Introduction

Perthshire has had a long association with brewing: Patrick, brewer of Kintillo, was mentioned in a charter of 1247,¹ and the earliest known recorded instance of ‘publick’ brewing in Scotland is associated with Blackford in 1488.² Commercial brewing did not, however, become a significant activity until the 16th century, and up until that time brewing was primarily undertaken in the home, by monks, or in brewhouses attached to ale-houses. For instance, in 1275 the Abbot and convent of Inchaffray (which lay between Perth and Crieff) was granted ‘the brewhouse of the whole land of Petlandy, with rights of the brewhouse’.³ Brewhouses were also associated with larger private residences,⁴ an example being that at the 18th century Inchtalla Castle on the Lake of Menteith to the west of Perthshire (see Fig. 1).⁵

By the second half of the 19th century, in common with most other counties in Scotland, a number of country brewers had established themselves, and some of these developed markets elsewhere in Scotland and the North of England. The main brewers in Perthshire during the second half of the 19th century and early 20th century were:

Carmichael & Co. (later Ltd.), Auchterarder (c.1880-1906)
Robert Eadie & Sons, Blackford (c.1864-1911)
R. & D. Sharp (later Ltd.), Blackford (c.1825-1927)
W. B. Thomson Ltd., Blackford (1895-1915)
James Ogilvy, Blairgowrie (c.1862-1920)
John Wright & Co. (later Ltd.), Perth (1784-1964)
Muir & Martin, Perth (1815-1926)

There were also smaller concerns to the north in Aberfeldy (Old Pitilie Brewery), Dunkeld (Peter Rutherford) and Pitlochry (Old Brewery); to the west in Crieff (John Bullions and the Crerar brothers); and to the east in Abernethy (James Brown), Errol (John Blair and successors) and Inchture (T. Mole).

* This article has undergone peer review.

---

Figure 1. Inchtalla Castle and its brewhouse.
Of these brewers only R. & D. Sharp Ltd., Muir and Martin, James Ogilvy and John Wright & Co. (Perth) Ltd. survived World War I, and only John Wright & Co. (Perth) Ltd. remained in business after World War II, being eventually taken over by Vaux & Associated Breweries Ltd. in 1961. Brewing came to an end at Wright’s Perth Brewery in 1964, leaving the county without a commercial brewer until 1995 when the Moulin micro-brewery opened in Pitlochry. This was followed by the Aldchlappie Hotel in 1996, which ceased brewing in 2000, and the Inveralmond Brewery in 1997, which has grown to be one of the most significant of the wave of new breweries in Scotland. The most recent addition is the Strathbraan Brewery which was established on a farm near Dunkeld in 2012. Two other short-lived breweries also operated in the 2000s: the Breadalbane Brewery and the Trossachs Craft Brewery.

The most immediate competition for the 19th century brewers of Perthshire were their counterparts in the neighbouring counties of Clackmannanshire, Fife, Forfarshire and Stirlingshire (see Fig. 2). The town of Alloa in Clackmannanshire was of particular significance as it was the third largest brewing centre in Scotland (only Edinburgh and Glasgow were bigger) with eight breweries at its height. While these areas have been researched in some depth (see for instance Alloa, Dundee, Fife and Stirlingshire) Perthshire has received relatively little attention. This paper is intended to fill part of that gap.

Blackford

In Barnard’s account of his visit to R. & D. Sharp’s brewery he made particular mention of the purchase of beer in 1488 by James IV, in connection with James’s coronation at nearby Scone, making it the earliest known documented account of commercial brewing in Scotland. The King’s treasurer’s account states that 12s were paid: ‘quhen the King com furth of Sanct Johnston for a barell of Ayll at the Blackfurd’.

This was the first evidence of what was to become a long association with brewing in Blackford.

In the second half of the 19th century Blackford was a village of between 1,500 and 2,000 people and, as can be seen in Figure 3, was formed around two main streets, each of which was less than a mile long. Other than brewing, the main activities were tanning and boot making, and there was also a small rope works. Yet, despite its small size and inherently limited local demand, it was at one point home to three substantial breweries, and it had its own excise officer from at least 1889. Why there was such intense brewing activity lies in a combination of four main factors:

i) The abundant water supplies, which were particularly suited to the manufacture of high quality ale and porter. The quality of the water is still relied upon today by Highland Spring (the UK’s leading bottled water company) and its subsidiary the Gleneagles Spring Water Company, both of which are based in Blackford;

ii) The availability of high quality barley in the immediate locality for producing malt (noted by Barnard); 11

iii) The Central Railway which opened a station in Blackford in 1848. This connected the village with Perth to the north, and Stirling and points south, and hence provided ready access to new and established markets for their products; and,

iv) The quality and reputation of the product, which was widely acknowledged. 12
Figure 3. The breweries of Blackford in 1899. 1 = W.B. Thomson Ltd.; 2 = R. & D. Sharp Ltd.; 3 = Robert Eadie & Sons; 4 = the site of William Eadie's former brewhouse.

Figure 4. The breweries of (1) R. & D. Sharp Ltd; (2) Robert Eadie & Sons; and (3) W.B. Thomson Ltd. in 1914.
The sites of the breweries belonging to R. & D. Sharp Ltd., Robert Eadie & Sons, and W.B. Thompson Ltd. are clearly marked on the 1899 Ordnance Survey map (see Fig. 3). The breweries are also recorded in a photograph taken in 1914 which was recently donated to Perth and Kinross Council Archive (see Fig. 4).

How the breweries of Blackford were established, and their subsequent development, is presented in the next section. Relatively few papers have survived for the businesses under consideration. In the case of W.B. Thomson Ltd. the liquidator was specifically authorised to ‘destroy the books and documents of the company after the lapse of six months from this date’ [9 August 1918] and the same was probably the case for R. & D. Sharp Ltd. No papers are held by the Scottish Brewing Archive other than material relating to Gleneagles Maltings Ltd., which utilised part of W.B. Thomson’s former premises. The authors have, however, identified and used material from a number of other Scottish archives, including previously unexploited documents which provide insights into the challenges faced by the companies, and the decisions that had to be made by management. The main documents consulted consist of:

i) Company dissolution records for R. & D. Sharp Ltd. and W.B. Thomson Ltd., held by the National Records of Scotland.


iii) The debtor’s ledger for D. & W. McLaren of Blackford, in private hands.

iv) Miscellaneous legal and commercial documents relating to R. & D. Sharp Ltd. and W. B. Thomson Ltd., held by Perth and Kinross Council Archive.

v) Valuation rolls for the County of Perth, 1855-1945, held by Perth and Kinross Council Archive.

vi) Wills and inventories for Andrew Cousin, George Eadie, Robert Eadie, William Eadie, Daniel Sharp, and William Chalmers Burns Thomson, held by the National Records of Scotland.

These have been supplemented by contemporary news accounts, trade and post office directories, official notifications from the Edinburgh and London Gazettes, and birth, marriage and death certificates.

The brewers and breweries of Blackford

R. & D. Sharp Ltd.

The Sharp family took over the Blackford Brewery at the end of the 18th century, by which time it is generally believed that brewing had been undertaken on the same site for just over 300 years, with the oldest surviving building dating from 1610. The brewery is clearly marked on the Ordnance Survey map of 1863 (see Fig. 5), as is Sharp’s Inn, which was owned by another Robert Sharp, a further member of this extended family.

The business was initially run by James Sharp (c.1771-1820), described as a brewer, maltster and farmer, who married Catherine Forbes in 1799. In 1830 his sons Robert and Daniel succeeded to the business and formed a partnership that developed its trade and established its reputation for high quality ales.

Robert Sharp (c.1802-1865) is known to have been a brewer from at least 1825, and was also a baron bailie (i.e. local magistrate) of Blackford. He was married twice: firstly to Catherine McCallum, then to Lillias Lawson in 1850. By 1841 Robert had decided to con-
centrate on his farming business, and his brother Daniel took on the day-to-day running of the brewery. In 1852 Robert became a member of the Provisional Committee of the Crieff Junction Railway Company, which was established with a notional capital of £45,000 in order to build a link north from the Central Railway. The nine mile section of track was completed in 1856 and ran from the nearby Gleneagles station (the next station up the line from Blackford) through Tullibardine and Muthill, before terminating in Crieff. When Robert died in 1865 his widow Lillias took on his role in the copartnery with Daniel under the terms of a new contract of 1866, by which time Daniel’s son James was already employed by the company.

Daniel (c.1807-1870) married Elisabeth Connal in 1837 and had two sons: James (1838-1875) and Daniel junior (1850-1908), who became partners in the business following Daniel’s death in 1870. Daniel senior was also a director of the local gas works company, which had been established in 1855. He left an estate valued at £5,133, which included £3,309 as his share and interest in the business. Following James’s death in 1875, Daniel junior retired from the copartnery leaving Lillias Sharp, Robert Sharp’s widow, as the sole remaining partner.

In 1884 the business became incorporated as a limited company (Scottish company number 1361), by which time it was jointly, and equally, owned by John Stewart (1843-1924), the general manager, and Alexander Ferguson, who was the brewery’s agent in Glasgow. John had originally worked for Dron & Lawson, a firm of iron tube manufacturers in Glasgow, but came into the business through his marriage, in 1871, to Catherine Sharp, a daughter of Daniel Sharp. He was to be the major driving force behind the business for some 50 years.

The price paid for the heritable subjects, machinery, plant, utensils, office furniture, and goodwill of the business was £10,000, plus the stock-in-trade at an evaluation provided by Hugh Baird of Hugh Baird & Sons, the Glasgow maltsters, which had been established in 1855. Baird’s company had already acted as an agent for the sale or funding of a number of breweries, ranging from Bathgate in the East to companies in the South and West of Scotland.

The initial capitalisation of R. & D. Sharp Ltd. was £25,000, made up of 2,300 ordinary £10 shares and 200 deferred £10 shares. 14 individuals initially took up shares, the bulk of which were held by members of the Sharp family or their relations through marriage. Shortly after incorporation the firm adopted a trademark consisting of an arm clutching an arrow and the motto bene dirige (see Fig. 6). The authorised share capital was further increased in 1899 to £45,000 by £20,000 of £10 preference shares, which allowed the business to expand the number of external investors without significantly diluting the holdings, and hence control, of the Sharp family.

The initial funding helped pay for the expansion and some modernisation of the brewery, work on which was begun in 1888 by the Glasgow firm of Russell & Spence. The improvements were reflected in the rateable value of the brewery (i.e. its anticipated annual rental value). This had been £40 in 1855, £50 in 1865, and then £100 in 1874, a year which saw major revaluations of properties throughout the county. There was then a major increase in 1888 to £200, followed by a further increase to £375 in 1890 (by which time the improvements had been completed) before it fell back to £300 in 1892, at which level it broadly remained until the closure of the brewery in 1927. After the modernisa-
tion programme the brewery occupied over two acres of land, with several acres of grazing and cultivated land being attached. It had a 15-quarter plant and around 400 barrels were produced per week including stout, table beer and pale ale (see Fig. 7).

By the time of Barnard’s visit to the brewery in 1889, it had already been celebrated in song:

Ales of the best are also manufactured here
From old Pale Ale to Sharp’s most noble beer.

The layout of the brewery can be seen on the Ordnance Survey map of 1899 (see Fig. 8). On the south side of the brewery complex, opposite the yard entrance, were the maltings, which were some 70 feet in length and 45 feet wide. The maltings were built of red sandstone, were four storeys high, and contained three separate malt-barns. To the west of the maltings were the malt-kiln, the mill-room, and the engine-house, which contained a fifteen horse-power engine driven by a large steam boiler in the yard. The brewhouse was to the west of this row of buildings.

At the top of the brewhouse was the reservoir, which was supplied with water pumped from wells in the yard. On the floor below were the brewer’s office and the mash tuns, which were regulated by Willison cataract mashing machines. At the west of the building was the copper-house which contained one domed and one open copper, both heated by fires beneath.

Next to this, in an upper floor of one of the new buildings, were two open coolers, fed from the coppers via the hop-back, which were connected to a Morton refrigerator that could cool at the rate of forty barrels per hour. Even further to the west was the tun room which contained nine fermenting vessels fed by beer that had passed through the refrigerator. On a lower level were settling squares from which ale, beer and porter were passed through the cask-filling machines into barrels. After racking, the barrels were stored in one of six cellars, No. 6 being used for local trade. This was the oldest building in the complex, dating back to 1610, and had previously been used as a malt-barn.

Although the tied house system was not as prevalent in Scotland as in England, due to the different licensing laws, the company did own a small number of licensed premises. These were mainly in the local area (such as the Moray Arms in Blackford and the Queen’s Hotel in Auchterarder) but stretched as far north as Elgin (the City Hotel). The funding from the second share issue was used to help add, with additional borrowing, a small tied estate in the North-East of England, where Scottish ales were particularly popular. The local railway provided connections to these markets, and the business had its own sidings at Blackford station through which beer and returns could be processed.

The partial tie system was a more common approach in Scotland, through which brewers could exert their

Figure 7. Label for Sharp’s Sparkling Pale Ale.

Figure 8. The Blackford Brewery in 1899.
Figure 9. Staff at R. & D. Sharp’s Blackford Brewery at the end of the 19th century.

Figure 10. Coopers at R. & D. Sharp’s Blackford Brewery at the end of the 19th century.
influence over publicans and hotel-keepers by offering them loans on condition that they sold their products until such time as the debt was paid off. The advantage was that less capital was needed to generate more sales, though that had to be traded-off against the possible loss of the tie further down the line. R. & D. Sharp Ltd. had loans on their 1908 balance sheet amounting to £5,267, though these were gradually reduced to £67 by 1922.

It was also normal practice to extend credit to the trade. Inevitably some of these businesses were unable to repay their loans or pay their day-to-day bills, and the sequestration of estates was a regular feature of the Edinburgh Gazette, the official journal of record and newspaper of the Crown in Scotland. R. & D. Sharp Ltd. had its share of bad debts, and several of the partners and directors were appointed trustees or commissioners on a number of sequestrated estates. Amongst the debtors with which the company were involved were:

William Bisset, of the Ewe and Lamb Tavern, Perth in 1870
David Morrison, innkeeper, Auchterarder in 1871
The British & Foreign Mineral Water Co., Glasgow in 1875
Robert Scott, innkeeper, Dunning in 1875
James Lindsay, Railway Hotel, Edinburgh in 1885
James Duncan, hotel-keeper, Crieff in 1896
Hugh Campbell, hotel-keeper, Red Lion Hotel, Fochabers in 1900
Hugh McIntyre, grocer and wine merchant, Glasgow in 1902
David Wilkie, hotel-keeper, Market Hotel, Perth in 1910
David Hamilton, hotel-keeper, Royal Hotel, Crieff in 1915
James Thomson, hotel keeper, Red Lion Hotel, Garmouth in 1916
James Smith, Glen Village Stores, Falkirk in 1916

These cases show that the company dealt as far north as Morayshire, and across the central belt of Scotland. It is notable that there were no similar cases of sequestrations south of the border where the strategy had been to acquire, rather than lend.

R. & D. Sharp Ltd. was a small but steady employer within Blackford and it also contributed to the local economy through its use of other services, as reflected in the ledger for 1895-1908 of D. & W. McLaren, a local haulier. McLaren’s transport was used to augment Sharp’s own drays to move draff and manure from the brewery, and to take bottled beer to the railway station and bring empties back. They were also used to assist with the agricultural activities of the Sharp family. Examination of a number of group photographs of Sharp’s staff suggests that they had around 15 draymen, brewery labourers, coopers, a blacksmith, and a dog (name unknown), in addition to two or three senior staff (see Figs. 9 and 10).

The firm made numerous contributions to local affairs and social activities including: providing their ‘far-famed ale’ to troops of the 15th Perthshire Volunteers who were on military exercises; two casks of ‘famous Blackford bitter’ for the Blackford versus Bridge of Allan bowling match; publishing an illustrated pamphlet on the Blackford district; and holding an annual curling match at Whitemuir pond for their employees.

During its first 15 years the company was relatively successful, in part due to its strategy of expansion through the acquisition of licensed properties. However, the decade from 1910 to 1919 was a difficult one as, like many other brewers, R. & D. Sharp Ltd. was impacted by legislative and economic factors outside its control. It saw falls in the book value of its properties in England, where magistrates had the power through the 1902 and then the 1904 Licensing Acts to reduce the number of public house licences in areas where it was felt that the number of outlets was too dense. For instance, Newcastle Breweries Ltd., who also operated in the north-east of England, had five licences refused in 1903. Although the 1904 Act introduced the notion of compensation, this was paid for out of a fund generated by a levy on all licensed properties. While it may be argued that demand would then be spread across a smaller number of outlets, the business risk and costs were increased, and perceptions of the value of the assets were affected. The 1910 Licensing Act also had an effect on property values as it increased the cost of obtaining a licence. Sharp’s saw a fall in the value of their South Shield’s properties from £13,297 in 1910-12, to £13,247 in 1913-1916, and then to £12,584 in 1917. After some major disposals they fell again from £4,588 in 1918 to £4,226 in 1919.
The book value of their Scottish properties, which operated under different licensing laws, actually rose from £10,399 in 1910-11, to £10,465 in 1912, then £10,535 in 1913-15. However, they too then started to fall: to £10,445 in 1916, £9,942 in 1917, £9,464 in 1918 and £9,251 in 1919. The common factor affecting both sets of properties was the onset of World War I, which also brought a general rise in the price of raw materials, and a reduction in their availability. For instance, the 1916 Output of Beer (Restriction) Acts reduced output by between 20 and 30% in order to conserve scarce cereals, and the 1917 Intoxicating Liquor (Output & Delivery) Order required brewers to produce at least half of their beer at less than 1036º. John Stewart makes several references to the cost and volume of barley and hops, and the subsequent impact on profits, in his letter book.49

A final factor was the 1913 Temperance (Scotland) Act which provided the opportunity for districts to be voted ‘dry’ and thus led to the loss of markets and the closing of brewing and licensed premises. In the end Perthshire was unaffected, but 40 districts did vote ‘dry’, including Airdrie, Kilsyth, Kirkintilloch and eleven wards in Glasgow, all of which would have been markets for R. & D. Sharp Ltd.50 Despite these external factors the business still managed to make profits, apart from in 1912 and 1913, after which year John briefly entertained the possibility of selling the brewery:

With reference to your advertisement in the Scotsman of the 18th [October, 1913] we beg to state that arrangements might be made to dispose of this old established brewery. The plant could, with slight extension, be brought up to turn out 1000 Brls per week. The maltings are comparatively new and fitted up with machinery to save manual labour. There are three wells within the premises and one on the adjoining ground. Two of the wells within the premises are very suitable for Pale Ale brewing.51

It would appear that it was primarily through the assistance of the auditor, Thomas A. Craig, who found sympathetic ways in which to present the accounts, that the company managed to survive World War I. Even so, like many small country breweries it became unable to compete with the larger urban ones, and the 1915 Excess Profit Tax meant that any success was penalised, and heavily: the firm had to pay £1,500 in excess tax over a four year period at a time when it needed money to meet other obligations. The problems of the cost of raw materials continued into the 1920s when John advised Andrew Cousin, who held a bond of £2,500 over the brewery, that:

I am very sorry that there will be no dividend on the ordinary shares of the brewery for the year ending 31st August partly owing to the very high price of barley and hops, and also the excessive beer duty of £5 for every standard barrel. The Government has spoiled the brewery trade.52

On 20 October 1924 John registered a new name, the Gleneagles Brewery, possibly hoping to capitalise upon the publicity surrounding the opening of the luxury Gleneagles Hotel in June of that year in nearby Auchterarder. However, he never had the opportunity to gauge the impact of this move as he died four days later at the age of 81. John Stewart had been the engine behind the business, constantly finding ways to fend off creditors, even paying dividends out of his own pocket to meet the company’s obligations, and backing loans. An examination of his letterbook shows that it was only in his final year, at the age of 81, that he made the gentlest of complaints:

I feel I will not be able to carry on much longer without some assistance. The office work is all right but it is looking after the brewery and the commercial department that worries me.53

Three new directors (John L. Menzies, Andrew Auld and James R. Sharp) were appointed after his death, but the company went into terminal decline. On the 30 March 1927 the directors declared that:

As the company by reason of its liabilities cannot continue in business, it is advisable to wind up same and that the company be and is hereby placed in voluntary liquidation.54

The subsequent valuation of the business was: brewery and goodwill £5,400, properties in Scotland £2,930, and properties in England £3,170. Charles Taylor C.A. was appointed the liquidator but the process took longer than anticipated: although the brewery was demolished around 1930, a cut in funding for road widening schemes meant that the contractor did not remove the materials from the site, making the ground unsellable.55 A final meeting to consider the disposition of the firm’s assets was held in 1936.56 The only surviving part of the brewery is the office, which was taken on as a private
house in 1930 by a Mrs Scobie. Figure 11 shows it as it is today, still a private residence, with an armorial crest above what was the main door.

William Eadie

The Eadie name has had a long association with Blackford. Helen Eadie ran an inn that was destroyed when Jacobites burnt the village to the ground in 1716, along with nearby Auchterarder, Crieff, Dunning, Muthill and Dalreach;\(^57\) she later received £33 in compensation. In the nineteenth century William Eadie (1785-1860) also ran an inn, probably from around the time of his marriage to Mary Stewart in 1809.\(^58\) He appears in a directory of 1837, without a specified occupation, but in the 1841 and 1851 censuses he is described as an inn-keeper and also in the 1855-56 valuation rolls, where his business is recorded as having a rateable value of £18. After his death the business was taken on by his son, William junior (1822-1886), who described himself as a grain merchant in 1860, and as an inn-keeper (at Eadie’s Inn) and farmer in 1861, employing two men and two boys. Then, in the 1863-64 valuation rolls, a brewery is mentioned for the first time as an addition to the inn, with a valuation of £20; the complex can be seen on the 1863 Ordnance Survey map (see Fig. 12). In the 1871 census William junior, who married Christina Thomson in 1860, is described as a brewer employing one brewer, one clerk, and three men and a boy. William, who was fined £3 in 1872 for not having a proper sign on his premises,\(^59\) was finally described as a retired brewer in 1881.

The valuation of the brewery rose to £108 in 1874, and then fell back to £90 in 1879, which was also its value when it was offered to let in 1880. It was described as:

The New Street Brewery carried on till recently by Mr William Eadie. There is a supply of water on the premises admirably adapted for brewing purposes besides an ample gravitation supply for cooling and washing. The brewery plant and machinery, which includes a 16-barrel wort copper, is in good working order. A new pumping engine and boiler were recently added. There is ample cellaring and part of the premises could readily be adapted for malting.\(^60\)

It was offered for sale the following year,\(^61\) and was sold by private bargain to a Mr McLean of Glasgow,\(^62\) who was probably acting as an agent as the valuation rolls for that year record James Thomson as being the proprietor. The brewery is then described as being ‘empty’, and in 1882 it passed into the hands of William’s brother James. In 1886 it was acquired by D. Lawson, a local banker whose family had married into the Sharps (which explains the use of the cellars by R. & D. Sharp Ltd. from 1887 to 1894). The premises were then acquired in 1895 by William Chalmers Burns Thomson, who commissioned a new brewery on the site and adjoining land. The hotel and associated buildings survive to this day as the Blackford Hotel (see Fig. 13), behind which can be seen the maltings built by W.B. Thomson Ltd.
Several of William Eadie junior’s relatives were involved in the brewing industry. His uncle and three of his cousins established a brewery in Stirling Street in 1865 (see the next section). His brother James moved to Burton-on-Trent where he founded a brewery in Cross Street in 1854, which was eventually acquired by Bass, Ratcliff & Gretton Ltd. in 1933. William’s sister Ann married John Burden of Stirling in 1846, who was the third member of the Burden family to operate the Stirling Brewery, which dated back to 1795. When John died in 1852 Ann ran the brewery until their son Peter came of age. Ann’s nephew, another William, was eventually to become the manager of the Stirling Brewery and, along with James Eadie, a director of Peter Burden Ltd. until its closure in 1931. James Thomson Eadie, the son of William junior, was the company secretary of W.B. Thomson Ltd. and later a director of one of the giants of Scottish brewing, William McEwan & Co. Ltd. Finally, James’s son Gregor became a director of Scottish Brewers Ltd. in 1939.

Robert Eadie & Son

Robert Eadie & Sons was a partnership formed by Robert Eadie (1780-1859) and his three sons, Robert junior (1820-1890), George (1828-1903) and John. Robert senior, who was William Eadie senior’s brother, married Helen Davidson in 1815. He was initially a boot and shoe manufacturer, but expanded the business to include brewing and tanning. The brewery first appears in the valuation rolls of 1865-66, at a value of £14, rising to £25 in 1871 and £90 in 1874, before falling back to £80 in 1879 and £70 in 1891. The brewery is clearly marked on the 1899 Ordnance Survey map (see Fig. 14), and covered an area of approximately 100 by 80 feet. In 1872 the business was fined £50 (reduced to £20 as it was their first offence) for ‘making an untrue or incorrect entry of the quantity of malt’.

In 1878, the three brothers agreed to focus their energies on separate ventures and the partnership was dissolved. The brewing and malting side of the business was carried on by Robert and George, who continued trading as Robert Eadie & Sons, while John concentrated his interests on tanning, and boot and shoe making. In 1880 the firm registered a trademark consisting of a circle bisected by a wavy line (see Fig. 15).

Robert and George employed their nephew James Cunningham as a brewer, and James McOmish, the infamous umbrella thief, as a traveller. James Cunningham was first recorded as a brewer’s assistant in the 1871 census, and as a brewer from 1881 to 1901. His father, also James, married Mary Eadie (Robert Eadie senior’s daughter) and was recorded as a brewer from 1851 to 1881 (employer unknown).

In 1890 the partnership was dissolved, with George Eadie carrying on the business under the same name. By
this time Robert was resident in Dundee suffering from ‘suffusion of the brain’, and his affairs were being dealt with by Robert Moody Stuart, who was acting in the capacity of curator bonis. Robert Eadie died, intestate, the same year, at which point his interest in the business was valued at £532.

Like R. & D. Sharp Ltd. the business had its share of bad debts, and the partners were appointed trustees or commissioners on a number of sequestrated estates. Amongst the debtors with which the company were involved were:

- Alexander McLaren, hotel-keeper, Broughty Ferry in 1869
- James Storrer, spirit dealer, Dundee in 1879
- John Shanks, Lennoxtown in 1884
- James Anderson, Rutherglen in 1900

These cases indicate a much smaller market, both in size and geographical spread, than that of R. & D. Sharp Ltd. George died in 1903 intestate, like his brother, and the ‘value of the stock-in-trade, machinery, etc.,’ was taken over by his nephew Robert Eadie, whisky merchant, 58 West Regent Street, Glasgow for £1,246. Although the business had been taken on by someone connected with the drinks industry, the writing was on the wall; the brewery had closed by 1911, and the company was finally dissolved in 1915. The buildings were used from 1922 for storage by a local potato merchant until they were acquired in 1947 by Welsh land surveyor William Delmé Evans. They were then converted and rebuilt into a whisky distillery which, having passed through a num-
ber of different owners, survives today as the Tullibardine Distillery (see Fig. 16). The connection to brewing is not lost, however. Visitors to the village can buy a bottled beer at the distillery which has been matured in whisky casks, and which is named ‘1488’ to commemorate the purchase of beer by James IV.

W.B. Thomson Ltd.

William Chalmers Burns Thomson (the ‘Chalmers’ was only used in his birth and death records) ran a wholesale and retail wine and spirits business with his brother Alexander in South Street, Perth, from 1860. He subsequently opened his own business in Canal Street, and then established a highly successful aerated water company which eventually had manufacturies in Perth, Blackford and Kirriemuir, and which survived until 1977 as Thomson Craik & Co. Ltd.

William (1840-1896) was an expert whisky blender and his skills earned him a position as director of the Burntisland Distillery Company. He was also a director of the Tayside Floorcloth Company in Newburgh, where he maintained a depot to service an extensive trade in ale and aerated waters in the town. In 1895 he acquired the former premises of William Eadie and commissioned the building of a new brewery on the site and adjacent land. Sadly, William died before he could see the buildings completed in 1897. They are clearly shown, labelled as the Moray Street Brewery, on the Ordnance Survey map of 1899 (see Fig. 17). William Eadie’s former inn is shown as a hotel in front of the buildings.

The brewery (see Fig. 18) was designed to accommodate a 30-quarter plant, but was initially fitted out with a 15-quarter one. The malt and hop store was four storeys high, 50 feet long and 30 feet wide, with the ground floor containing the cooperage, mill-house and engine-room. The brewhouse joined the store and was 30 feet long, 20 feet wide and five storeys high, and contained the hot and cold water tanks, the mashing machine, and the mash tun. Next door to the brewhouse was a three storey copper house, also 30 by 20 feet, which contained two 100 barrel coppers and furnaces, two sugar dissolvers, and a steam boiler.

Running west from this building was a two storey cooler house with a large hop-back at the east end, and a refrigerator from Willison of Alloa at the west end. The building was 70 feet long and 28 feet wide, and the ground floor was used as a cellar and a pump room. The turn room at the west end of the cooler house was also two storeys high, and 72 feet long by 42 feet wide. It contained nine fermenting vessels, and beer was racked off on the ground floor before being stored in the cellar below. An artesian well was sunk to a depth of 160 feet, and a Gillespie pump, driven by a 15 horse power engine from Cochrane of Barrhead, supplied water to the top of the brewhouse at 18 gallons a minute.

An aerated water manufactury, which was one of the largest in Scotland, was built on the site to the east of the brewing complex. It was two storeys high, 104 feet long...
and 60 feet wide, and had a bottling plant that was capable of processing 140 dozen bottles per hour. Later, maltings were built to the north of the brewing complex, which contained two malting floors, 18 malt store bins, two steeps, two double kilns, a drying kiln, two dressing machines and one kibbling machine.

After William’s death the business was run by a board of trustees who felt that their powers were insufficient to develop it appropriately in response to any increased demand for their products. To address this a limited company was established (Scottish company number 3953) with a share capital of £120,000, made up of 6,000 5% cumulative preference shares of £10 each, and 6,000 ordinary shares of £10 each. All the ordinary shares and one third of the preference shares were accepted by the vendors (i.e. the trustees) as part-payment of the purchase price, with £25,000 cash being provided by them to fund the building of a maltings; 4,000 preference shares were then offered to the public. The prospectus for the new company incorporated valuations for the brewery by Russell & Spence, Glasgow (£10,249) and the plant and machinery by Robert Willison, Alloa (£4,464).

Although the late William Burns Thomson’s books were ‘not such as an accountant could now make up profit and loss accounts from, especially as no regular record has been kept of the annual stock taking’ the fact that he left a considerable fortune from his wine and spirits business gave the directors the confidence to state that future annual profits would be no less than £8,500. It was proposed that at least 10% of this profit should be used each year to establish a reserve fund of £6,000. The initial shareholders were: Helen Hope Thomson (William’s widow), Alexander Douglas Lawrie (wine merchant and brewery manager), Alexander Thomson (wine merchant), James Thomson Eadie (brewery cashier), Farquhar A. Ogilvie Laing (wine merchant in Newcastle) and Sinclair MacDonald (a merchant in Dundee). All, with the exception of Helen, were also directors of the company. The new company successfully applied for a transfer of a dealer’s license for porter, ale and beer in 1899, and applied for the registration of a trademark featuring a hand holding a foaming stein of beer in 1904 (see Fig. 19). The company also used a four pointed star on a series of circles as a trademark, as can be seen on a label for its pale ale (see Fig. 20).

As with R. & D. Sharp Ltd., and Robert Eadie & Sons, the business had its share of bad debts, and the directors were appointed trustees or commissioners on a number of sequestrated estates. Amongst the debtors with which the company were involved were:

John Dow, aerated water manufacturer and bottler, Kirriemuir in 1904

![Figure 19. Trademark registered by W.B. Thomson Ltd.](image1)

![Figure 20. Label for Thomson’s Pale Ale.](image2)
Mary Catherine Deans, Douglas Hotel, Dunfermline in 1909

In the early 1900s the decision was made to spin-off the aerated water business and merge it with John Craik and Co. of Perth (Thomas Craik had run the mannufactury at Blackford) to form Thomson Craik & Co. Ltd. This business was eventually acquired in 1952 by John Wright & Co. (Perth) Ltd., the largest brewery firm in Perthshire. The brewing side had ongoing problems, however, related in the main to its attempts to build a tied estate. In a petition to the Lords of Council and Session in 1906 it stated that:

To enable the company to secure a market for its beer it was found necessary, owing to other brewery companies doing so, to secure licensed businesses, or interests in them. Considerable sums were invested with the result that the brewery was made a profit-producing asset. Unfortunately these investments were made at a time when, as it turned out, the prices of licensed premises were much inflated, and the value of the investments then made is now seriously reduced. The depression in the licensed trade during the past few years has tended further to reduce the value.

This problem was mitigated by the simple expedient of cancelling £8 on every ordinary £10 share, and writing the corresponding £48,000 off the book value of the licensed premises. Even this extreme measure was insufficient, and, after warnings from the auditors, the business was put into voluntary liquidation in 1915 with the final dissolution of the company taking place in 1918.

The recent discovery of John Stewart’s letterbook (John was the general manager of R. & D. Sharp Ltd. and his son worked for the Bank of Scotland) sheds new light on the liquidation of the company. A letter from John of 13 October 1915 states that:

It is fully six months since Thomson’s brewed any beer or stout. All the beer is out of this brewery a week since and they cannot sell Blackford Beer. We supplied them with several barrels to complete their order, that is unless they had some beer in stock, but that will be finished now as Calder will likely get the supplying of the Perth places. We understand this Robertson from Coldstream is a traveller or nominee of Calder’s, Alloa, and they bought the plant and heritables from the liquidator and the malt, hops and part of the casks are sent to Coldstream.

Calder appears to be behind the scheme and though the machinery, tuns and coppers have not been touched the talk is that they are all to be removed but I think this is a move to bring the bank to accept their offer which is evidently very small.

John Joseph Calder (1868-1962) was a prominent figure in the brewing industry, and had registered the company of James Calder & Co. (Alloa) Ltd. in 1905 to acquire the existing business of James Calder & Co., of which he was the sole partner. The assets included the Shore Brewery in Alloa, and distilleries in Bo’ness and Gargunnock. The company sold off its whisky interests in 1920, and was re-registered as James Calder & Co. (Brewers) Ltd. Throughout his career John Joseph Calder had a remarkable eye for new business opportunities, and his reputation as a ‘forceful business manager’ was such that he was brought in to rescue Samuel Allsopp & Sons of Burton in 1913. This reputation failed to impress John Stewart, however, and he actively sought an alternative purchaser for Thomson’s brewery, including approaching the distiller John Walker on the 21 October 1915:

You may not have heard that the liquidator of W. B. Thomson Ltd. advertised the brewery here but he did not get an offer. The whole buildings in Perth and Blackford are mortgaged to the Bank of Scotland and they are anxious to sell the brewery, hotel and houses here. The whole premises here cost the company over £20,000 and I understand the Bank would be disposed to sell at less than half that figure, some £8,000 might be expected. The maltings are good and the brewery would be without very much expense converted into a distillery. The water from the Danny Burn is safe and quite suitable. I understand Calder, Alloa, made an offer but it was so low that the Bank would not accept.

Walker declined the offer but passed it on to the Distillers Company Ltd. prompting John to reply on the 24 of October 1915:

I am favoured with yours of yesterday and note that Thomson’s brewery does not interest you as a firm. I have to thank you for sending my letter to the Distillers Company Ltd. and hope they can inspect the place and make an offer. We would rather have them in the village than Calder as he
seems to be very unpopular in Alloa. Although I mentioned £7,000 to £8,000 I believe the bank would accept considerably less.93

John then lobbied to have the Government use the brewery to billet troops (2 November 1915) adding that:

The brewery is of no use to us as we have a nice up to date and compact brewery and splendid maltings and much more economically worked than Thomson’s. It was partly on selfish grounds I was anxious the place being sold to someone other than Calder as he has a bad name.94

Finally on the 16 February 1916 he wrote to a Mr Stevenson offering him a post of brewer, and adding that:

J. & A. Davidson (Coldstream) Ltd. bought the goodwill of the business and movables from the liquidator,95 but not the brewery buildings, as they belong to the Bank of Scotland, who had an absolute disposition of the whole buildings in Perth and Blackford. The most of the casks are sold and away and the steeps, coolers, etc., are to be taken out very soon.96

Despite John Stewart’s attempts to keep John Joseph Calder’s company out of the picture, the Bank of Scotland finally sold the premises in 1922. Although the brewery lay vacant, James Calder & Co. (Brewers) Ltd. used the maltings until 1927, and they were then leased to Gleneagles Maltings Ltd. in 1931, on a 21 year lease, at £75 per year for the first two years, and £150 per year thereafter. Intriguingly, letters between James Calder & Co. (Brewers) Ltd. and Gleneagles Maltings Ltd. show that the maltings were owned by Captain James Calder, John Joseph Calder’s son.97 James Calder had won a Military Cross in World War I, and by the time of this sale was working in the timber trade in Canada.

Gleneagles had an option, which they eventually exercised in 1950, to buy the premises for £2,500.98 Ironically the brewery was also leased to the War Department from 1941 to 1947, which had been one of John Stewart’s strategies for blocking the acquisition in the first place. The buildings are now occupied by the Gleneagles Water Company, and parts are category B listed (see Fig. 21).

Conclusions

In many ways the breweries of Blackford typify the range of businesses that existed in Scotland in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The Eadie family were represented by William Eadie’s business and then through the more significant one of Robert and George Eadie. William built a brewhouse attached to his inn, and although he briefly retained an agent in Glasgow (Lang Brothers from 1870 to 1871) this small family brewery only employed six men, had primarily parochial interests, and there is no evidence of it building up a tied or partially tied estate. The business would have ultimately found it difficult to compete against the other, larger, breweries in the area which benefitted from economies of scale and reliable outlets for their products. Family businesses of this type were often dependent upon the skills and drive of an individual and once those capabilities were diminished or removed they would find it difficult to maintain their presence.

Robert Eadie & Sons was also a family concern but had the advantage of involving Robert Eadie’s three sons as partners in the business from its formation. As is reflected by the dispersion of its clients (albeit defaulting ones) through Forfarshire, Lanarkshire, and Dunbartonshire, it had greater aspirations in terms of its markets than William Eadie’s business. However, it was impacted by the loss of the three partners over time: John focused his interests on boot and shoe manufacturing in 1878, Robert died in 1890, and George in 1903.
The valuation for the stock-in-trade, machinery, etc., in George’s will (£1,246) shows that it was a much smaller concern than R. & D. Sharp Ltd. and a significantly smaller one than W.B. Thomson Ltd. Although the brewing interests were taken on by another family member in 1903, his interests were primarily in the wine and spirits trade. In all probability he lacked the knowledge, motivation and the finance to take the brewing business forward. It was eventually dissolved after some 50 years of existence in 1915, a victim of limited capital, competition from the larger breweries from Edinburgh, Glasgow, Alloa, Perth and Dundee, and a general depression in the trade.

R. & D. Sharp Ltd., on the other hand, demonstrated that it was possible, even desirable, to take a family partnership, change it into a partnership which included non-family members, and then convert it into a limited company. Although key family members died (Robert in 1865 and Daniel in 1870) or left the partnership (Daniel junior in 1875), it was able to maintain its momentum through the introduction of partners from outside the family, in particular John Stewart, who had previously worked for the engineering firm of Dron & Lawson in Glasgow.

Under John’s astute management the business was then converted into a limited company, which provided access to new capital. This allowed it to build up markets across Scotland (vide the sequestrated estates from clients in Perthshire, the Lothians, Lanarkshire, Stirlingshire and Morayshire). It also gave it the means to create a tied estate in South Shields and modernise its brewery. These initiatives allowed it to survive longer than the other Blackford breweries and even to remain in business through the restrictions of World War I.

However, the inter-war years were difficult times for the industry as a whole: in 1920 there were 63 brewers in Scotland; by 1930 this had fallen to 46 and very few of these could be described as country brewers. John was still managing the company at the age of 81 but it had become too reliant on his ability to find solutions to the financial challenges it faced. His strength became the company’s weakness, and the lack of a successor with the same skills, connections, drive and determination meant that the closure of R. & D. Sharp Ltd. was all but inevitable when he died. The company’s closure brought to an end over 500 years of brewing tradition in this small Perthshire village.

W.B. Thomson Ltd. was another family business which adopted limited company status, this time in response to the sudden death of its principal, William Chalmers Burns Thomson. However, from that point there was no sense of a strong family figure with brewing in the blood driving the business forward; rather it was primarily under the management of businessmen who came from the wine and spirits sector. The company benefited from having a purpose-built brewery and an injection of a considerable amount of capital. However, the combination of ill-timed property investments, wartime restrictions and an over-optimistic projection of annual profits, against which the dividends on preference shares should be taken into account, was too much for this young company to shoulder. It closed after only 20 years of trading.

These four brewing concerns, two founded by branches of the same family, were all established in the 19th century in response to growing demands for beer, expanding markets driven by the growth of the railways, and an established reputation for their beer linked to the quality of local spring water. For a time Blackford represented a sufficiently significant part of the Scottish brewing industry that it merited the permanent appointment of an excise officer for the village.

These businesses demonstrate both the dangers inherent in relying upon key individuals for business survival, the benefits of widening ownership from individual to family partnership, and then to limited companies, the risks involved in forming limited companies in order to finance the development of the business, and the vagaries inherent in building tied and partially tied estates. The examples discussed above highlight the fortunes of businesses in the same industry, in the same location, but which adopted different business models for survival once they had become established. All were founded on a rising market and all ceased when they were subjected to various combinations of the pressures affecting many country breweries:

Consolidation in the industry, which created a small number of considerably larger companies that were able to exploit economies of scale;

The rapid growth of the railway network, which
allowed these larger companies to access new local markets;
World War I, with its associated restrictions regarding raw materials, licensing and labour, and difficult taxation regimes;
The loss of key personnel who had demonstrated considerable corporate loyalty; and,
A lack of capital to expand the business.

The achievements of these businesses are all the more remarkable in that context and should ensure that Blackford will always be remembered as a centre of brewing concentration and excellence.

Acknowledgments

The authors wish to acknowledge the assistance of the following organisations that provided access to documents and images:
Blackford Historical Society
Glasgow University Archive Services: Scottish Brewing Archive
National Records of Scotland
Perth and Kinross Council Archive

References

11. ibid. p.452.
20. Figures have been rounded down to the nearest pound throughout.
42. Anon. (1866) ‘Bridge of Allan’. Glasgow Herald, 26 July.
49. Remarkably, some of these remained ‘dry’ into the 1970s.
51. ibid. Letter 538.
52. ibid. Letter 778.
64. McOmish stole a station agent's umbrella and, when accused, told the agent to ‘Go to Halifax’. question was returned, the Sheriff was minded to let him off with the advice that he should be 'more wary in dealing with umbrellas in the future.'
67. In Scotland, a curator bonis is appointed by the court to look after the financial and other assets of an individual when they are mentally or physically unable to do so themselves.


88. Stewart, J. (1910-1924) op. cit.

89. This is a reference to the brewing firm J. A. Davidson (Coldstream) Ltd.


93. ibid. Letter 262.

94. ibid. Letter 264.

95. An invoice for J. & A. Davidson (Coldstream) Ltd. of 17 August 1921 includes the statement ‘In which is now incorporated the business of W.B. Thomson & Coy., brewers, Blackford, Perthshire and wholesale spirit merchants, Canal Street, Perth. Established 1850’. in the header.


98. ibid.