950s. The cost of the project was a quarter of a million pounds, and it presented an important stage in the recovery of the company from a depressed period. As well as being an example of the vertical integration which has characterised the firm in recent years, it represented the introduction of automation into what had traditionally been a labour intensive industry. The plant had a capacity of half a million bottles a week and was controlled by 30 staff. The bottles are filled under pressure, being arranged on a star-wheel for this process. They are then automatically capped, labelled and stacked, cleaning



*Figure 8. The Stanhope Street brewery. Photo: Jeff Sechiari.*

and sterilising also being carried out by the plant. Further extensions and up-dating of plant and buildings have been made in 1969 and in the 1970s. The second bottling line deals with non-returnable bottles and provides a backing-up facility. Higson's are contract bottlers for Guinness, Mackeson, Bass Blue label and some lagers.

The introduction of keg beer in the 1960s required the setting-up of a keg racking - eg., filling - plant, and at the same time the Fermenting Room in the brewery was extensively modernised. With the swing to tank beer in the 1970s, a tanker terminal was commenced in 1971. The 14 tanks have a total capacity of about 70,000 gallons of beer. The big advantages of tank beer are its consistency and the fact that it can be used immediately after delivery; other beer has to settle.

In 1978 plans were laid for a considerable expansion of the brewery, with modernisation of plant, increased brewing capacity and the facilities to profit from the lager market. Stage one of the scheme is now complete. New ale fermenting vessels have been installed. Stage two will involve the construction of a new brewhouse and cask shed, and should be completed in under two years. Financing this stage will provide problems and the firm's short-term profits will be an important factor. This stage will allow Higson's to brew their own lager. The whole scheme should increase the potential production of the Stanhope Street Brewery from 130,000 barrels per year to 200,000 barrels.



Figure 9. The Stanhope Street brewery. Photo: Lynn Pearson.

The brewing process is often dealt with in articles and booklets; it is basically the same for every brewery. The most fascinating aspect of the brewery is, however, the combination of old and new, the latest buildings and equipment jostling with old utensils, beautifully made and representing centuries of tradition and craftsmanship, in a central structure still retaining many unexplored nooks and crannies. The interior is like the engine-room of a multi-period ship, throbbing with activity. Outside among the various outhouses, hoists lift sacks of malted barley, wagons come and go, pallets are stacked, and diesel oil mingles with the smell of grains.

According to the under-brewer, brewing has tended to become more a science than an art. Although the basic processes of mashing the malted barley, boiling it in the huge coppers and fermenting it with yeast in other vessels remains the same as for centuries and much

equipment has not changed radically in appearance since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, some changes have taken place and are accelerating. Since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, attention has been paid to water analysis, a factor which tended to reduce eventually the pre-dominance of the Burton brewers over light, sparkling ales. There has been a greater study of salt contents in the brewing process, and of the organic substances (enzymes) which in solution produce fermentation. Nowadays, a prospective brewer normally starts with a degree in bio-chemistry, followed by a brewing diploma, though many senior brewers entered without degrees, reading instead for brewing certificates at Edinburgh or Birmingham.

Perhaps one reason for the high quality of Higson's beers is the stability of their brewers; apart from a rapid turnover of brewers in the 1920s, there have been only two head-brewers between the early 1930s and 1979,

when Andrew Knowles retired. The number of brewers at Higson's may possibly be greater than in many firms of a comparable size. There are six altogether, including the new head brewer who came from Bass Charrington. Two of these are shift-brewers, since fermentation is an unbroken process lasting through day and night. The under-brewer and assistant brewers have specialised fields of responsibility - training and industrial relations, bottling, production and quality-control. There is also a technical services manager.

Current developments at the brewery owe much to the foresight of the Board in purchasing land and property in the vicinity as it became available, especially in the 1950s. This has facilitated a compact development, though, as an inner-city area, surrounded by run-down properties and bordered by a defunct docks system, there are problems of vandalism.

#### *The financial structure of the group*

High levels of inflation have been a continuing feature of post-war Britain. Firms have had to adjust themselves to conditions to survive.

The smaller firm in an age of growing industrial concentration tends to lack the same access to the capital market which characterises the larger concern. Profitability of the business becomes all-important, because future expansion depends on ploughed-back profits.

In 1955, Higson's ordinary shares became more widely available on the Stock Exchange. In the following 25 years, the company's ordinary capital has been systematically expanded in line with the company's growth.

The general prosperity of the company over the period has resulted in build-ups of reserves. The New Properties Building Fund was established in 1960/61 to meet the need for public house developments, and there has been a constant programme of brewery and plant extension and updating. The transfer of profits into Pension Funds has also been significant.

There have been a number of new share issues in this period, financed from reserves as bonus-scrip issues to increase the share-holders' participation in the compa-

ny's profits. The first such issue took place in 1958. In 1969, the Chairman's report did warn that borrowing might be necessary to meet the cost of the heavy capital expenditure then in hand. In the 1971 company year, the 5% £1 Cumulative Preference Stock units were converted to 6½% Unsecured Loan Stock, long dated to 2000 - 2005. The Authorised Capital was then restored to £1,450,000 by the creation of 2,200,000 ordinary shares. Another bonus-scrip issue was also made from reserves. The Authorised Capital was now entirely in ordinary shares.

In the 1973 accounting year, a further £1,265,000 was capitalised from general reserves to provide another bonus issue for share holders; it was considered desirable to bring the issued share capital more into line with the capital employed in the business. The authorised capital was increased to £3 million to meet this issue.

An analysis of ordinary stock units for 1979 shows the holdings as follows. The direct family (Corlett) interest was 32% of the total; of the other listed holdings, that of Bass Charrington Ltd. stood at 12.44% and Royal Insurance Co. Ltd. had a 9.68% stake. No other listed holdings exceed 5% and the residual 'all other holdings' represented 15.46%.

#### **Higson's trade**

In the Chairman's Report to shareholders for 1977 Roy Mackenzie drew attention to the motto on the coat of arms of the Sir Robert pub in Ellesmere Port - 'Produce or Perish'. The motto was felt to be appropriate to the company and the nation. However, production is no use without marketing and distribution. The brewing industry has become more sharply competitive, despite the reduction in the number of independent brewery companies, from the mid-1950s onwards. If the smaller firm is to survive, it has to be market orientated; it is less likely to coast along than in some previous periods.

#### *The trade area*

The company is essentially a local brewery in the sense that it has only one brewery and concentrates its trade on Merseyside, though there are Higson's pubs further a field. Liverpool itself has extended its tentacles over a

wider area since 1955, and Merseyside County includes Southport, St. Helens and the Wirral. The pubs outside Merseyside include ones in Blackpool and Fleetwood, Rochdale (a hotel), Manchester, a couple between Ormskirk and Preston, Ashton-in-Makerfield and several in North Wales.

Higson's beer are as follows

Products marketed	Original gravity
Draught Mild	1032
Draught Bitter	1039
Keg Mild	1034
Pale Ale	1031
Double Top - brown	1034
Stingo Gold - strong	1080

There are also take-home-paks. 'Foreign' beers sold through Higson's outlets are Draught Bass (in some pubs), Draught Lager and Guinness (draught in some houses, but bottled only usually). Worthington E is sold in party-cans; Harp and Carlsberg Lagers (bottled) and Holsten Diet Pils are also sold.

Wines and spirits from the Group's two subsidiary companies specialising in this trade are marketed through their own retail outlets (in the case of Mellors) as well as in Higson's pubs. Crown Vat and Highland Laddie are Sykes's proprietary brands of Whisky; Gin, Rum, Vodka and various wines are also sold in pubs and other retail outlets, the range of wines depending on the type of house and demand. Soft drinks and mineral waters complete the liquid picture, save in the restaurant-pubs.

#### *The clientele*

Daniel Higson's pubs were predominantly in the poorer, densely populated districts of Liverpool and Birkenhead, though there were a number in the areas of artisan dwellings which sprang up in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Since the brewing industry aims at a mass-market and the bulk of the population are working-class, public houses generally reflect this situation. Higson's customers may have a stronger 'loyalty' than the (probably) more floating clientele of the bigger brewers, in the same way that people attach themselves to their local football

team. It is hard to say and there are so many factors involved. There are Higson's pubs in mainly professional districts, as also in rural areas, but, overall, the image is not a stockbroker-belt image. Sharper contrasts in the social composition of Higson's customers may, perhaps, be found on the Clubs side.

#### *The organisation of trade*

Trade is organised under the Director of Trade who is a member of the Management Board of Higson's. The retail trade of Mellors is under the control of their Managing Director, that of Sykes's under the Wines & Spirits Manager.

The plan of Higsons' trade may be seen as split into two branches - the free trade and the tied trade. Behind both is sales promotion - production of statistics, marketing new lines, advertising and public relations.

#### *Free trade*

Higson's have an extensive free trade in the Merseyside area and elsewhere in the north-west. Much of it based on the various sorts of social clubs which have always been popular in Northern England. Some smaller clubs, for instance parish-clubs for churches, may have a trade-tie arising from loans. The nature of clubs supplied varies - football clubs, clubs affiliated to political parties, works social clubs, Royal British Legion clubs and many others. Higson's free-trade has made a useful contribution to the company's profits over the last 25 years, although the nature of the trade may change to take account of particular circumstances. In 1971, the firm's free trade covered 120 clubs, 140 off-licences, 18 restaurants and five local supermarket groups. The supermarket business is highly competitive with relatively small profit margins and has been abandoned. However, between 1972 and 1977, Higson's barrellage increased by about 30%; allowing for the increase in the number of the group's tied houses following the acquisition of Mellors in 1974, the rise in production also reflected an expanding free trade.

Back-up to the free trade is given by the Bar Training School, run by the Retail Training Office, which is situated in the company's Dale Street headquarters. This

provides a familiarisation course in cellar equipment for club stewards, cellarmen and others from the firm's free trade outlets. The free trade, however, is especially vulnerable to any prolonged disruption of the company's production or distribution - as, for instance, the delivery men's strike in 1975. Loyalty to the local firm may not survive the obstruction of supplies.

### *The trade*

Under the over-all control of the Trade Director, the tied trade may be seen as a chain of command stretching down from the Tied Trade Manager to the public house Managers and Tenants. As with the free trade, there is a range of intermediaries, all with a particular function. In 1980, fully licensed properties owned by Higson's amount to over 160. The tied estate is based mainly on the managed house, although there is a small number of tenanted pubs. It is interesting to compare the present number of pubs with the 1930s when the firm had over 200 houses in (1933). Many were very small, however, with restricted licences in many cases. They were also more widely dispersed; post-war trends have been towards concentration of the company's outlets on Merseyside, together with improved décor and a greater range of facilities than would be expected in the 1930s. Many of the old town pubs have vanished in redevelopment schemes, while new ones on housing estates have to be large enough to cater for a substantial population. The days of a pub on every corner have passed.

The general supervision of the public houses is left to four area supervisors; each is responsible to the Director of Trade for all matters concerning the running of pubs in his area. The Trade Union recognised by Higson's is the National Association of Licensed House Managers for the Managers. This was formed in recent years to offset the feeling that the other representative bodies were too closely linked with tenants' interests. Managers may come and go, but the post-war years have seen nothing comparable to the rapid turnover in staff during the 1930s!

### *Distribution*

Transport of Higson's beer from the brewery to the pubs is carried out by their haulage subsidiary, James Addey & Co. Ltd. Mellor's vans supply the off-licence shops.

### *Some Higson's pubs*

A company's profits depend on its sales. The main outlet for a brewery's products is its public houses. The pub and its manager and staff represent the brewery to the man who comes in from the street.

Since Higson's pub trade is concentrated mainly on Liverpool and Birkenhead, the firm has inevitably suffered some loss of outlets under Local Authority development schemes. Even where a pub remains, the depopulation of the older areas may have an adverse effect upon trade. Furthermore, competition for pub sites on new housing estates is keen, and planning permission is not always easy to get. Re-builds and major alterations to existing public houses have been a strong feature of Higson's activity in the last 25 years. The 1971 Company Report gives the following figures for the period 1961 - 1971.

Public houses	1961 - 1971.
New building	17
Re-builds	5
Major alterations	51
Free houses bought	44
Houses closed	30
Houses threatened	22

According to the Chairman's Report for 1979, the difficulty of obtaining sites for new pubs is likely to lead to more re-builds of older establishments over the next ten or fifteen years. Among the re-builds has been the Derby in West Derby Road. Re-opened in 1978, it was the first 'new' Higson's pub since 1965 to have cask-conditioned beer. Another establishment, one of Higson's more remote outposts, which has undergone extensive and costly alterations over recent years is the firm's only Hotel. This is the Schooner Inn, Rochdale, formerly the Wellington Hotel. In some cases, the pub which is re-built will have had interesting historical associations. The Farmers' Arms in Longmoor Lane, Fazakerley, re-built in 1961, is an example. The building was replaced, literally overnight, by 'new premises previous in contemporary style', but the previous pub was said to be about 150 years old. The *Walton Times*, recalling the pub's rural associations, referred to a

smithy which adjoined it under the shade of a magnificent, ancient pear tree.

Among new pubs opened in the last 25 years, the first one deserves mention. A puzzle for some years to the people of Childwall was the emergency water tank which stood at the Five Ways Junction from 1939/40 till 1954. The site was acquired by Higson's before the Second World War and the foundations were laid for the new pub, but the war halted progress. Building recommenced in 1954 and the Five Ways was eventually opened in 1956, nearly 20 years after site negotiations began. The beer is now stored in the water tanks! When the Mill at Greasby is built, it will represent the end of an even longer trial of patience. Higson's plans for a pub on this site date back to 1939! Other new building included the Yew Tree in Ormskirk in 1963/64. This was the town's first new pub for 100 years.

Pubs purchased by Higsons since 1955 include the Afon Goch, near Holywell, the Legh Arms, Tarleton, near Preston and the Fool's Nook, Macclesfield, among others. Higson's also took over the management of the Mellor houses after the merger. In some instances, houses owned and supplied by Higson's may be managed outside the group. The Schooner Inn, Rochdale, and the Elephant, Woolton, are examples of this. Some new pubs have been incorporated in shopping or business blocks, for example, the Penny Farthing by St. John's Lane, and the Spiral Staircase in Old Hall Street.

A pub's origins are often obscure. A number of Higson's pubs are referred to in 'Public Houses in Liverpool, 1828 - 1904', a Liverpool University thesis by D.A. Jackson. Some of them have been demolished. He mentions the Trojan's Head, St. John's Lane, the Old Dive, Brythern Street, the Grapes, Upper Dawson Street, the Villiers, Elliot Street and the Globe, Cases Street - all with licences going back over 100 years. The Hare and Hounds in Prescot is said to stand on consecrated ground. The Ring o' Bells at Lathom is an old canal inn, part of the building dating from the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The local hand-bell ringers used to meet there. The Railway in Tithbarn Street, a former Mellor's house has the first Exchange Station and a Lancashire & Yorkshire Railway engine depicted on the windows. The Argyle, Birkenhead, has handbills and other souvenirs from the old Argyle Theatre, destroyed in the blitz. The Wellington, St. Anne Street, has good bow windows and

seems to be early 19<sup>th</sup> century; the Courthouse in Commutation Row has some fine woodwork inside.

Pub names are an interesting field of study. In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, inns were often known by the name of the landlord - Mr Rigby's, for instance, or by the name of the landowner - the Shrewsbury Arms, the Sefton Arms. National figures and famous victories were particularly popular in Victorian times, but, even at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, many town pubs had no name. With the rise of the big brewery groups in recent years, local brewers have displayed a keen imagination in the selection of names for new pubs. Unlike, for instance, Young's of London, Higson's have little in the way of eye-catching pub-signs. The nearest to a discernible pattern in the names of new Higson's pubs is a tendency towards a name with local associations. The Red Rum at Gillmoss commemorates the famous Grand National winner; the Pipe and Gannex recalls the erstwhile Prime Minister, Sir Harold Wilson, M.P. for Huyton. The Black Angus at Cantril Farm refers, presumably to a breed of bull, the Boffin at Kirby to a breed of scientist and the Flying Saucer, Speke, to the proximity of the airport rather than the behaviour of the clientele! The Wirral Hundred in Noctorum is purely historical while the Twelfth Man at Greasby has a cricketing ring. The Tenterhook of Kirkby is unusual but obscure.

### Trade growth: 1955 - 1980

The stages in Higson's trade development tend to reflect the national brewing scene. Up to 1955, the national trend in beer consumption and production had been declining, except for the rise in the 1939 - 1945 war. From 1955, the trend has been fairly steadily upwards.

Trends in Beer Consumption. 1955 - 1979

1955	23.6 million bulk barrels.
1960	25.6
1965	29.9
1970	33.5
1975	38.5

Source: Hawkins, K.H. and Pass, C.L.(1979) The Brewing Industry. London: Heinemann p.58.



Figure 10. The Stanhope Street brewery. Photo: Jeff Sechiari.

Basically, this trend is explained by the rising real incomes of the traditionally beer-drinking sectors of the community over the period. However, the upward shift in demand has been accompanied by changes in beer preferences, to some extent led by the younger element of society. The ability to adjust to changing tastes, while not neglecting the more conservative sectors, has been a key-feature in Higson's success during this time.

Recovery for the brewing industry from its post-war decline in trading profits was spear-headed by the demand for bottled beer in the 1950s. Higson's saw the trend and adjusted to it. Since 1930 the firm's bottling had been done under contract; from 1930 to 1955, profit as a percentage of sales on Higson's bottled beer had stood at about 10%. From 1956 up to 1965, the annual figure was about 20%. While the increased profitability of bottled beers must be seen against the capital cost of plant and equipment, the bottling stores also provided scope for contract bottling and development of the home-pak market.

The extent of Higson's recovery from the lean years after the war can be seen by examining the barrellage figures for the period. Between 1950 and 1959, the annual barrellage fluctuated between 55,500 and 58,750 barrels. This was about the same as in the closing years of the 1930s, and considerably less than 1920s production after the purchase of the Stanhope Street Brewery. In the words of the present Managing Director, the early 1950s represented 'the nadir of the company's fortunes'. Figures taken from the Managing Director's Accounts are as follows:

Year	Number of barrels raked
1960	63,175
1965	83,413
1970	95,038
1975	122,433
1978	134,732

'Foreign' beers are included in the above figures, For Higsons' own beers, the relevant figures are:

Year	Number of barrels brewed
1960	N/A
1965	N/A
1970	92,992
1975	117,493
1978	128,431

The conclusion seems to be that although the building of their own bottling plant enabled Higson's to take some advantage of the rising demand for bottled beer, and provided facilities for future developments, the real upturn in the company's fortunes was 1960. One reason for this may lie in the time-lag between north and south in relation to rising real wages, and, of course, changing tastes.

Higson's introduction of Keg Beer in 1962 again followed a national trend, led by the large groups. The first sign of northern affluence was the swing from Mild beer to Bitter. This probably had its origin in physical and psychological factors, apart from rising purchasing power. The emphasis on heavy manual

labour was gradually falling; there was also a reaction against the living conditions which Mild beer symbolised. It is possible also that as the demand for Mild decreased, the quality of the product declined. For Higson's, Keg Mild in the early years seems to have led to a revival of Mild drinking - slops could not be poured back into a keg! At first, the profit per barrel on Keg Mild exceeded that on Keg Bitter. As production and sales of all of the firm's draught beers increased, and prices were brought more into line with inflation, the variation between the profits on keg and traditional beer levelled out. One result of the wider-scale introduction of keg beer, and its derivative, tank beer, was to arouse a reaction against their standardisation of the product which was symbolised in the emergence of the big brewing combines; this reaction eventually resulted in CAMRA. Despite the expense of installing the necessary equipment the new beer had a consistency greater than the old, and wastage was reduced. It is possible, however, that more marketing emphasis was required by the local brewery which had entered this field. It may be argued that, to some extent, the package had taken over from the product. Higsons steered a middle course.

Unlike keg beer, tank beer can be used on delivery. It made its appearance in Higson's pubs in the early 1970s, but not all pubs are fitted with the necessary storage tanks. It is delivered by tank wagons and pumped directly into the pub's storage tanks.

From 1970, the lager market in Britain has been the main growth area for brewers. For draught lager, the trend has been as follows:

1970	5%
1971	7.1%
1972	8.5%
1973	11.3%
1974	12.6%
1975	15.6%
1976	18.6%
1977	19.0%
1978	20.6%

*Draught lager as a percentage of total draught beer sales (U.K.) by volume*

*Source: The Brewers Society*

In 1968/69, draught Carling Lager was introduced to a number of Higson's pubs as part of a reciprocal trading agreement with Bass Charrington. Trading agreements with Bass have formed a feature of Higson's for many years. By 1975, draught lager sales represented 15% of Higson's total beer trade, and the figure has increased since then. The installation of a lager fermentation and conditioning plant was decided upon in 1978, provided the trend continued.

### Conclusion

All attempts at evaluation are limited by available material and personal expertise. In the case of a brewery, however, it seems to me that any assessment must be concerned with both economic and social factors if it is to be a realistic one.

The evidence indicates that Higson's is a progressive, economic unit of its own sort. This leads to the question of the size of the firm. Whether a firm is a large, medium or small firm depends on the aspect from which it is assessed. Within the brewing industry since 1960, there has been growing concentration of market power. In 1976, seven brewers with 58 breweries were responsible for 91% of beer sales. In the light of this fact, whether a particular brewery is medium or small, regional or local, loses much of its older significance. In terms of trading area or the number of tied houses, Higson's is small and local. In terms of barrelage, Higson's is below the arithmetical average, thus:

	No. of breweries	Average output per brewery.
1960	358	73.4 (000 barrels)
1968	211	146.0 "
1973	163	217.0 "
1976	147	268.0 "

*The pattern of production, 1960 - 1976.*

*Source: Hawkins, K.H. and Pass, C.L.(1979) The Brewing Industry. London: Heinemann.*

From the point of view of capital formation, Higson's is not medium sized. The truth is that the emergence of the giants has reduced the scope for evaluation in terms of

size; assessment must be in terms of performance. Though correct as a principle, however, this as an analytical tool, a theoretical concept, derived from empirical investigation, and must be used with caution.

The result of one (unpublished) analysis in terms of sales by value for 1978, and based on a selection of 60 breweries, shows Higson's as number 21 in the table. This figure, interesting though it is, must be treated with reserve, however. Firstly, it is based on a sample technique. Secondly, the spread between numbers 12 and 60 is relatively even compared with the variation between the first eleven and the others. Allied, Bass and G.M.H. have each sales of over £1,000 million. The next eight have sales exceeding £50 million, and 24 have sales below £10 million, Higson's, with sales of £19,780,000, stand below Thwaites and Matthew Brown & Co., higher than Young's or Boddington's. The result is not, on reflection, so surprising as it might seem at first sight.

Performance may also be analysed in terms of profit as a percentage of sales, or profit as a percentage of capital employed. K.H. Hawkins, the historian of Bass (published but withheld from circulation) and co-author of *The Brewing Industry* (1979) favours the second method. He lists four small firms as follows:

	1900-	1971	1974
Boddington	13.0	14.1	18.6
Mansfield	18.3	21.3	22.6
Tollemache Cobbold	5.8	7.4	6.4
Higson's	15.0	19.3	11.0

*Pre-interest profits as % of capital employed.*

The decline in the Higson's figure in 1974 reflects the re-valuation of properties in that year; none of the other three companies re-valued their properties in the period. An evaluation based on *pre-tax profits* over 1977 - 1979 gives the following:

	1977	1978	1979
Higson's	13.2	7.8	5.5

*Pre-tax profits as a percentage of capital employed.*

In 1978, the accounting policy of the firm was altered; firstly, certain categories of property which had not formerly been charged with depreciation were now so charged; secondly, the group's fixed assets were re-valued and depreciation was calculated on the enhanced values. These adjustments are again reflected in the 1978 and 1979 figures. On a comparative basis, pre-tax profits for Higson's may be viewed as follows in 1978.

	Sales £	Pre-tax profits £
Daniel Thwaites & Co.	20,529,000	2,020,000
Matthew Brown & Co.	20,012,000	3,541,000
Higsons	20,012,000	3,541,000
Boddington	15,582,000	3,094,000
Young & Co.	17,643,000	1,540,000

The higher profits in relation to sales for Thwaites, Brown's and Boddington's may indicate under-valued properties. Profit as a percentage of sales for Higson's, 1977 - 1979 is:

	1977	1978	1979
Higson's	10.1	8.5	6.7

Any attempt to assess performance of companies by the rate of return on capital employed, and using balance sheet figures, must be a tentative one because of variations between companies in their interpretation of balance sheet categories and accounting conventions.

Higson's Brewery Ltd. emerges as a vigorously sales-slanted concern, cautiously responsive to current trends. It is an example of contained growth. While the return to shareholders has not been neglected, neither has provision for long-term needs. The company seems to have benefited from its continued independence, exploiting its local image and its individuality. The ability of the



Figure 11. The Stanhope Street brewery. Photo: Lynn Pearson.

remaining local breweries to profit from their position is indicated by the re-opening of some local breweries by the larger groups, which they had formerly closed as non-economic, also by attempts to revive local brews in some cases. The increased standardisation of beers, although not without its merits to both brewer and consumer, has created a re-action. If this trend were to continue, Higson's future would seem to be one of rapidly expanding profits. There are, however, other factors to be considered. Since the end of the Second World War, it would seem that the brewing industry, among others, has been able to prosper because of rising disposable income in those sectors of the population which provide its main customers. It has indirectly benefited from the Welfare State to the extent that this has protected consumer incomes, and beer sales, which formerly suggested a high degree of elasticity, have tended towards a much lower degree of elasticity.

Merseyside is not one of the nation's regions of low unemployment. Increased unemployment, with reduced

state assistance, may have been foreseen by Young's of London in their recent decision to lower the price of their Mild beer to 33pence a pint. Price sensitivity, rather than product differentiation, may again become the leading consideration in the brewing industry's marketing activities.

#### *Private profit and public interest*

It is usually agreed that the brewing industry is very much an oligopoly. This raises the question of how far an 'independent' brewing concern can behave independently. Most breweries are members of the London Brewers' Society and firms' pricing policies tend to be determined either at the Brewers meetings or in detail after more informal local consultations. It is likely that the greatest scope for the profitable assertion of the local brewer's independence may lie in an emphasis on the quality of service which it provides. This means quality of service in the widest sense of the words. Elaborate



Figure 12. The Stanhope Street brewery. Photo: Lynn Pearson.

face-lifts for pubs may often be unnecessarily costly, but is there any justification for a clearly shabby and somewhat sordid atmosphere merely because the pub is in a run-down or tough district? There might, in fact, be such justification. A chairman of Bent's is reputed to have viewed their pubs as mere drinking houses for Liverpool, with the Alsatian dog as the most important member of the bar-staff. On the other hand, most pubs in older areas have some historic interests; in some cases, they are, however, just waiting for demolition.

Again, crime and vice of various sorts are seemingly becoming more respectable in our society. The 'permissive' ethos resting, perhaps, largely on relatively high wages for young people and an objection to any form of implied segregation, means that substantial groups of youngsters often dominate a room. Older people, often couples, who would be regulars, even if not spending large amounts at any one time, may be deterred by the bad language and obscenities which are freely bandied about. Many people will not complain individually because of the feeling of futility in such procedures. Is this an area where a local brewery could create a good image, possibly through stronger management and the extension of room-service by mature bar staff?

Identification with its local community has always been a feature of breweries. Higson's is no exception. Apart from the company's diplomatic support of both local football teams, the firm was one of the first contributors to the *Liverpool Echo's* Goodfellow Fund when it began in the 1930s and has subscribed to the Bluecoat Institution, as well as other local funds at different times. W.E. Corlett was a subscriber to the Lancashire and Cheshire Historic Society.

The scope for Higson's to maximise their opportunities as the only independent Merseyside brewer pivots on the extent to which the economic and social ethos of the country, and Merseyside, changes in the near future. With continued imagination and foresight of the sort which has been responsible for the company's impressive performance over the past 25 years, the survival and relative prosperity of Higson's Brewery Limited seems assured for some time to come.

## Appendix

### *The subsidiary companies*

There are three subsidiary companies of Higson's Brewery Limited; Sykes & Co. Ltd., and James Mellor & Sons Ltd. represent the group's wines and spirits interest, and James Addey & Co. Ltd. is the transport subsidiary.

### *Wines and spirits*

The Licensing Act of 1961 removed certain restrictions on the growth of the off-licence sales trade, especially in connection with opening hours. A further Licensing Act in 1964 assisted the expansion of licensed restaurants, and the abolition of Resale Price Maintenance in the same year also favoured the wines and spirits trade. This was the year when John Mellor joined Higson's Board. During the 1960s, a number of brewers acquired established Wine and Spirits merchants, the trade passing very much under the dominance of the major brewers.

National growth of the wines and spirits trade in the period from 1955 is indicated by the following table.

	Spirits	Wines
	(proof gallons)	
1955	11.5	16.9
1905	19.1	36.4
1975	20.7	77.5

### *Trends in drink consumption, 1955 - 1975 (U.K.)*

However, this trade tends to be rather erratic. For the years 1955 - 1958, Higson's profit as a % of sales of wines and spirits ran at between 16% and 19%. From 1959 to 1973, 8% or 9% seems to be a more usual figure. When Mellor's merged with Higson's in 1974, they became responsible for Higson's off-licence shops.

The membership of Mellor's and Sykes's Boards is the same.

### *James Mellor & Sons Limited*

This company, representing the most recent merger of interests, is the really fascinating one from a historian's point of view because of the wealth of early records.

The Mellors originated in the central-eastern area of Lancashire, the Protestant, weaving district around Rossendale/Bolton/Oldham, an area which had known George Marsh and where the Radcliffes were a leading local name. The marriage pattern of the family in the 19<sup>th</sup> century reflects this ethos, involving names such as Ogden, Knott and Hyde. The strongly Puritanical influence of central and north-eastern Lancashire religion promoted, in general, a keen business sense and encouraged migration to the expanding commercial centres, traditionally the home of Lancashire Protestantism.

The family tree commences with John Mellor (born 1720, died 1795) and he seems to have belonged to Failsworth. His son by his first marriage was known as Thomas Mellor of Mossley. Both places are now part of Manchester. The date of Thomas's birth was 1765, and he died 1829. He appears in Liverpool in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century as an Excise Officer, with vaults on the east side of Johnson Street and Dale Street. Often, these vaults or cellars later became pubs while retaining vaults in their name; for instance, the Justice Vaults and the Vauxhall Vaults. In case of Thomas Mellor, the Vaults seem to have become the Old Scotch House which is now Higson's Excelsior. Above this, ironically enough, is the new suite of offices into which Mellors moved in March 1979.

Thomas Mellor married Elizabeth Ogden by whom he had three sons - John, James and Thomas - and a daughter, Mary. Mellor's business commenced in 1823. The first draft of the co-partnership agreement of that year provides for the business to commence at the vaults in Dale Street, under the title of John Mellor & Co. The two younger brothers were to be junior partners, and there was no mention of brewing. The original business seems to have been that of Wine and Spirit and Ale, Porter and Cider Dealers, as well as '...buying, selling and vending the same goods and commodities belonging to the said trade'. The partnership was to last for ten years, according to the agreement, and the brothers were all living in the same house in Dale Street. The business as a partnership began on 4 August 1823 and the existing, original private ledger runs from this date.

Mellor's title to the Dale Street/Johnson Street property first appears on a conveyance running from 1765, on an indenture dated 5/6 May 1825. The Hunter Street premises, which became the firm's ultimate home, are first mentioned in connection with Mellor's on a conveyance of 1781, the indenture being dated 26/27 March 1830. In both cases, the indentures seem to represent a two years lag between actual use of the premises. The brothers were in business in Dale Street/Johnson Street in 1823; in relation to Hunter Street, a letter of objection to redevelopment plans in 1936 states, 'Our main business premises have been established between Hunter Street and Cuerdon Street since 1828'. The first indenture naming Mellors in connection with Boundary Street is dated 1844. The brewery and distillery were situated Hunter Street, the maltings being in Boundary Street. Properties, both licensed and non-licensed, were gradually accumulated by the firm around the town and its environs.

Thomas seems to have dropped out of the business at the end of the ten year period, re-entering it in 1847. He died in 1853/54, and from 1853 till 1854/55 it continued as John and James Mellor. After John's death, his son, John, joined James (his uncle) under articles of co-partnership dated 1856, but these seem to have been terminated after three years. From 1859 to 1869, James seems to have run the concern on his own, then as his sons grew up and he wanted to retire he formed the firm into James Mellor & Sons, a title which lasted until 1913. The wide difference in age between James and his sons arose from their being children of his second marriage. This took place in 1845 to Maria Hyde. James junior, John and Joseph Hyde Mellor all entered the family business.

Among the business records and papers which the Mellor family thoughtfully preserved are letters from the younger son to James junior while the family were visiting the Midlands Spas in the interest of father's health in the 1870s. James, as the eldest son, had been left to look after the family business in Liverpool. The correspondence sheds light on that precocious awareness of business matters and delicate situations which tended to characterise the self-assured offspring of Victorian business families. The letters also breathe that dutiful spirit of fraternal love, redolent of the Victorian family photograph, and provide beautifully conventional, if somewhat uninspiring, descriptions of

Malvern on a wet Sunday afternoon. Poor James was missing so much!

### *Mellors in the 19<sup>th</sup> century*

The records of Mellors which have fortunately been preserved can throw much light on the brewing and distilling industries in Liverpool throughout 19<sup>th</sup> century, together with the licensed trade in general. They were part of that network of breweries and distilleries on the northern side of Dale Street and William Brown Street which would find a profitable market in the town's northerly expansion. A short distance from Hunter Street, Sykes Porter's brewery would be set up in Holly Street later in the century. Firms like Pickhop & Miles (commemorated today by Pickhop Street) and the Liverpool Porter Brewery in Scotland Road were neighbours. Harvey's Brewery was in Cheapside, close by it Bent's and Threlfall's would develop Johnson Street, North Street, and Thomas Howard was in Scotland Road.

Although only a small firm, Mellors was involved in all aspects of the business, from about 1840 onwards. The original co-partnership of 1823 was based on a capital contribution as follows. James and Thomas advanced £200 each, £37.15.5d. being represented by cash, £162.4.7d. by goods. John, the senior partner, advanced £430 cash and £225.11.10d. in goods, making a total capital of £1055.11.10d. John, the eldest brother, seems to have been in business as a (rather young) merchant before establishing the co-partnership, so too does Thomas. A circular of 1847 described him as having 26 year's experience in the trade.

It seems likely that the firm was going through a difficult time in the 1830s, after the rise of the beer shops under the Duke of Wellington's Act and their restriction under the legislation of 1834. The rest-book or private ledger for the period shows a high proportion of bad debts, and it seems probable that many of the victuallers, spirits dealers and beer shops went out of business from the mid 1830s to this mid 1840s, with consequent difficulties for their creditors.

At the time of Thomas's death in 1853/54, a number of Mellor's properties, belonging to John and James, were mortgaged to him to secure a loan to the firm of £20,000

and interest. An indenture on the Schedule of Title Deeds relating to these properties is of particular interest. The indenture, dated 24/25 February 1837, is on the Hunter Street lease and names James Harvey as a party. A second indenture, dated 25 February 1837, names James and Thomas Harvey as the parties; a third, dated 13 September 1841, names Robert Ellison Harvey, Thomas Harvey and Thomas Mather (a corn and hops merchant and cousin of R.E. Harvey) as the parties. These indentures may have indicated the securing further loans from outside parties by the Mellors in a difficult period. They also suggest the close-knit relationship of certain elements of the Liverpool brewing fraternity. The Harvey and Mellor families were similar in type. Both were strongly Protestant, the first Unitarian, the second from the virtue of preaching and were ready-made for the Protestant business ethic. Both were prolific of commercially minded offspring and promoted the rise of the Victorian industrialist middle class. They had much in common.

### *Mellor's trade*

A selection of order books for Rum, Whisky and Gin during the 19<sup>th</sup> century has been retained by Mellors, together with letter-books (in poor condition, unfortunately) and petty ledgers for different periods in the century. The surviving private ledgers give details of wine, spirits, ale and porter stocks at the six monthly balances or rests. The term, rest-books, seems to have had a dual meaning; it represented the time when business came to a halt for the contractual stock-take and profit/loss appropriation to the partners. It also meant that not only were the debtors and creditors, together with stocks on hand, assessed, but the 'rest' eg., premises, fixtures and fittings, everything down to the parrot and cage in the office - were valued to the last farthing in a general inventory. A normal allowance in the accounts is for 'bad copper' - debased, worn or counterfeit coinage - in the cash in hand. Customers' bills would often be settled in cash and this would need to be weighed to assess its worth.

From the start of the business 1823, Mellors dealt with Robert Preston & Co. for spirits purchases. This firm now belongs to Seager Evans, but Prestons and Mellors were the last two gin distillers in Liverpool. In creditors' list for February 1824 two Bristol firms appear, Castles

& Co. and Jas. Lax & Co., probably in connection with wines purchases. Barclay Perkins of London appear among the debtors at the time. The lists also include debtors in East Lancashire - Oldham, Lees, Slaithwaite, Hazelhurst, Mossley; Beaumaris in North Wales also occurs. The East Lancashire connection was retained into the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Profits for the first six months' trading amounted to £606.18.2d. For the corresponding six months ended 1 February 1830, partners' profit was £1,281. From then to 1834, profit fluctuated between £976 and £630. Two six month periods, in 1836 and 1837, show NIL. By 1839 the rests or balances were being taken yearly, but that for the last six months of 1838 shows a profit of £197. Profits were apportioned equally between the partners. After deducting creditors' balances increases sharply from 1838 to 1840, which is as far as the analysis has been (ten years 1831-1840).

Wet stock valuations for are as follows.

	1824	1829	1834	
Rum	11/6d	11/8d	11/11d	per Gall
Cognac	22/-	26/-	25/-	" "
Whisky	10/10d	9/-	7/8d	" "
Gin	11/6	9/- 7/6d	6/6d	" "
Sherry	13/10d	11/6d	11/6d	" "
Port	12/6d	10/1d	13/-	" "
Grog	5/-	5/-	5/-	" "
Porter (uncertain)	7d/8d	N/A	1/1 ¼d	" "
Ale	6d	1/1½d	10d-1/8d	" "
B. Beer (Bitter?)		Too uncertain		
Black Beer		Too uncertain		

*NB. The schedule cannot allow for variations in quality.*

In the early period of the business, John Mellor and his brother lived on the premises in Dale Street, as the Harveys lived on their Cheapside premises at first. The very early inventories represent only the merchandising and retailing business, of course, not brewing, malting or distilling. It is probable that John alone slept in the counting house. Included in the 1824 inventory is one Feather Bed, valued at £2.17.8d., as well as a Dressing Glass, spoons and office stools.

The later history of the business in the 19<sup>th</sup> century has not been examined in any depth. It is the early records which make Mellors so interesting from the point of view of the Higson's history.

#### *Later progress*

James, John and Joseph Hyde Mellor, sons of James, senior, by his second wife, Maria Hyde, carried the firm into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. John, the second son, died in 1911. He fathered a large family, even by Victorian standards, of 15 children. His eldest son, John, was father of the present Managing Director of Mellors; another son, James Douglas Mellor, was father of J.D.H. Mellor, the other member of the family on Mellor's Board.

The several re-constitutions of the business have been noted. On the death of John Mellor in 1911, it was decided to register the business as a private limited company to acquire the business and assets comprised in an agreement with James Mellor and Joseph Hyde Mellor. The other directors were to be John Mellor junior and Robert Mellor. The share capital was to be £50,000. The effective formation of the company was delayed by the wartime company legislation, and the formation was not completed until 1923.

Despite the high profits which brewers were able to make in the war years, these were offset by Excess Profits Duty in the period, the lasting curtailment of the permitted hours under Lloyd George and, more seriously, the steep rise in the Beer Duty in 1919. Probably it was this latter factor, combined with the delay in the effective formation of the company and the general feeling of uncertainty among small brewing interests at the time, that led the family to approach Threlfall's with a view to selling the business. These delicate negotiations, conducted discreetly with Threlfall's General Manager,

Walter West, ran from October 1922 to September, 1923. The period was a bad one for the industry; many small breweries and some larger ones were coming onto the market or seeking mergers, and brewery profits were in decline. Apart from the fall in world trade, there was still the aftermath of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century breweries boom, resulting in excess capacity in the industry, with large proportions of capital tied up in declining properties. The brewing industry had to contract, but larger and, possibly, more immediately profitable businesses than Mellors' might have been accessible to Threlfall's - it was a buyer's market.

The negotiations fell through over the sales price. Many small family businesses probably sold-out on poor terms. Perhaps in some cases the generation who would have continued the business had been killed in the War. Mellors were spared this problem. James Mellor had died, aged 69, in 1915, but his brother, Joseph Hyde Mellor remained on the Board in the 1920s, though when he did leave he withdrew his capital. There was also Robert Mellor, but John Mellor seems to have been the main force. The company divested itself of the distillery before 1925, and the brewery finished about 1926 - 1929. Malting ended some years earlier. The wheel had come full circle; the firm had reverted to its Dale Street days, and now, literally, occupies its old Dale Street site.

Mellor's office manager, who retired in 1979, joined the firm from school in late 1928. He has many memories of the firm over the years - the small, gas-lit office in Hunter Street, the stables with five horses, three drays and a bottle-wagon. The horses went about 1931. He remembers the brewery as a tower brewery with a well below. (According to John Mellor, this well had to be deepened at intervals, because Bent's had one on the other side of the valley and periodically deepened theirs!) In the 1930s, the company had about 28 pubs, all gas-lit, and one off-licence shop. When the brewery closed down, a contract was drawn up with Walker Cain's to supply Mellor's public houses. The country trade in wines and spirits was based on the Midlands, Yorkshire, Manchester/East Lancs. and North Wales, one traveller being assigned to each region. In the course of his 50 years with the firm, Mellors' late office manager became deeply involved in all aspects of the business. He excelled particularly in his grasp of the relevant legislation - all Mellor's pubs suffered bomb

damage. Six new ones have been opened since the Second World War, the first being opened in 1961.

James Mellor & Sons Ltd. merged with Higsons Brewery Ltd. in 1974 and, as a subsidiary of Higsons, manage about 20 off-licence shops belonging to the group. Mellors have two subsidiary companies - Mellor & Pattinson Ltd. and The Vineyard (Wirral) Ltd. Though the merger only happened in 1974, Mellor's Managing Director, W.J. (John) Mellor, joined the Higson Board in 1964. Educated at Rugby and Oxford, when he read General Science before war-service, he maintains a keen interest in the business, with a consciousness of its long continuity. J.D.H. Mellor, F.C.A., as well as being on the Boards of Mellors and Sykes, is assistant group accountant.

#### *J. Sykes & Company Limited*

When Higson's Brewery Limited was formed in 1937, J. Sykes & Co. Ltd., which had been the principal company in the previous grouping, became the wines and spirits subsidiary of the public company.

The pre-1911 business activities of the Sykes family cannot be fully assessed because no records remain. The 1842 Liverpool Ale House Registers show Thomas Sykes as a licensee in Pembroke Place, Liverpool (with '68' written in blue pencil alongside the entry) and John Sykes as a licensee in Trowbridge Street. The premises have no sign eg, are not named. Thomas Bailey, probably of the family which married into the Sykes family and produced Thomas Daily Sykes, appears at the Plough in St. James's Street. In the 1856 *Gore's Directory*, Thomas Sykes, a spirits dealer, is shown at 2 Brownlow Street, which is on the corner of Pembroke Place, John, spirit dealer, is at 101 Brownlow Hill, Benjamin, victualler, at 19 Great Charlotte Street, Eliza, victualler, at 93 Fontenoy Street, and James, a wines and spirits merchant with R.C. Gardner & Co., resides at 49 Seymour Street, off London Road. The Gardner family inter-married with the Sykes family, hence John Gardner Sykes. By 1865, another Sykes business had appeared; Sykes, Porter & Co., Brewers, of Walton Road and Holly Street. The Sykes element was Thomas Sykes, brewer, who now resided at Ormond Bank Church Road, Seaforth, then a pleasant residential area. The Sykes's married, apparently, into the Porter family,

an appropriately named choice for an aspiring young brewer. Ellen Porter Sykes, mentioned in the opening Minutes of J. Sykes & Co. Ltd. in 1912, would be an offspring of this union. In this year, 1865, Peter, Richard, Robert and George Sykes are all shown as involved in the licensed trade; but they may not all of the same Sykes family.

By 1870, the Dale Street block running east from Hatton Garden must have been a brewer's paradise. Benjamin Sykes, victualler, occupied 113, James Sykes & Co., wine and spirit merchants, number 115, Thomas Taylor, wine and spirits merchant, numbers 117 and 119, and John Crane, victualler, held numbers 121 and 12e Dale Street. James is also shown at 68 Rodney Street and as possessing a residence, Breck House, at Poulton-le-Fylde, which probably has a bearing on the Sykes' trading interest in that region.

In the Alehouse Registers for 1872/73, John Gardner Sykes, owner of licensed premises, appears under the business address 115 Dale Street. The partnership between James and John Sykes seems to date from 1867, James being the senior partner and the business bearing his name. In 1896, the registered office was 117 Dale Street, and, by 1904, the firm was shown with stores Johnson Street, too.

John Gardner Sykes seems to have died about 1900, James sometime prior to this. The formation of J. Sykes & Co. Ltd., as a private company in 1911, was the outcome of a family law suit - Sykes v Sykes. William Harold Harrison Sykes and Thomas Bailey Sykes were executors of the late J.G. Sykes; they were opposed by Ellen Porter Sykes. W.E. Corlett was solicitor for the executors (who won the case). The new company was registered on the 11 December 1911, its capital being £71,645.1.6d. The notice in the *Brewers' Gazette* describes the company:

... to get business carried on at 117 Dale Street and elsewhere as executors of the late J.G. Sykes, together with the assets and liabilities of such undertaking and businesses and of the estate of J.G. Sykes.

To get the business carried off-at 117 Dale Street as James Sykes Co.

The new company's Board consisted of Frank Rochfort

Garrard (Chairman) who represented the Bass, Ratcliff & Gretton interest in the company. Bass had a substantial share-holding, perhaps as creditors of James Sykes & Co. The other directors were Arthur John Parkinson, an accountant, and Thomas Bailey Sykes. The auditors were Simon Jude & West, Bremner Sons & Corlett were retained as solicitors. W.E. Corlett was elected to the Board in 1912 'in virtue of an agreement between J. Sykes & Co. Ltd., Roderick Williams and John Paterson'. The Board's best thanks were offered to Bremner Sons & Corlett for their part in the transfer of the assets of the late J.G. Sykes to the company.

Sykes lacked a brewery, however, although its registered description included the business of brewing. How the firm acquired a brewery is described in the main text. The company had a number of public houses in Liverpool, and inherited a number of others, scattered over the North and Midlands. Apart from the Bass tradetie, beer was supplied by local brewers in the various trading regions. The scattered houses provided a wide market for the firm's trade as wine and spirit merchants. Travellers were employed to cover the different regions in which the firm had interests, and free trade wines and spirits reinforced by reciprocal trading agreements with local breweries. The company's wines and spirits trade in more distant areas seems to have been conducted through local agencies which Sykes's managed - Benson's in the Potteries, Wheatley's in Hull and Walker & Knight in Chester. In the early days, travellers were hired and fired with monotonous regularity. A letter was received from E.C. Bowles, traveller for the Chorley area, in December 1914. He informed the Board that the wine and spirits trade there was 'not profitable to the Company'; it was resolved that the Secretary should write to him and tell him that more energy was required!

The capital of the company included only 14 ordinary shares, these being divided between T.S. Sykes and W.H.H. Sykes. The balance of capital was issued in the form of preference shares on loan stock. At least two members of the Sykes family appear as employees in the early days. John S. Sykes was assistant to the Company Secretary, and, in 1912, the Board agreed to meet the bill for two guineas incurred by his tuition in shorthand. Cecil Sykes was appointed manager of the Chester depot in the same year. E.A.V. Coleman was appointed Manager and Company Secretary at £450 per annum.

Later, Sykes's trade advertisements described the firm as Wine & Spirit Merchants, Importers, Bonders, Blenders and Exporters; Home and Export Bottlers. G.L. Corlett relates how the Higson group, via Sykes, enjoyed a profitable trade resulting from whisky bonding from the mid 1920s to the mid 1960s. Sykes's had contacts with a number of distillers. Best Malt Whiskies were kept under Bond at three years maturity until five - seven years maturity. They were then sent to blenders with an Empire trade. Sherry was imported in casks and sold through Sykes's outlets. The casks were filled with the whisky, kept until the market was right, and sold at an enhanced value because of the flavour, among other reasons. The dominance of the trade by the large concerns, and the switch to plastic containers for sherry, meant an end to this little enterprise.

Sykes's later history is referred to in the main text. The present Board consists of R.D. Felgate, W.J. Mellor and J.D.H. Mellor. Sykes's are housed in Higson's office block at 127 Dale Street, their warehouse being alongside in North Street.

Sykes's present premises are a little east of their old office at 117 Dale Street. On the same block, 119 Dale Street, stood Sykes's pub, the Excelsior. On the opposite corner of Johnson Street/Dale Street stood the Old Scotch House (121 Dale Street), a Walker-Cain pub. Walker's pub was in a block where Higsons wanted to build their new office. The pubs were swapped, together with their names, causing confusion to drinkers and historians alike, especially when the two professions are combined. However, the Walker-Cain block was demolished and part of the site now serves Higson's senior personnel as a car-park.

### *James Addey & Company Limited*

This company is Higson's transport subsidiary. It started, like many such firms, at the end of the First World War as a family business. After W.E. Corlett acquired control over the Sykes group, the Higson and Sykes transport side was closed down and reliance placed on contract haulage. From 1920, Addey's have been the hauliers for Higson's, operating both local and distant deliveries. Horse drawn drays survived in the firm until 1950, occupying the old Walker stables where 'the horses went upstairs to bed' in the words of one employee. In the 1920s, the firm had a number of motor wagons, bought from Thornycroft's under an arrangement with W.E. Corlett. Higson's subsidised the purchase. (Thornycroft's were also the firm which provided W.E.C. with his yacht!)

Addey's 1920s fleet is featured in an article in the *Commercial Motor* for the period, and comprised a Carrimore six-wheeler, five three-ton Thornycrofts and a 30 cwt. subsidy lorry. This was the new fleet; also, the firm had (1925) two Pierce-Arrow lorries and a stable of horses. In 1935, Mr Addey as sole proprietor of James Addey & Co., was authorised by the Higson Board to buy a new fleet of Albion Lorries; these were bought by Higson's on Abbey's behalf, the loan to be repaid by Addey's at £20 per week plus 6% interest.

Up to 1955, Addey's garages were at Kirk Street and Beacon Lane. In that year, the garage was transferred to Beaufort Street when the new Bottling Stores was opened and Addey's were formally acquired.

*This previously unpublished article was written in the early 1980s.*