

THE INDUSTRIALISATION OF THE LONDON BREWING TRADE: PART II

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Chapter Four: The Market for Porter

In 1726 a young Swiss traveller to Britain, César de Saussure, wrote to his family on many aspects of British life including the following passage:

In this country nothing but beer is drunk and it is made in several qualities. Small beer is what everyone drinks when thirsty; it is used in even the best houses and costs only a penny a pot. Another kind of beer is called porter, meaning carrier, because the greater quantity is consumed by the working classes. It is a thick strong beverage and the effect it produced if drunk in excess is the same as that of wine; this porter costs threepence the pot. In London there are a number of alehouses where nothing but this sort of beer is sold.¹

Three decades later, the situation had sufficiently changed to be reported in *Lloyd's Evening Post* as follows, 'Beer, commonly called porter, is almost become the universal cordial of the populace'.² Within that period the 'porter revolution' in brewing had taken place. In this chapter we will follow the consequences of the early industrial development of the London brewing trade.

In early-eighteenth century London, the larger brewers began to develop business methods which we could recognise today. Product branding of porter became established, as with Calvert's or Thrale's entire-butt. There was a system of quality control, where the broad clerks visited the publicans cellar to check on the condition of the beer and to deter its adulteration. Accounts departments gave assistance to publicans in promotional activities like savings clubs. They also administered a complex system of monthly credit, which often secured the sole rights for the sale of the brewer's beer.

Transport, where the brewer had his own drays and horses which guaranteed delivery and control of distribution. Advertising, where the brewers name was displayed on the drays and over the public-house signs. Promotion, where brewer-politicians campaigned on behalf of the brewing trade.

Distribution

Ambrose Page's brewery in Bow gives an interesting insight into the trade of a common brewer in 1721 before the 'porter revolution'. Page lists 25 horses which, allowing one or two for working the horse-mill, meant that over 20 horses were employed in delivering beer to customers, over 600 in number.³ Mathias stated that brewers' delivery rounds formed a circle around the brewery of about three to five miles radius.⁴ However, a glance at Page's accounts gives a different picture of a circle of six to nine miles radius, ranging from central London to Romford in Essex.⁵ This contraction of breweries' distribution areas, is an indication of the porter-brewer's domination of its surrounding area, as competition from smaller brewers was eliminated.

The other significant feature of the Page's accounts is that he lists beer of various strengths, including strong beer at 22s. a barrel, which were all stored in barrels. This is a clear indication that a description of 'strong beer' in 1721 did not mean porter, because we know that porter was stored and transported in butts, not in barrels. The 'porter revolution' depended on the adoption of larger vessels for the manufacture of beer, but it also involved the use of the larger cask, the butt, for distribution.

This was made clear in a petition to the House of Commons in 1743, by the London brewers, when they complained of widespread theft of casks throughout the metropolis. Several leading brewers, who were representing the Brewer's Company, attended the committee appointed to hear their case. Robert Hucks, a leading brewer from St. Giles, described how he had 'several thousand butts trusted to victuallers'.⁶ Ralph Thrale complained of the difficulty in getting a prosecution for victuallers' misappropriation of butts belonging to him. Benjamin Truman estimated his loss in butts to be £500 a year, based on a value of 22s. each. He then added:

The brewers were obliged to use ten times the vessels they did formerly by reason their trade heretofore consisted chiefly in brewing mild beer and ale, which is now disused, the present demand of their customers being all for strong beer, the former of these liquors is drawn in two months, the latter is frequently kept as many years.⁷

This statement encapsulates the 'porter revolution' which had taken place between the 1720s and the 1740s. Strong beer was stored for up to two years to mature before delivery to the public-houses in butts.

Porter was sent out in butts, carried three at a time by horse-drawn drays, making their deliveries to public-houses within the ambit of the brewery. The butt, which contained 108 gallons, was the brewer's principal means of distribution. Although all types of malt liquor continued to be measured in barrels, they were no longer distributed in them and they became a diminishing feature in the porter-brewer's inventory. By 1748, the Anchor brewery in Southwark, numbered only 453 barrels in the annual rest book against 14,574 butts, a mere 1% of capacity.⁸ Truman's rest book of 1760 shows that he had 23,947 butts which were valued at over £30,000. Casks in public-house cellars were valued at £19,018 and those held at the brewery were worth £11,760, which amounted to a quarter of his total debt.⁹ In 1721, Ambrose Page's records show £836 for 'casks in trade', just 8% of his total debt.¹⁰ This clearly demonstrates how the 'porter revolution' had required a massive investment in the distribution system.

Obadiah Poundage's description of the London brewery trade during King William III's reign seems accurate:

The brewer sold his brown ale for 16s, a barrel. These were mostly fetched from the brewhouse themselves and paid for with ready money; so that the brewer entertained but few servants, fewer horses, and had no stock of ales or beers about him, but a trifling quantity of casks.¹¹

In the intervening period, the London brewing trade had industrialised. The breweries were now centralised units of production, which delivered a standardised product over wide areas of London. This had required a massive investment in a distribution system.

Organisation

The investment needed for bigger brewing vessels was significant, but not as much as that needed for the growing infrastructure that attended the growth of porter brewing. The storage of beer to mature meant that capital was tied up for up to two years. The costs of a distribution network of horses, drays and butts were complemented by those of the draymen, farriers, wheelwrights and coopers that were needed to service it. Mechanisation at this time was limited to horse-mills and wheelwork, which nevertheless carried costs for maintenance as well as the initial construction.

The rest books of the Anchor brewery, provide evidence of the running costs of the brewery (see Table 5). First, if we look at the totals we can see that there was a massive general investment in all of the brewery trades between 1748 and 1750. The farrier's costs are the second highest, but if they are added to that of the wheelwright, it makes transport the highest single cost in tradesman's services. It is interesting to note that these transport costs continue on a steady upward curve, indicating the increased production.

The most expensive items to maintain were the coppers, needing the attention of the coppersmiths and the plumbers. However, some of this expense was probably due to an expansion in copper size as the cost peaks in 1750. The mash tun and the large casks were the province of the back-maker whose costs peak in 1752. It follows that an increased copper size would necessitate greater storage capacity in casks soon after. In comparison, the maintenance of the brewery's wheelwork by the millwright seems to be relatively inexpensive.

Date	Coppersmith		Farrier		Plumber		Blacksmith		Millwright		Wheelwright		Backmaker		Total	
	£	s.	£	s.	£	s.	£	s.	£	s.	£	s.	£	s.	£	s.
1748	307	11	142	14	170	-	78	9	30	-	45	15	50	-	936	16
1750	859	12	630	3	229	10	168	18	93	-	255	2	740	-	3,477	19
1752	823	8	648	-	229	-	163	-	88	-	307	-	680	-	4,108	12
1753	810	14	631	-	229	-	165	14	92	-	376	11	630	-	4,109	16
1755	780	7	703	-	223	-	163	-	96	-	382	8	580	-	3,982	9
1757	746	2	773	17	268	-	160	-	95	-	372	8	630	-	4,206	15

Table 5. *The Anchor brewery, Southwark. Valuations of the utensils by the several tradesmen.*¹²

The management of monthly accounts was another expense, which was supervised by a nucleus of counting-house clerks whose wages were high. Most porter-brewers delegated the running of the brewery to managers, who were called clerks at that time and the head clerk was the usually the highest paid employee. James Graham, head clerk at the Griffin brewery in Clerkenwell, left property of £30,00 in his will.¹³ At the Red Lion brewery, the 'Book of orders for the conduct of the London brew-house' makes clear the duties of each individual clerk, including the head clerk whose specific responsibility was to 'examine the value of all things necessary for the brewing trade and where such things may be had the cheapest and best'.¹⁴ He was also in charge of the hierarchy of various subordinate clerks, but he had no authority over the head brewer.

The brewers rose in the ranks via a different route. After serving an apprenticeship a workman-brewer could expect to earn between £50 and £200 a year.¹⁵ If he was loyal and trustworthy he might be lucky enough to become head brewer when his wages would be considerably improved. Charles Calvert paid his brewer £400 a year, with rent-free apartment and free coal, candles and beer.¹⁶ There was always the danger of a head brewer defecting to a competitor if he was not paid enough.

Whitbread's head brewer, Joseph Delafield, left him in great difficulties when he was enticed to join a new brewing venture, Shum, Combe, Delafield & Co., at the Wood Yard brewery, Long Acre. Delafield had to scrape the money together to attain the status of a partner with the others, who were already successful sugar refiners.¹⁷ When Henry Thrale died, the head brewer, John Perkins, was only persuaded to stay at the Anchor brewery if the new owners would make him a partner, thus Barclay and Perkins were formed.¹⁸

Not all apprentices could become brewers, some were directed towards the accounts department to become a home clerk or a broad clerk.¹⁹ The broad clerk was primarily responsible for collecting the monthly accounts from publicans. At the Red Lion brewery they were paid 25s. a week and three pence in the pound for collecting, 'all debts that are accounted desperate, doubtful or above one years standing'.²⁰ However, he also oversaw the broad-coopers who monitored the beer in their cellars. Brewers had been prevented by law from making their own casks for over 200 years,²¹ but they employed coopers to repair them. A broad-cooper's job was more comprehensive, it being his job to, 'clean the butts, carry them into the victuallers cellar and start the beer'.²² Together with the draymen, they had a rep-

utation for dishonesty. The head house clerk at the Red Lion brewery was instructed to keep a particular eye on them, especially over the question of leakages.²³ Draymen were allowed to sell slops from the back of the dray,²⁴ so they had a ready outlet for any such 'leakages'. The draymen needed to be strong to move butts around, each weighing nearly half a ton when full, and they had a fearsome reputation as the strong-arm men of the brewery.

By the mid-century apprenticeships were becoming rare, when it was said, 'The brewers in London seldom take apprentices; his work is done by Labourers'.²⁵ They were paid 10s. a week with small beer,²⁶ which would have put them above the average for unskilled workers. The need for unskilled manual labour within the brewery was minimal. Improved brewery design ensured that beer in its various states of manufacture could be directed around the brewery by the operation of valves. The main need for labour was in the distribution system.

The tied-house system in the early eighteenth century

Having mastered the problems of supply and distribution, there was the corresponding need to take control of demand. Price competition was ruled out as prices were fixed, originally by law, but subsequently by custom. This left them vulnerable to rises in the price of raw materials and taxation, which dictated that profits were driven by increased sales. The porter-brewers were wholesale manufacturers, which meant that their fortunes partly lay in the hands of their customers, London's publicans. This often made for difficult relationships, as the brewers sought to control the conditions surrounding the sale of the beer. Sometimes this was done by persuasion and support for the publican by facilitating the provision of additional services to customers, but more often it was through the tied-house system.

Initially this was applied with a light touch where publicans could move from one supplier to another, probably no more onerous than a modern franchise. However, as the porter-brewers became bigger and the need to secure customers increased, it often degenerated into a system of coercion and corruption. David Hancock spoke of two-way conversations within the

Madeira wine trade, rather than an account based on either production or demand. This model can be applied to the eighteenth-century brewing trade in London, where the conversations were often less than polite. A Limehouse publican accepted a loan from the Black Eagle brewery on the agreement he would only sell their beer. When he tried to renege on the deal, 20 draymen were sent to persuade him to change his mind, needless to say that he quickly concurred.²⁷ Thus, by the early nineteenth century many London's public-houses were exclusively supplied by their brewers to whom they were 'tied' by financing and leasing arrangements, which typified the London porter-brewing industry.

Originally, all public-houses, inns and taverns brewed their own ale and were therefore 'free' houses. In time, some chose not to brew and were supplied from a common brewer until it became the norm for one or two brewers to supply a locality. This did not constitute a tied-house system, because public-houses could choose another brewer or begin brewing again, at least in theory. However, the usual result was that there was little or no competition in many villages which had only one supplier of beer. In towns, the situation was better for the consumer, but as the century progressed there was a process of rationalisation, where breweries closed and their customers, the local public-houses, were forced to seek supplies from the remaining breweries.

In cities, especially London, the situation was more complex. Brewers that supplied public-houses were deemed to be 'common brewers', who were not allowed to retail beer directly to the public. The one exception was the public-house attached to the brewery, known as the 'brewery tap'. Apart from the small central area of the ancient city, eighteenth-century London was very much a collection of villages that abutted against each other, where each was served by its local breweries. As the successful breweries swallowed up the casualties, they became bigger and fewer in number. Initially, they relied on the trade within their immediate surroundings, but increasing production forced them to widen the radius of their trade with inevitable intrusions into the areas of adjacent breweries.

This process was encouraged by the authorities. The excise derived from beer was the mainstay of government income and collection was easier and cheaper from fewer but larger breweries. The brewing industry

of London had become capital intensive, with the need to invest in mechanical improvements, bigger brewing vessels, a distribution system and the need to fund publican's monthly accounts. Rising prices of raw materials within a retail price maintenance system meant profit margins were squeezed. The solution was to increase the volume of sales with a guaranteed market from public-houses that were 'tied', whereby the publican was obliged, for one reason or another, to take his beer from one brewer only.

By the mid-eighteenth century, the tied-house system had developed into a marketing strategy, albeit a crude one. Brewers sought to stabilise fluctuations in demand by reducing their customer's option to choose an alternative supplier. Brewers rarely purchased a public-house outright, preferring to secure a 'tie' with a loan to the publican. Originally, in the early eighteenth century, this practice had begun in a more unplanned way, usually where a publican had got into arrears with his monthly account, which the brewer agreed to consolidate into a loan. If the loan was sufficient, the brewer would expect to hold the lease as a security against the loan and become the sole supplier of beer to the house.

A typical account of the acquisition of a tied-house is given in the following report of a court case concerning the brewers, George Hodgson and Edward Gordon of the Bow brewery. In 1757, they took action in court, for the repossession of a public-house in Hackney, *The Shoulder of Mutton and Cat*. They were successful, but instead of taking possession from the publican, John Redding, they agreed to the following settlement:

...the said G.H. and E.G. notwithstanding the said recovery in ejectment and the execution of the said writ, should suffer the said J.R. to hold the premises from thence until June next following, and that J.R. should keep open the said house for the sale of beer, ale and wines etc., and he should take all such ale and beer from the said G.H. and E.G., then exercising jointly together the art, trade or business of brewers.²⁸

Having established the legal right of possession, Hodgson and Gordon were happy to let the tenant stay as they now had secured sole rights to supply the house. Thus, brewers increasingly saw the advantages of these arrangements in securing a stable demand for their beer. The beginning of the tied-house system seems to have

been synchronous with the development of porter. In 1726, the following advertisement appeared in *The Daily Courant*, 'To be lett, a handsome corner publick house, in New Belton Street, St. Giles ... free from the bondage of any particular brewer'.²⁹ A study of classified advertisements of *The Daily Advertiser* through the eighteenth century reveals an increasing frequency of such stipulations as in the following examples, 'tis no Brewer's house',³⁰ or, 'is free from Brewer and Distiller'.³¹ This signifies the early onset of the more institutionalised form of the system where incoming tenants were left in no doubt as to the status of a particular public-house, whether it be 'free' or 'tied'.

London publicans tried at various times to organise defensively against the actions of their brewers, especially those that were tied. The following example in 1745 is probably one of the earliest:

Those brother victuallers, therefore, who are desirous to reap this additional advantage, and are disposed to unite into a collective body for their own interest (for those who are in the brewer's books as well as those who are not) will agree to pay one penny for every barrel they draw in a year.³²

On this occasion the publicans had no success, which continued to be the case throughout the eighteenth century.

After the mid-century, beer consumption in London was rising and public-houses were increasing in number, particularly in the growing inner suburbs. In 1755, an entrepreneur, John Boarman, saw an opportunity to exploit the needs of brewers for prospective tenants. He advertised a 'Publicans register' where brewers could register a public-house for letting for one shilling. Any applicant that was placed in a public-house was to pay one Guinea. It was claimed that:

this office may be of great use to the Brewery, since it will not only prevent numbers of incautious people (willing to become publicans) from falling into the hands of unskillful and bad men, but also the means of securing the ends of trade, which is profit.³³

Boarman, who was a prominent freemason, must have had some success. He continued to advertise his 'Publicans Register' until his death in 1762.³⁴ This

represents a new development in the industrial development of the brewing trade, where an agency was being created to satisfy the growing demand for tenants for brewers' tied-houses. Today we would describe this as a service industry or a 'spin-off'.

Generally, the brewers preferred the tied-house arrangements to be kept private, but as the practice became more prevalent, dissension sometimes became public, particularly at times when it was seen to be blatantly unfair. In 1766, a publican in Aldersgate was refused the annual renewal of his license because of the influence of his brewer on the licensing magistrate, after the publican had taken another supplier. The license was granted on appeal to the Quarter Sessions at the Guildhall, where the Lord Mayor insisted that the license was granted to the man and not the house and the publican had the right to purchase beer from wherever he chose. The magistrate ruled:

that brewers should not consider publicans as obliged to deal solely with them, whenever such unfortunately become their tenants; and in which too frequently happens, that by selling a bad commodity, the poor publican has shortly run out of the fortune with which he came into the business.³⁵

The blatant attempt by a brewer to influence a license renewal brought him perilously close to contempt of court. This was undoubtedly the reason that brewers had been debarred from acting as JPs at licensing sessions since 1752.³⁶

Relations between brewer and publican before these events were already bad, but they now considerably worsened, as reflected in the newspaper columns that revealed the tensions underlying the tied-house system:

I address myself to fellow publicans I hope you will never be influenced to encourage arbitrary and monopolizing proceedings ... If your houses will not answer, it is vain to continue them, as those who once get under their *Thumbs*, often groan under such weights, as even squeeze their whole guts out.³⁷

The association with bad beer and the tied-house system was made by increasing numbers of people, as in a letter headed 'Some account of the rise and progress and present state of the Brewery' to *The London Chronicle* in 1760, where brewers were advised that:

many of them should attend to the improvements of their manufactures and real quality of their drink and not intirely depend for the improvement of their fortunes on the extent of their interest they can make and the number of publick houses they can get into their hands.³⁸

Clearly, the tied-house system had many shortcomings as a marketing strategy, particularly when it came to public relations, a modern concept which was not unknown to eighteenth-century brewers.

The porter-brewers, taxes and prices

The success of the porter-brewers was due to their ability to make a product at a set price from the fluctuating markets of their raw materials. This relied on their capacity to carry sufficient stocks to survive a bad harvest. However, this would be stretched to breaking point when there were two succeeding crop failures. The most important factor in the production of beer was the price of malt, which was in turn affected by the interactive nature of corn prices.

This was clearly demonstrated in 1757, when the bad harvest of 1756 had raised the price of bread to such a high level that the authorities had decided to prohibit the use of wheat by the distillers. It was then reported that a petition had been received from the common brewers of London, Westminster and Southwark who wanted the distillers to be prevented also from using barley as a substitute for wheat, as the market had already risen in anticipation of a shortfall in barley.³⁹ The authorities reacted immediately by widening the distillers' prohibition to include malt and any other grain, despite their vociferous complaints.⁴⁰ This demonstrates how the price of bread, which was critical for any government, could affect the price of barley and therefore malt. The brewers had effectively campaigned in Parliament that they were more valuable to the economy than distillers and that beer was second only to bread in importance.

The harvest of 1757 was equally bad, and despite the continued prohibition of distilling,⁴¹ the price of brown malt had risen from 18s. to 30s. a quarter by June 1757.⁴² In November the brewers decided to take collective action to raise the retail price of porter by ½d. In a letter to *The Gazetteer and London Daily Advertiser*, signed 'the fifty brewers', the victuallers

were warned not to oppose this measure, because the brewers had all promised, 'not to accept each others customers, if any among you will be so obstinately blind to your own interest, as to sell your stocks at the present price'. The response came within a few days when the 'fifty brewers' were condemned by the publicans who stated: 'that not having the same command over their customers the brewers have over them, they are not at liberty to impose the half-penny, recommended by the said fifty'.⁴⁴ The brewers had taken a step too far. By collectively threatening to boycott any publican who refused the price increase, they had broken the law. The author of the letter was found and prosecuted for raising a combination, and the price increase failed.⁴⁵ The 'fifty brewers' were publicly condemned as law-breakers, who were worse than corn conspirators, who merely evaded the law.⁴⁶ The press had been the great leveller, whereby, the brewers' bullying tactics against the publicans was exposed for all to see.

A rise in taxation was the next major problem for the porter-brewers' ability to stay within the traditional price of 3d. for a quart. The period between late 1760 and early 1761 proved to be a pivotal time for the brewing industry when an increase in malt duty was followed shortly by another in beer duty. The unprecedented expenses of the Seven Years war had brought these desperate measures to William Pitt's wartime administration. Pitt, who rarely interfered in financial matters, raised objections to a sugar tax proposed by the Duke of Newcastle and Henry Legge at the Treasury. Many believed that Pitt was intervening on behalf of his friend William Beckford, the wealthy sugar planter. Legge threatened to resign, but Newcastle thought that Pitt could not be resisted and agreed to the biggest single tax increase in the duration of the war,⁴⁷ when the duty on strong beer was raised from 5s. to 8s. on 24 January 1761.

The duty on malt had already been increased by 3d. a bushel in late 1760, but as malt prices were low the brewers held their price.⁴⁸ However, with the 3s. increase in beer duty, the brewers were uncertain as to what price to charge. The three shilling rise in duty on a 36 gallon barrel would have taken the price to 26s., needing a rise in the retail price of only a farthing a quart. However, the porter-brewers decided to increase the price of a barrel by five shillings, leaving the publican no choice other than to raise the price by a halfpen-

ny to 3½d.⁴⁹ The events that followed were reported in *The London Magazine*:

A halfpenny advance in the price of a pot of porter was sensibly felt by the poor; it raised such a general discontent, that the masters of those houses, where this advance was insisted on, were in danger of being insulted, and some of them, perhaps, murdered by a riotous mob.⁵⁰

There was widespread rioting throughout London and some publicans were even prosecuted under an old disused law of James I which precluded selling beer at a price which included a halfpence.⁵¹ Obviously, this law had then to be repealed, 'to protect the retailers of strong beer from riots, but also to prevent prosecutions'.⁵² Many publicans refused to raise the price in the face of threats of violence or being taken to court. However, they got little sympathy from the brewers who decided that any retailer selling beer at the old price would no longer be supplied. Death threats against the leading porter-brewers were taken seriously by the Government. A reward of £100 was offered for the conviction of the writer of the following letter:

Sir, pray tell Alderman Calvert that if the Act is not repeal'd within a month that he being the principal schemer in this villainous affair he is to be murdered and not him alone but Mr. Calvert of Red Cross Street and Mr. Truman of Spittlefield as these three are the overgrown scoundrels that infest this metropolis.⁵³

The Government stood firm, and although the chaotic situation prevailed throughout the year whilst this old law was repealed, in January 1762 it was reported that, 'the publicans have at last been, in general, quietly permitted to raise their porter to three pence half-penny a quart'.⁵⁴

The whole affair had brought the brewers into dispute with the publicans, the Government and the consumers. This probably did not concern most of the leading brewers, Truman had undoubtedly received his knighthood for his support of the tax increase. However, Samuel Whitbread had been sufficiently concerned with his public image to place an advertisement in *The Public Advertiser*, defending himself from accusations that he had promoted the additional duty on strong beer in 1761, stating, 'I am intirely innocent and do declare

upon oath and say that I never knew of the tax, till it was generally known'.⁵⁵

This was probably untrue, Whitbread was second only to William Calvert in the porter production figures for 1759-60 and it is inconceivable that he was not represented at a meeting of brewers of the metropolis in late September 1760, where it was agreed 'that beer shall not be sold under 27s. a barrel'.⁵⁶ This was a blatant attempt to pre-empt the impending rise in malt duty, when it was stated that this raise in price had been, 'occasioned by the prospect of an additional tax on malt'.⁵⁷ The Treasury immediately reacted by issuing orders for the prosecution of, 'any persons that may be concerned in the combination for raising the price of beer and ale'.⁵⁸ Within days, a meeting was called at Brewers' Hall, when it was decided that the proposed increase of 3s. a barrel was to be cancelled and publicans would be charged the usual price.⁵⁹

The brewers' decision to pre-empt the Government's tax increase had incurred the wrath of their customers, the publicans. John Mathews, of the *Mother Red Cap*, Southwark published *An Address to the Victuallers of this Kingdom in General*, where he identified these events as a brewers' conspiracy. He then went on to complain of the widespread fraud committed by brewers on publicans by the practice of short measure, asserting that some brewers refused to take casks from coopers 'unless they were short ... and by these unfair practices the victualler is always kept in debt and dares not seek justice',⁶⁰ a clear reference to the tied-house system. He urged his fellow victuallers to sign a petition to the House of Commons to put a stop to these 'iniquitous proceedings'.⁶¹

The victuallers of the City of London and Westminster duly presented a petition to the Commons on 14 December 1762, complaining of all the events since 1760, but particularly of the way that they had been subjected to 'menaces from the populace and threats of prosecution'.⁶² The Government responded by stating that this was a price increase which had been dictated by the financial demands of wartime. It had been meant to fall on the brewer rather than the publican or his customers, and it was never intended: 'to enhance the price of the liquor called Porter in a retail way, but to squeeze some part of those vast profits out of the wholesale manufacturer, for the relief of the national burden'.⁶³

The Government's ineptitude in not foreseeing the consequences of a much-heralded tax increase is indicative of the gulf between ministers and the world of business. Their optimism that the brewers would carry the whole burden of the increase was misplaced. Instead of increasing the price of a barrel by the 3s. tax increase, they had increased the price by 5s and dared the Government to prevent it. Having been out-manoeuvred by the brewers, they left the publicans to the mercy of the mob for a year, many of whom were driven out of business due to threats or boycott.⁶⁴ Unable to prevent the brewers from increasing the price, ministers showed little interest in the social implications of their actions.

The increase in malt and beer duty had increased government income by 30%. This had achieved the desired outcome for the Treasury, which had been proved right on two counts, that the brewery was a better source of revenue than the distillery, and that a price rise would not stop the people drinking porter. However, the porter-brewers were chastened by the experience, particularly with the exposure of the tied-house system, and it was to be 40 years before a similar set of circumstances would cause them to raise the price of porter again.

The public-house: jobs, wages and savings

The fixed price of porter meant that retail profit margins were small and many publicans had to find ways to subsidise their income. Those in larger taverns could generate income from large rooms which could be hired out for regular use such as auctions held at the *Rose & Crown* in Brick Lane. Others such as *The Old Swan & Rummer Tavern* in Finch Lane, specialised in the periodic meetings of societies such as the freemasons.⁶⁵ The *London Tavern*, Bishopsgate was a favourite venue for the annual dinners of many societies. All of these events generated an income from the hire fee, but also from the increased consumption of liquor.

On the other end of the scale, smaller public-houses could let their rooms to lodgers which was usually enough to cover the rent. Games such as skittles, Dutch pins, drafts and dominoes were all provided by publicans to encourage stakes being wagered, the winnings being spent on drink.⁶⁶ Brewers supported publicans by offering them rudimentary banking services which were simply not available elsewhere. Thus, the publicans

could offer their patrons additional facilities such as savings clubs, friendly societies, employment opportunities and payment facilities.

Some public-houses acted as unofficial employment agencies, known as a 'houses of call' which predominated in certain trades, including hatters, tailors, shoemakers, book-binders, weavers, bakers and all of the building trades.⁶⁷ The landlord, usually a retired member of the particular trade that he served, would provide a 'call-book' where those seeking work entered their name, from which masters looking for hands could offer a day's work.⁶⁸ Needless to say, no-one's name would even enter the book, unless he bought a round of drinks when it was his turn. This was 'put on the slate' until he had been paid, ensuring that he bought his drink there and nowhere else. A typical 'house of call' for tailors was described in 1747:

an alehouse where they generally use, the landlord knows where to find them, and masters go there to inquire when they want hands. Custom has established it into a kind of law that the house of call gives them credit for victuals and drink when they are unemployed; this obliges the journeymen to spend all their money in this house alone, the poor wretch slaves only to enrich the publican.⁶⁹

The emphasis was always on the communal drinking, where obligations to buy fellow-workers drinks ensured that many drank more than their natural inclinations and the hardest drinkers set the pace.

The workplace itself was also a source of income. Tailors were particularly partial to their beer at work with apprentices being sent out for it several times a day.⁷⁰ Benjamin Franklin worked in a London print-room in 1725, where he was described as the 'Water American' because he would not drink beer. In his autobiography, Franklin recalled how drink punctuated the day of the other workers:

a pint before breakfast, a pint at breakfast with bread and cheese, a pint between breakfast and dinner, a pint at dinner, a pint in the afternoon at 6 o'clock and another when he had done his day's work.⁷¹

He also referred to the tradition of buying drinks for workmates at the least excuse, which he refused.⁷² These drinking rituals were reproduced in workshops

throughout London when beer was 'sent out' from the local public-house.⁷³ The London streets were said to be full of pot-boys with trays, 'filled with quarts and pints of dinner beer, carried out to the houses of customers'.⁷⁴ Public-houses could also care for the needs of the poorest. Those who could not afford the prices of beer in a public-house or even to have it sent out could bring their own jug and take it away, usually for a half-pence cheaper.⁷⁵

The pay-table was a means by which publicans could use a degree of coercion to sell more beer, whereby they offered unofficial banking services to local employers to pay out their workers on Saturday nights. The context of the pay-table lies with the chronic shortage of small change throughout eighteenth-century London. A serious disadvantage to trade arose from the shortage of coins that were suitable for retail transactions and the payment of wages.⁷⁶ The problem for the authorities was that copper coins were liable to be melted down as soon as the copper content became worth more than the face value. In the early eighteenth century, after several issues of farthings and halfpennies suffered this fate, copper coins were simply not minted. The public were then left with a miscellany of worn silver coins and counterfeit copper coins from Birmingham.⁷⁷ The Mint would supply coins free of charge to those presenting them with the necessary bullion.⁷⁸ When the price of porter rose in 1762, it was reported in the newspapers that, 'an order has been received at the Mint, for coining twenty tons of farthings, one of which was delivered to an eminent Porter brewer yesterday'.⁷⁹

Many of the public-houses that were 'houses of call' offered the further service of a pay-table, with the active assistance of the brewers who supplied the small change necessary to pay out wages. Brewers merely saw this as an extension to the need to supply their publicans with small coins to facilitate beer sales. Their shared object was to sell more beer through the pretext of providing facilities for employers to pay their workers. The foremen and clerks of employers responsible for wages would be rewarded by the publican for their patronage.⁸⁰ These facilities were advantageous to both parties. The public-houses were assured of the workmen spending some of their wages on drink, and the employer was spared the trouble and expense of sending for cash or paying their bank to provide it.⁸¹

The system was already well entrenched by 1759, when it was reported in *The London Chronicle* that pay-tables were :

pregnant with manifold mischiefs to individuals, to families and the public ... the labourers are assembled together on a Saturday night at his public-house, where for the benefit of the landlord, they are artfully detained till eight, nine or ten o'clock, and often later, before the military chest arrives. By this time many workmen are set in to drinking, some to gaming and some are either muddle-headed or drunk ... about one in the morning, he comes home drunk and penniless to bed.⁸²

From this, emerged the picture of the 'poor tradesmen's wives waiting for their husbands outside the doors of little alehouses, hoping to secure some money to support their family'.⁸³

The pay-tables received the most notoriety in the *Treatise on the Commerce and Police of the River Thames* by Patrick Colquhoun, a Shoreditch licensing magistrate and social campaigner. He told the story of the coal-heavers who unloaded the coal brigs at Wapping. Their employers, the coal undertakers, owned the public-houses where they were hired by the day and subsequently paid out. Unloading coal from the holds was undoubtedly thirsty work and the coal-heavers were probably glad of a drink, but not to the extent of paying for liquor before each ship was unloaded, which, 'if refused they lose the favour of their employer, and the preference he has in his power to give them'.⁸⁴

The coal-heavers were relatively well paid for this strenuous and often dangerous work. Their wages averaged 15s. a week, sometimes reaching as high as 27s. when a 14-hour day was needed to turn round the ship.⁸⁵ This was a tempting target for the public-houses in which they were paid out. The waterfront from Limehouse Hole to the Tower was known as 'the coast' where about 80 public-houses operated the coal trade of London, including the system of unloading the ships at Wapping.⁸⁶ The captains of the ships chose which public-house to tie up alongside, and the landlord hired the coal-heavers in gangs of nine. These were chosen from the regular drinkers at that public-house where it was said, 'the hardest drinker was the best man'.⁸⁷ Men were expected to buy drinks for the captain, the gang foreman and the publican. All drinks were paid for at the

Saturday pay-table where those who had spent the least on drink were fined for having 'a bad score'.⁸⁸ Despite many attempts to reform these practices, they continued into the nineteenth century when Henry Mayhew reported on the plight of the coal-heavers in 1851, when little had changed.⁸⁹

A more positive development to emerge within the brewing trade was the increase in friendly societies in eighteenth-century public-houses, more commonly known as 'box clubs'.⁹⁰ They were principally formed by artisans to satisfy their most fundamental need, to have a 'decent' funeral.⁹¹ However, they also sought to keep their families from 'going on the parish', with the provision of sickness benefits as demonstrated in this typical advertisement for the formation of a society:

At the Peacock in Fore Street near Moorfields, there is now established a Friendly Society or Beneficial Box Club for all Tradesman in perfect health. The advantages arising therefrom are, if any member becomes sick or lame, after he has been a member for six months, he shall be allowed ten shillings a week during his illness; if he dies five pounds are to be allowed for the funeral and ten pounds for his Widow or assigns. N.B. 2s 6d. entrance.⁹²

The usual rule was that two shillings went into the 'box' and the remaining six pence was spent on drink.⁹³ Thus, monthly meetings were usually an evening of conviviality as friends enjoyed the evening's proceedings along with their prescribed ration of beer.

The 'box' was not just an euphemism, it was a reality, as typified by the rules of a club at the *Three Jolly Butchers* in Hoxton, where it was decreed that, 'a box shall be provided with three different locks and keys, and the stewards shall each keep one and the landlord'.⁹⁴ However, the system was far from fool-proof. Time and again, accounts appear in eighteenth-century newspapers of the mysterious disappearance of the box, its contents and quite often, the landlord. To safeguard against this, many of the larger porter-brewers offered to act as a banker to the club, by holding the money. This was not entirely altruistic, there was an obvious incentive to support the publican's desire to increase his trade. Furthermore, as they usually paid 4% interest, they felt entitled to use the balance to iron out the irregular flow of capital which was inherent in the seasonal nature of brewing.⁹⁵ The sums were not great, at least in

the mid-century. Thrale's accounts reveal that 'Club Money' amounted to £3,565 in 1750.⁹⁶ By 1760, Truman's Rest Book shows that he held £16,570 club money for 41 clubs, and paid about 4% interest.⁹⁷

Although many of these friendly societies were no doubt run with propriety, those that were not generated the most publicity in the newspapers, where accounts of drunkenness were associated with the opening of the 'box'. All too often, stories of disorder were described, as in a public-house in Spital Square:

there was a great disturbance and riot, occasioned by members of the box-club quarreling amongst themselves. In the confusion some persons made off with the box, which contained the club's money.⁹⁸

The notoriety of many similar cases brought the friendly societies into ridicule and general disrepute. Patrick Coloquhoun even disapproved of their fundamental purpose to cover funeral costs, which he dismissed scornfully as:

the most miserable of them have to have what they call a decent funeral; an undertaker generally endeavours to get into the society, that he may bury all of them; and that funeral takes from the funds, which ought to go to the widow.⁹⁹

The friendly societies represented the laudable attempts of working men to provide for their families in the event of sickness and death. When they failed it was generally due to the venality of the publicans. The brewers distanced themselves from dishonesty, on some occasions even replacing the stolen club money, but they did little to prevent it.¹⁰⁰ The underlying cause was the pressure put on publicans to sell more beer. However, the most serious charge against the box clubs was that they brought the more industrious members of the working class to the contagion of drink. Once addicted, they could be enslaved for life.

The tied-house system in the late eighteenth century

In the late eighteenth century the tied-house system began to intensify for a number of reasons. The most important of these was a tightening of the liquor licensing system from the late 1780s, due to widespread con-

cern over disorder in and around public houses. The liquor licensing system had undergone two changes in the eighteenth century. In 1729 the system was modified whereby licenses were only granted annually at special licensing sessions, known as the Brewster Sessions. In 1753, a stipulation was introduced which required applicants to provide a certificate of good character signed by parish notables, usually the local minister, overseer and churchwardens. However, the system soon fell into disrepute, when it became usual for a broker, acting for the applicant, to approach the local beadle who would obtain the necessary signatures for a fee.¹⁰¹

The period from 1753 to 1787 was one of neglect by the licensing magistrates with their indiscriminate issue of licenses.¹⁰² This came to an end in when parishes in London decided to convene special meetings of the vestries:

... to enquire into the conduct of Licensed Victuallers who suffer gaming, tippling, drunkenness, or other disorder, or irregularity, or harbour people of ill fame to the disquiet and disturbance of the neighbourhood ... the magistrates will meet on every Monday until the Licensing day to receive information against any persons offending as abovementioned ... to prevent the victuallers complained against being further licensed.¹⁰³

Where cases of misconduct were proved, licenses were refused, which reduced the number of public-houses in London. This created a scarcity which increased the value of any premises that held a license, which was reflected in the 'coming-in' price, which began to rise from about £100 to over £500.¹⁰⁴ This amount was beyond the means of the average applicant without a loan of working capital sufficient to start in business. Consumption fell and brewers sought to stabilise their customer base by offering loans to prospective licensees from the outset. Soon half the public-houses were 'tied'.¹⁰⁵

The most vociferous campaigner against the licensing system at this time was the licensing magistrate, Patrick Coloquhoun, who published a pamphlet in 1794, *Observations and Facts Relative to Public-houses*. He attributed the worst excesses of publicans to the fact that there were simply too many public-houses in London, to the extent that many had a trade of less than five butts of porter a month. In such a case, a publican could not

make a living unless he resorted to mixing his porter with small beer and his gin with water.¹⁰⁶ These arguments were not new, 30 years earlier, Sir John Fielding had thought there were too many public-houses in London which caused ‘gaming and other disorders in them’.¹⁰⁷ The difference in 1794, was that Coloquhoun thought that competition between brewers for leases had pushed the prices way above their real value, compelling them to, ‘screw up the rent beyond what the trade will afford, raising the rent of a house 40 to 50 per cent.’¹⁰⁸ In order to find enough trade to fund these inflated rents, publicans adopted, ‘the vilest arts such as badger-baiting, cock-fighting and every low game, affording an asylum to the most depraved part of the community’.¹⁰⁹

In the face of this mounting criticism, the more respectable publicans took defensive measures. They formed the Friendly Society of Licensed Victuallers in 1793,¹¹⁰ followed closely with the creation of *The Morning Advertiser* in 1794 to act as a mouthpiece for the trade. It eventually became a very successful newspaper, but was initially derided as follows:

This paper is the organ of the ‘Licensed Victuallers’ and is owned by them. Its circulation is almost entirely confined to the London hotels, drinking-shops, gambling-hells and eating houses. The proprietorship and support for this paper is a kind of joint-stock affair - a combination for mutual defence ... It has long been known by the soubriquet bestowed upon it by *The Times*, the Morning Tap-tub.¹¹¹

This measure was no doubt intended to mitigate the isolated position of the publican, but that was a difficult task. The brewer always had an intrinsic advantage in the relationship with any particular individual who sought a living from a public-house, because he needed capital to set up in business.

When the porter-brewers raised the price by 15s. a butt in November 1799,¹¹² the licensed victuallers tried to organise a petition to Parliament for legislation to curtail the brewers’ hidden payments, which had accumulated in the trade over many years. These included a shilling charge, both for ‘laying-in’, and fining a butt of porter and the requirement to provide the dray-men with beer and food.¹¹³ Meetings were arranged in late November and December, but when the brewers heard of this they met at the Crown & Anchor, ‘and every man

present confessed himself not free from his Brewer, therefore dared not fix their name to the Petition’.¹¹⁴ Despite the cover of collective action, they worried about being detected by their signature. They knew that any complaint by an individual publican over these expenses would result in a termination of their supply, which would be almost impossible to obtain elsewhere.

The porter-brewers maintained that any publican who wished to clear his debt could obtain supplies from any brewer he chose. However, in practice they operated a system of seeking agreement from the publican’s previous brewer to ‘release’ him before any new arrangements were made. The letter-book of Truman, Hanbury & Buxton reveals numerous letters to the other brewers such as Barclay & Perkins, Calvert, Meux, Delafield, Whitbread, Gyfford, and Goodwyn, all from the twelve leading houses. The tone of the letters generally reflects mutual respect, but occasionally a discordant note appears, where Sampson Hanbury wrote to Clowes, Newberry & Co. in 1803:

As I consider you obtained my customer very unhandsomely I beg leave to inform you that I have today taken a lease of his house. I also beg to appraise you of my intention of referring the transaction to the Gentlemen of the Trade, agreeable to our late engagement at Brewers’ Hall.¹¹⁵

The Porter-brewers’ Committee operated an arbitration system where disputes arose between brewer members. Usually, if there was disagreement, the publican would not be accepted by the new brewer. In such a letter to Meux & Co., Hanbury reiterates that he would not take a customer who was only leaving because he refused to pay the increased price of 45s. a barrel, which equated to 5d. a quart pot, saying, ‘I will not take him without your consent as I am an advocate of acting up to the spirit as well as the word of our arrangements at Brewers Hall’.¹¹⁶

It was also considered a duty of any member of the Porter-brewers’ Committee to police the retail price of porter and report any publican selling at the old price. The letter-books of Truman, Hanbury & Buxton reveal an astonishing degree of vigilance over retail price maintenance. There were many letters from Hanbury informing fellow brewers, such as Barclay, Perkins & Co., that one of their customers was still selling at the

old price of 4½ d., requesting their ‘interference’.¹¹⁷ Occasionally, Hanbury would stick up for one of his publicans if he thought that he had been wrongly accused, as with his letter to Calvert & Co.:

my customer at the Peacock in the Minories has not sold a drop under the full price. I so much wish to deal plainly with my customers and not to trouble them with erroneous complaints that if you will meet with me at the Langbourne Ward Coffee House (where the committee are summoned) I will attend you to the Minories and give you every satisfaction.¹¹⁸

The third price increase of ½ d. per quart within the space of four years had caused a dramatic decline in porter consumption in London. In 1804, it fell to 892,827 barrels,¹¹⁹ from the 1798 figures of 1,146,163 barrels,¹²⁰ a reduction of over 250,000 barrels per year. The ‘London Porter Brewery’ was vilified in the newspapers, which most of the major brewers chose to ignore.

However, occasionally one of the smaller brewers chose to reply publicly. In 1802, Richard Flower, a Hertford brewer, published *Observations on Beer and Brewers in which the inequality, injustice and impolicy of the Malt and Beer Tax are demonstrated*, where he defended the brewers’ case against complaints over price. However, he had little sympathy for his fellow brewers who had acquired ‘undue ascendancy over publicans’ by buying up leases of public-houses, saying:

There are two types of brewers who are purchasers of this kind of property. The first, from a motive of ambition to be the greatest man of his district, or from erroneous calculation of profit, led to purchases of public-houses at enormous prices, which necessitated his less opulent neighbour to purchase in his own defence. He is reduced to purchasing also or losing his trade.¹²¹

As the magistrates had sought to curtail the issue of new licenses in areas already well-served with public-houses, the leading porter-brewers had reacted vigorously in ‘tying’ as many of their existing outlets as they could. It was then, that the medium-sized breweries began a defensive strategy of purchasing the leases of public-houses outright. This was particularly true of brewers on the periphery of London, such as the Stratford brewers, Steward & Head, who purchased the leases of approximately 100 public-houses.¹²² Nearby,

at the Bow brewery, the proprietor Mark Hodgson, left specific instructions in his will in 1809, for his executors, ‘to purchase public-houses in proper situations to enlarge the said trade’.¹²³ The property portfolio was increased to 35 public-houses within ten years.¹²⁴

In the first decade of the nineteenth century, there was a scramble for the control of London’s public-houses by the major porter-brewers as they followed the lead of their smaller counterparts to take many public-houses into full ownership. In a time of decreasing sales it was the larger porter-brewers who were bound to win this contest, particularly those with Quaker banking connections such as Barclays, Perkins & Co., which had acquired 117 leases by 1810 and Truman, Hanbury & Buxton, not far behind with 94 leases.¹²⁵ Samuel Whitbread’s obituary recorded:

that the high character of his beer rendered it less necessary for him to push business, by becoming the owner of a great number of public-houses, than it was for many of his brethren.¹²⁶

However, it may also have been because he lacked the banking connections of the first two. After his death in 1796, his son took great strides to overcome the firm’s financial difficulties and had obtained the leases of 51 public-houses by 1810.¹²⁷

A magazine article entitled *The London Porter Breweries*, gave the following description of the scene by the 1830s:

most of the public-houses in the city are connected with some brewing company or another, and hence are called ‘tied-houses’. The brewers advance *loans* to the publican on the security of his lease, and from that moment he is bound to the lending party. Indeed, the advance is made in the open and direct condition that he shall sell the lender’s liquor, and his alone. In short, the publican becomes a mere retail-agent for the behoof [*sic*] of one particular company. They clap their sign above the door, and he can no longer call the house his own.¹²⁸

From the brewer’s point of view this was merely a marketing system that brought more certainty. The tied-house system had many critics but it was logical step for manufacturers who needed to regulate demand to the same extent that they had done with supply.

Summary

The low profit margins on porter meant that the brewers had to rely on mass sales, which had to be delivered to London's public-houses. This was a logistical exercise which would be a challenge today. An expensive transport system had to be provided, where the brewer's own drays and horses guaranteed delivery and control of distribution. A complex clerical organisation was needed to administer accounts, where the publicans were given monthly credit. This meant that the beer in the publican's cellar still belonged to the brewer until it had been paid for. Thus, the brewer's clerks could operate a form of quality control, where they were free to visit the publicans cellar to check on the condition of the beer and to deter adulteration.

The porter revolution had allowed the London brewers to control the brewing process to the extent that they could mass-produce a consistent product to satisfy the needs of London's public-houses. There was a corresponding need to control the demand for porter, which provided the brewers with many challenges. Various forms of support were offered to the publicans to bring in the customers; banking facilities, friendly societies, savings clubs and entertainment. There was also the question of loans, which often led to public-house becoming 'tied' to the brewery.

The tied-house system was much more widespread than is merely revealed by records of ownership. The system was governed with hidden loans, known only too well by the publican, but kept hidden away from the company ledgers and the record books. Porter-brewers employed mass production methods to create a product that was cheaper than other beers. They exploited the market for this product by eliminating competition whenever possible, until a few powerful magnates remained to dominate the metropolitan brewing trade. These methods made them fabulously wealthy, but generally unpopular. They were accused of operating a monopoly, particularly over the operation of the tied-house system.

Chapter Five: Porter, Promotion and Puffing

Neil McKendrick said in his study of Josiah Wedgwood that most manufacturers shrank from 'blowing their

own trumpet', preferring to get others to do it for them.¹ In the eighteenth century, any form of self-promotion which contained a degree of assertion, would be quickly denounced as 'puffing'. The porter brewers were among the leading 'puffers' of the day. They were expert in grabbing the headlines in prose, poetry and newsprint, but it was always 'unintentional'. They were heavily satirised in the best eighteenth-century fashion, but this always followed a recognised format. They may have been feared and even hated, but they managed to stop short of being considered ridiculous, which would have been fatal in eighteenth-century London.

Active propaganda was limited to events such as a royal visit or the inauguration of a gigantic vat with a banquet held inside it. Most promotion was implicit, where the endorsement was meant to be seen as impartial, such as the annual brewer's list. The London brewery trade abounded with heroic anecdotes of brewers' exploits but as they became rich and powerful the stories attracted negative comments. This probably explains the most curious, but lasting brewers' legend, the 'invention of porter'. It is difficult to decode its eighteenth-century meaning completely, except to say that it was probably seen as a form of defence against criticisms of affluence and grandeur. However, the most comprehensive marketing tool that they deployed, which we can easily recognise today, was the promotion of the brewers' names, which must qualify them as one of the earliest examples of branding in the industrial revolution.

Puffing and folklore

In the mid-eighteenth century a contemporary dictionary defined a 'puff' as 'to advance the value, character or price of any thing privately, to make others buy it'.² Any form of promotion needed to be seen as an unconscious act. One of the best methods was to be mentioned in literature. Whether it was in prose, doggerel or classic poetry, to gain the attention of an eighteenth-century readership, meant that your name was in the public domain to the exclusion of the competition, without the stigma attached to 'puffing'.

The names of the leading brewers became well known, particularly if they were politicians. The two most famous brewer politicians of the early eighteenth century were Alderman Parsons and Alderman Calvert. They

were included in Oliver Goldsmith's *Description of an author's Bed-chamber* in 1760, with the lines, 'Where Calvert's butt, and Parson's black champagne, regale the bloods and drabs of Drury lane'.³ However, such universal recognition did have its disadvantages. When the tax on porter was raised by 3s. a barrel in 1761, these specific brewers were specifically condemned for the wealth they obtained from fixing the price. Calvert was subjected to personal criticism, confirmed in the following report of customers' resistance to the price rise:

I dare swear there is not a compositor or press-man in your printing-house but is a friend to honest porter, and is glad that the brewer and the publican have been defeated in their designs of laying an additional tax on that admirable liquor. Yet the Alderman whose fame is still stuck above the sign post.⁴

In 1761 everyone knew that the 'Alderman' could only mean one person, Sir William Calvert, of the Hour Glass brewery. By that time Alderman Parsons was dead but his widow did not escape the public's wrath. The Red Lion brewery had continued under Lady Parsons, and was still sufficiently prominent in 1761, to invite criticism over the same price increase. In an article, *Occasioned by the Attempt to Raise the Price of Porter*, the author complained of the 'the immense fortune already raised at Parsons's brewery'.⁵

Humphrey Parsons had been propelled to fame as a brewer before his career as a politician. After inheriting the Red Lion brewery, East Smithfield in 1717, he was a frequent visitor to France where his Jacobite leanings were well received. He was invited to a hunting party of the young Louis XV at Versailles, where Parsons's magnificent horse was complimented by the king who enquired as to its price, whereupon Parsons offered it to him as a gift. The story went that Parsons was rewarded with the sole right to import porter to France free of duty. This entered folklore as an anti-French anecdote epitomised in *A Hymn to Alderman Parsons our Lord-mayor*:

in France he is respected
The French King does agree
that he should bring his beer
over there duty free
which is a great advantage
and plainly does appear

it must save his Lordship
some hundreds in a year.⁶

However, the story was chiefly remembered for a French courtier's disparaging pun on the order of the Knights of Malta, when he advised the King that Parsons was, a *chevalier de Malte*, in other words a 'knight of the brewing trade'.⁷ It was that aspect of the story which persisted into the nineteenth century, as in the aforementioned *Some Account of London*, where brewers were collectively described as, 'Chevaliers de Malte, as an impertinent Frenchman styled a most respectable gentleman, the late Humphrey Parsons'.⁸

Anti-French references were guaranteed to promote the popularity of any anecdote, a trend which persisted in the promotion of porter. Beer was seen as the part of English patriotism along with John Bull, St. George and contempt of all things French.⁹ Thus, in a Song in Praise of Porter, it was said, 'In praise of Claret and Champagne, let others be profuse, with such those elves may please themselves, give me some barley-juice'.¹⁰ With the subtext of patriotism, a foaming tankard of porter could therefore be promoted in favour of French wine as in a 1759 poem entitled *A Tankard of Porter*:

The foaming cup replete with mad'ning juice
Of Gallic vines, to others taste I leave;
Why should I sicken for exotic draughts,
Since with kind hand *Ceres* gives
Potation more robust - replenish here -
Boy - take this honest tankard- fill it high
With buxom porter, such as *Hercules*,
Was *Hercules* in being, would imbibe
... 'tis the porter's manly juice
... the gallic vine must bow, and Gallic butlers
to the stout British draymen must give way.¹¹

The message was clear, porter was a manly drink, whereas wine by implication, was effeminate. Furthermore, British barley was endorsed with the power to give the drinker the strength of Hercules.

The strength-giving qualities of porter were a common topic. In *The Westminster Magazine* of 1776 it was said that the Scots, Irish and Dutch lived on porridge, potatoes and salads, and would not be able to carry out the work of an English coal-heaver unless they had, 'strong

beer and Porter to drink'.¹² Whilst all of these works incorporated a general theme of the celebration of porter for its various qualities, porter-brewers did not specifically advertise their product at that time. Stories of the strength-giving qualities of foaming tankards of porter were aimed at the individual porter drinker generically, where all porter was promoted. When it came to the individual brewer it was a question of image. In order to command respect a brewer had to promote his position in society by his lifestyle. Some opted for the country estate with all the trappings of the squirearchy, while others sought a political career. The porter-brewers' self-promotion in literary outlets had to be appropriate to their social position to avoid the ignominious label of 'puffery'.

Puffing and advertising

By the 1780s many businessmen were losing their inhibitions about advertising their services in the newspapers. This invited criticism in letters to the editor such as the following:

The newspapers are the general vehicle of the puffing art ... Some years ago it was thought a very bold attempt for a man to commit his name to the public prints ... Now, indeed this prejudice is at an end; and it is by publishing their names, qualifications etc. in the every possible form and manner, that people of all ranks and professions rise into notice and wealth ... Peregrine Puff.¹³

Most manufacturers feared the attention of such newspaper correspondents. The most famous of these was 'Antipuffado', who used the pages of *The Public Ledger* to dismiss merchants who advertised their products, as mere 'puffers'.¹⁴ Josiah Wedgwood, who pioneered new sales methods including advertising in newspapers, advised his partner Thomas Bentley 'not to write anything in reply to attacks from Mr. Antipuffado that would anger him'.¹⁵ However, Neil McKendrick tells us how the attacks by 'Antipuffado' drew so much public attention that Wedgwood and Bentley even discussed how they could use it to their advantage.¹⁶ This is confirmed in Wedgwood's letter to his friend and fellow manufacturer, Mathew Boulton on 19 February 1771:

If you take in the Public ledger you'll see that Mr. Antipuffado has done me the honour to rank me with the

most stupendous genius's of the age, and has really *cut me up very cleanly*. He should not wonder if some surprising genius at Birmingham should be tempted to make *Corinthian knives and daggers*.¹⁷

Boulton, who had also been a target of his attacks, was urged by Wedgwood to see the article because it was, 'one of the better sort of this class'.¹⁸ This was the dilemma for late eighteenth-century manufacturers like Wedgwood and Boulton, who wanted the publicity but not the ridicule.

The public were often suspicious of any degree of professionalism in those seeking publicity. Manufacturers who hired established writers to promote their products in the late eighteenth century encountered hostility, as in the following critique:

This business of puffing is now reduced to a system. Mr Katterfelto [Christian Katterfelto, German lecturer on optical, electrical and hydraulic arts] wrote his own sublime puffs himself, and only employed a scribe to translate them into English. Others employ, at a heavy expense, the hiring inventive pens of the day, for their respective occasions of representing themselves properly to the public attention.¹⁹

One such inventive pen was deployed on behalf of the porter brewers, the eighteenth-century travel writer Thomas Pennant. In 1790 he published *Some Account of London* where he included the list of the chief porter brewers of London from 1786 to 1787, with the following approbation:

And we make no doubt but it will give our readers much pleasure, to find such a capital article of trade solely confined to England; and the more so, as a large quantity of the porter makes a considerable part of our exports.²⁰

The public were to be persuaded that drinking porter was an act of patriotic duty which helped fill the nation's coffers, and the production of porter was a celebration of England's manufacturing prowess.

Pennant was intent on bringing a new dimension to the public perception of the London porter-brewers, invoking both pride and awe, with his description of the sight of a great London brewhouse as 'a magnificence unspeakable'.²¹ The emphasis was continually on size and the extent to which the taxes it paid supported the

state. He finished his piece with a final flourish in describing Richard Meux's largest vat which could hold 4,500 barrels of wholesome liquor which, 'enables the London porter-drinkers to undergo tasks that ten gin-drinkers would sink under'.²² Thus, another porter 'puff' was born, that porter sustained heavy work by the nourishment it gave to the drinker. The 'sinking gin-drinkers' story was repeated without question in many serious accounts of the London porter breweries throughout the nineteenth century. Like a twentieth-century advertising slogan, it tripped off the tongue of many contemporary commentators on the drink problem, without scrutiny or question.

Vat sizes

One element of Pennant's triumphant piece was not new, the preoccupation with cask sizes. Samuel Johnson, who was a close friend and advisor to Henry Thrale at the Anchor brewery, Southwark, described how:

an emulation arose among the brewers to exceed each other in the magnitude of their vessels for keeping beer to a certain age, probably taking the hint from the great tun at Heidelberg.²³

Thrale, who apparently lost sleep over the fact that Samuel Whitbread had a vessel that could hold 1,000 barrels, was only just dissuaded by Johnson from wasting money on building one even larger.²⁴ However, Thrale could not resist the challenge for long, and by 1775 he had built four vats each with a capacity of 1,500 barrels. He entertained 100 guests to dinner in one of them,²⁵ a theatrical gesture which was to become almost obligatory on the commission of each brewer's new vat of ever increasing size. Thrale had a compulsive need to outdo his competitors, particularly Calvert and Whitbread, 'two fellows he despised'.²⁶

Ironically, Whitbread was turning away from the use of large wooden storage vats at this time and pioneering the use of stone-walled tanks, which he called cisterns. An underground stone cistern might have been more durable than a large wooden vat, but it lacked flamboyance, so he added the showman's touch for the Royal visit of 1787. When George III, complete with the Royal Family, toured the brewery they were invited to:

inspect the stone cistern which contains not less than 4,000 barrels. Upwards of 1000 lamps were found necessary to light it up, and a temporary staircase was erected for the accommodation of the august visitors.²⁷

In 1795, Richard Meux confessed that his ambition was to overtake Whitbread to become the leading porter brewer in London.²⁸ With this in mind, he commissioned the biggest vat on record, 25 ft. high, 65 ft. diameter, with a capacity of 20,000 barrels.²⁹ Thomas Pennant reported on the event, complete with the requisite dinner held inside the vessel, this time for 200 guests.³⁰ This vat was the largest ever built as the size of vats had reached its zenith. Needless to say, that Meux went on to overtake Whitbread in 1802, to become the largest producer of porter in London, and thereby the world.³¹

The continued building of large vats finally ended in 1814 after the failure of a vat's hoops in the Horseshoe brewery of Henry Meux junior, which led to a catastrophic flood of beer, causing eight deaths and widespread criticism of large containers above ground.³² Another factor in the demise of large vats was their increasing irrelevance as the process of brewing porter underwent fundamental changes at the end of the eighteenth century. Greater scientific knowledge and the use of the thermometer and hydrometer proved that pale malt gave a better return than the dark, high-roasted malt on which porter was based.³³ These changes reduced the time needed for maturation and therefore reduced the size of the vats needed for that process.

These events were guaranteed to gain the attention of the public, convincing them that the porter brewers were engaged in fierce competition, which they were on many levels except for the price. On a personal level, some of the brewers competed so intensely to become the leading producer of porter, that they sometimes sacrificed profitability. Henry Thrale brewed more than he could sell, in an effort to oust Whitbread from his place as London's top brewer, which drove him to the brink of bankruptcy and hastened his premature death.³⁴

There was always an element of exhibitionism in the porter brewers' methods. The dinners held inside massive vats were pure showmanship, as were the drays, which were decorated way beyond the simple needs of identification. Even the steam engine was harnessed

into the publicity drive when the Royal approval was conferred on a porter brewery. Whitbread, Calvert and Thrale were household names, which were the subject of many letters to the newspapers. The porter-brewers were precocious in the promotion of their names into the public domain, where they were celebrated in poems, denigrated in the press and debated in Parliament. They were among the first to develop the concept of brand-names.

Signs; breweries, drays and public-houses

Early eighteenth-century attitudes to commercial promotion are encapsulated in a letter to *The Champion* in 1741:

when truths are self-evident, tis a kind of impertinence to enlarge upon them; but in this case it may be expected. Look around therefore and you will find that the whole scope of master's education is to convince him, first of the importance of puffing his own person, and secondly the means of doing it with success. Tis this that gave tradesmen the first notions of Signs, Handbills, fine shops.³⁵

This was seen as the right way to do things. Explicit appeals for patronage were considered presumptuous, but handbill and signs were acceptable.

Each porter brewery had its own trade card printed with the brewery insignia. Whitbread's brewery was *The White Hart*; Barclay Perkins, *The Anchor*; Truman, *The Black Eagle*. These emblems were also displayed over the entrance gate, along with the brewer's name. However, the most powerful projection of the brewer's name was when it was carried through the streets on the side the brewer's dray, pulled in splendour by the biggest horses in London. These massive animals were slow and lacked stamina, but they towered above other horses using the streets, and were sufficiently robust for the intermittent demands of a drayman's delivery round. The porter-brewers were more interested in the appearance of their dray-horses as they delivered their cargo throughout London. Whitbread's horses were said to be kept, 'in the very highest condition ... In Whitbreads we observed the name of each horse painted above his stall'.³⁶ The horses were fitted out in regalia almost as grand as those that drew the Lord Mayor's coach. The harnesses carried brass symbols of their respective

breweries, for Barclay Perkins an *Anchor*, Calvert an *Hourglass* and Meux a *Horseshoe*.³⁷ The brewery crest was displayed on the side of the dray along with the brewer's name, which was emblazoned in stylised lettering that was unmistakable even to the illiterate. Clearly, these were among the earliest examples of brand-names.

The dray-men complemented the size of the horses, big men who were capable of controlling the dray and manhandling the casks. The eighteenth-century dray was a two wheeled cart, drawn by two horses. With no solid floor, it carried three butts in line, lodged between lateral wooden struts to accommodate the curved shape of the cask, the dray-man sat on the foremost.³⁸ Each butt contained 108 gallons of beer, the overall weight of the dray probably weighing about 2½ tons. The dray-men were skilled in the art of maneuvering these heavy vehicles, being able, 'to back the horse into a narrow street or archway, but a few inches wider than the vehicle, guided only by his voice ...'.³⁹

The brewer's dray was an everyday sight in late eighteenth-century London, a traffic-survey of 1816 revealed that drays represented 53.8% of wheeled vehicles using London Bridge.⁴⁰ A contemporary description of the daily cavalcade from the Hour Glass brewery, captures the sense of awe:

When the head of the foremost of its colossal horses is seen emerging from one of those steep, narrow lanes ascending from the river side to the Strand, there is a general pause in the full tide of human life that flows along that thoroughfare. Heavily, as they would plant themselves into the earth, the huge hoofs, are set down, clattering and scraping as they slip on the steep ascent; the huge bodies of the steeds thrown forward, till at last the dray, high-piled with barrels emerges from the narrow way, the strain over, the long line of steeds pass smoothly onwards.⁴¹

The general pause in the traffic as they emerged may have contained an element of self-preservation. The dray-men had a reputation for not giving way to other traffic, whether on wheels or on foot as indicated in the following poem:

a brewers dray was seen to glide
unmindful of the mud
two high-bred steeds of beauteous mould

the pride of Whitbread's fluid
then all ye bucks who walk the street
so spruce, so buxom and so neat
learn this sad tale by reading
to keep at home on rainy days
lest you should meet with any drays
for draymen have no breeding.⁴²

Whitbread, like the other porter brewers, fitted his draymen out in his own livery to complete the spectacle.⁴³ They exhibited a powerful presence which, 'set the draymen a race apart, as intolerant of slurs upon their dignity, as naval captains were jealous of salutes upon the high seas'.⁴⁴ The intention was to project the name of the brewer painted on the dray with an image of strength, purpose and respectability. This was the porter brewers' method of advertising, emulating the pomp and ceremony of civic dignitaries. It was meant to be the ostentation of a gentleman not a naked display of commercial power.

The display of the brewer's name on the public-house was rare in the early part of the century. In 1752, readers of the *Drury Lane Journal* were warned, 'not to trust to the signs that are hung out of the Alderman's Entire Butt Beer'.⁴⁵ The 'Alderman' in this case was Sir William Calvert and his sign indicated that this was a tied-house. A similar complaint against Calvert's signs came in 1760, 'the Alderman whose fame is still stuck above the sign post, let the names on the pewter pots be changed ever so often'. The publicans might come and go, but the house still belonged to Calvert. Such a public display of commercial power was not well received by the public and few other porter brewers emulated him at that time.

A French visitor of 1765 thought the signs on public-houses to be 'gaudy and the pictures bad',⁴⁶ and the *Tatler* described the signboards as follows, 'the paintings are usually so bad that you cannot know the animal under whose sign you are to live that day'.⁴⁷ One of the oldest Public-house signs was 'The Bush' which was rooted in the legal requirement to inform the public that ale was for sale. In medieval times the display of a bush on a pole was a recognised sign to ale tasters, that a new brew was ready, or that a new barrel had been tapped.⁴⁸ In the early eighteenth century, there was such diversity in the names of signs, it is clear that they shared only one thing in common. The sign portrayed a name or tra-

dition attached to the particular public-house where it was displayed, not of the brewer who supplied it with beer.

However, by the late eighteenth century, this was changing. Signboards displaying the brewer's name on the face of public-houses were becoming a regular feature in London. Thus, traditional public-house signs such as 'The King's Head', were now becoming subservient to a larger signboard, such as 'Truman's Entire', which solely displayed the commercial connection to the brewer who supplied the public-house. By 1788, the practice had spread from London to other provincial cities. Sir William Cunynghame complained in parliament of, 'boards bearing the words "Whitbread's Entire", "Calvert's Entire" and the like, against houses in various streets in Leith and Edinburgh'.⁴⁹

A sense of corporate identity can be detected in 1809 when Meux, Reid & Co., formed from the dissolution of Richard Meux's brewing empire, decided to provide brewery signboards for all of their public-houses. Thereafter, the value of over 400 signboards appeared in the company's annual accounts.⁵⁰ By the early nineteenth century it was said that one brewery alone, 'had *fifteen thousand pounds worth* of sign-boards stuck up over London',⁵¹ which had transformed the scene as in the following description:

A stranger in the metropolis is struck with the large number of boards marked with 'Whitbread's Entire', 'Meux's Double Refined', 'Combe & Delafield's Brown Stout House' that meet the eye in every part of London. These signs are of such size as to extend from side to side of the building, and if a house presents two ends or even three, to public view, the massive letters adorn them all.⁵²

Within 20 years all inhibitions had gone and porter brewers were shouting their names from the rooftops. The brewer's name had become one of the first examples of branding for a mass-produced commodity like beer, another indicator of the advanced nature of the porter brewing revolution.

Puffing and the 'Brewers' list'

Eighteenth-century competition between the porter brewers was far from healthy, with signs of price-fixing

as early as 1757, when a general meeting of the principal brewers of the city resolved not to supply publicans under 26s. a barrel.⁵³ This is not to say that brewers did not compete for the custom of publicans, it was just not on price. The quality of the beer was the principal arena for competition, but financial support to the publican ran a close second. Whilst this gave brewers a degree of control over income it did little to address that other variable, the price of raw materials.

Brewers were at the end of a long chain of supply for an agricultural product, which was subject to the vagaries of the weather. Many agencies had to earn their living in the transition from a field of barley to the pewter pot. The fixed price of 3½d. per quart ensured that brewers were more prisoners of their fixed price system than masters of it. Thus, when malt prices became too high and the brewers were seen to act collectively, it drew the inevitable charge that they were acting in ‘combination’. In 1766, they threatened to stop brewing unless the distillation from malt was curtailed,⁵⁴ reminding us that there was another powerful presence in the market for malt and barley, the London gin distilleries. Hops were also subject to great variations in price which the brewers said were subject to speculation and exploitation by agents. In 1773, this again prompted them to cease brewing to drive down prices and to operate political leverage on the Government.⁵⁵

In 1772, the Brewer’s Company had asked two of their members, Samuel Whitbread and Henry Thrale, to present petitions to Parliament to be allowed to import foreign hop, malt and barley.⁵⁶ On that occasion it was refused but they were more successful in 1782, when Whitbread’s petition for the importation of foreign barley from the Baltic to augment domestic supplies was allowed. However, the minister, wary of the reaction from Britain’s farmers, allowed it only as a temporary expedient.⁵⁷

The major porter brewers saw that their interests were better served by individual members acting as parliamentary spokesmen, outside of the worshipful Company of Brewers’ organisation. Whitbread proved to be a powerful advocate in his campaign for a full drawback for London brewers against the proposed increase in the malt tax in 1780. He deployed the argument that the brewers were patriotic tax payers, informing the House of Lords that the taxes on malt,

hops and beer paid the interest for 80 millions of the national debt.⁵⁸ He ended on a more dramatic note, stating, ‘that however the brewers might be oppressed he would rather burn his brewhouse to the ground than raise the price of beer to the people’.⁵⁹ Whitbread’s rhetoric won the day, the drawback was granted and the price of porter was held at 3½d.

An opportunity for better public relations came in 1787 when George III visited Whitbread’s brewery in Chiswell Street, Moorfields. The newly installed steam engine was undoubtedly the main attraction for the King, where, ‘Mr. Watt, the patentee, was present to explain the machine, which afforded their Majesties singular pleasure’.⁶⁰ Samuel Whitbread then demonstrated his intelligence in his management of the event. It was a foregone conclusion that he would gain massive kudos from a Royal visit, but Whitbread wanted the right sort of publicity for his product. The event was widely covered with detailed descriptions, such as that in the fashionable magazine, *The Weekly Entertainer*:

When everything was seen, the walk ended in the house. Their Majesties were led to a cold collation as magnificent as affluence could make it. The whole service was plate. There was every wine in the world. The Duchess of Lancaster and Lady Harcourt sat at the table with the Princesses.⁶¹

That was fine for the ladies, but Whitbread knew that the target for his publicity was men, principally working men who drank his porter. Thus, the male members of the party were led to, ‘a second banquet, scarcely less sumptuous’.⁶² This was described in more detail in *The General Evening Post* as, ‘a good beef steak, which was dressed at the stoke-grate, and washed down with a draught of Whitbread’s entire’. This was Whitbread’s showmanship at its best. He instinctively understood the earthy symbolism of a beef steak that had been cooked for the King on a malt shovel in the furnace of the brewery, the natural companion to a pot of his porter.

The whole exercise was a master-stroke in public relations. Considering that the visit only lasted four hours, the extent of the coverage in newspapers, magazines and books was unprecedented, continuing for years after the event. Whitbread was not slow to exploit this favourable publicity, with the following press release, which was widely reported:

... so much has been said in the London papers of the late Royal visit to Mr. Whitbread's brewery, the following concise account will furnish more information than all put together, viz. that the last season he brewed 143,058 barrels of porter.⁶³

In November, a list was published of the leading London porter brewers in the format of a competitive league-table, as follows:

	Barrels
Whitbread, Samuel	150,280
Calvert, Felix	131,043
Thrale, Hester	105,559
Read, W. (Trumans)	95,302
Calvert, John	91,950
Hammond, Peter	90,852
Goodwin, Henry	66,398
Phillips, John	54,197
Meux, Richard	49,651
Wiggins, Mathew	40,741
Fasset, Thomas	40,279
Dawson, Ann	39,400
Jordan, Thomas	24,193
Dickinson, Joseph	23,659
Hare, Richard	23,251
Allen, Thomas	23,013
Dickinson, Rivers	18,640
Pearce, Richard	16,901
Coker, Thomas	16,744
Proctor, Thomas	16,584
Newberry, William	16,517
Hodgson, George	16,384
Bullock, Robert	16,272
Clarke, Edward	9,855
Total of Barrels	1,176,856

Table 6. *The leading porter-brewers 1786-7*⁶⁴

Thus, the idea of promulgating the annual production of the porter brewers was born. Within three years the list had been regularised as the 'correct and comparative statement of the brewings of the 13 principal brewers in London'.⁶⁵ The list was published annually at the time

of the brewers' 'rest' in July, which continued in this format until 1830. Since the list promoted only the names of the leading brewers it required a new organisation to collate the statistics and pay for its publication. Although they appeared to be statements, they often appeared in the classified advertisement column. It was through this exercise in self-promotion that the first steps were taken to form the Porter-brewers' Committee, albeit, still under the umbrella of the Brewer's Company at this stage.

The annual publication of the 'brewers' list' was nothing more than a sophisticated 'puff' to promote the cabal of leading porter-brewers. It also served as a rudimentary marketing tool, by keeping the names of the porter brewers in the public domain in an age when the advertising of brand names was in its infancy. It was elitist, intending to infer that porter could only be produced on a large scale, the bigger the brewery, the better the beer. Porter had been developed by exploiting the benefits of mass production on an economic basis, which was now being portrayed as an indication of quality.

Puffing and the 'invention' of porter

In the early nineteenth century a myth became established of the heroic development of porter by a single individual, which survives to this day. Like most durable legends, there were some elements of the story that were true, some merely plausible and others that were improbable. Most historians who have written on the brewing industry have included their analysis of this story and its embellishments, and therefore it seems appropriate to attempt another deconstruction of its rhetoric.

In February 1802, the article, 'The History of the London Brewery' reappeared in a publication *A Treatise on Brewing*,⁶⁶ by Alexander Morrice, a minor porter-brewer in Southwark. It was immediately reported in the book reviews of magazines such as *The Annual Review*⁶⁷ and *The Monthly Epitome* where the article was published in full.⁶⁸ In March, the whole article was again published in *The Monthly Visitor*⁶⁹ and the influential *Edinburgh Magazine*,⁷⁰ thereafter widely published. This tale had now been restored at a critical time for the London brewing trade, which then engendered yet another account of the 'invention' of porter.

John Feltham, a travel writer, published *The Picture of London* in 1802, where he incorporated the newly resurrected story, 'The History of the London Brewery'. However, he changed the story in many ways, with the principal difference being that the 'invention' was ascribed to a single individual, described thus:

The wholesome and excellent beverage of porter obtained its name about the year 1730 ... a brewer of the name of HARWOOD, conceived the idea of making a liquor which should partake of the united flavours of ale, beer and twopenny. He succeeded, calling it entire butt meaning that it was drawn entirely from one butt and as it was a nourishing liquor it was suitable for porters and working people. Hence it obtained its name of porter.⁷¹

This was immediately followed by a description of, 'Messrs. Whitbread & Co.s' Brewery in Chiswell St., near Moorfields, the greatest in London'.⁷² Feltham's story of the 'invention' of porter served as an introduction to a celebratory piece about Whitbread's brewery, complete with the steam engine, which could, 'do the work of seventy horses and does not make more noise than a spinning wheel'.⁷³ The rhetoric had changed. The brewery was no longer described in generalised terms of 'unspeakable' magnificence. This detailed description of the brewery's mechanical functions portrayed it as the marvel of the modern age, which set the tone for all future publications on breweries.

Samuel Whitbread junior, who seems to have inherited his father's showmanship, was undoubtedly the initiator of the 'Harwood' legend, which went unchallenged into the nineteenth century. He was known as the 'Great Fermentator' by the aristocracy and was often depicted as surrounded by froth.⁷⁴ As the leading porter-brewer, he was determined to promote his own brewery and the porter-brewers' image at the same time. He would have heard of Feltham's proposal to publish a new guide to London based on a similar publication for Paris, as early as 1800.⁷⁵ He invited Feltham to write about the brewery and gave him the account of the 'Harwood' story which was the subject of local legend, centred on the Bell brewery in Shoreditch, less than half a mile from Whitbread's brewery.

That legend had originated with an article in the *Gentleman's Magazine* of 1788, where a 'parishioner' described the neighbourhood of Shoreditch:

On the East side of the High Street is Proctor's brewhouse, formerly Ralph Harwood's, who, it is said, was the first brewer of porter beer, which he made there, as sung by poet Gutteridge, a native of Shoreditch. Harwood, my townsman, invented first Porter, to rival wine, and quench the thirst.⁷⁶

Thus, all components of the story were now in place. Feltham combined the separate elements of the story together to produce his article, under the heading, 'Wheat, Coals, Ale and Porter'. The origins of porter had been included because, 'it not having yet been printed, we think then proper to record in this work'.⁷⁷ The story was then re-published in many contemporary newspapers under the heading, 'The Porter Brewery'.

The story was brought to its completion in an instructional book, *Arithmetical Questions*, in 1811, when it was repeated with the additional assertion that Harwood was the partner in the Bell brewhouse, Shoreditch, from which, 'Entire Butt beer was first retailed at the *Blue Last*, Curtain Rd., Shoreditch'.⁷⁹ In 1813, the story appeared in *The Supplement to Rural Sports*, to be repeated word-for-word in the *Times* in 1817.⁸⁰ This probably gave it sufficient authority to be included in Abraham Rees's influential work, *Cyclopaedia* in 1819.⁸¹ Thereafter, this latest version of the story was repeated without alteration throughout the nineteenth century, including many encyclopaedias, thereby 'establishing' that Ralph Harwood 'invented' porter at the Bell brewery in Shoreditch.⁸²

Like all myths, some aspects of it were true. Ralph Harwood did exist, and had been brewing at the 'Bell' brewery in Shoreditch since the beginning of the eighteenth century.⁸³ He was described as an eminent brewer when made a magistrate in 1723.⁸⁴ On his death in 1729, his two sons Ralph and James inherited the brewery which was sufficiently important to make Ralph a founding member of the River Lea Navigation Trust.⁸⁵ Ralph died in 1749,⁸⁶ soon after leaving the Fleet prison as an undischarged bankrupt.⁸⁷ However, his brother James continued the business and eventually cleared the family name before he died in 1762, when he was described as, 'an eminent brewer in Shoreditch, and the first that brought porter to perfection'.⁸⁸

What concerns this study is to understand the motives behind the invention of these stories, not the beer, which is quite well understood. The development of porter was

undoubtedly more complex than the ‘invention’ of a beer, that would merely replace the process of mixing of three different types of beer together. It was a typical strategy of eighteenth-century manufacturers, to appear in supposedly impartial articles to avoid charges of ‘puffing’, but which then praised or drew attention to their specific product. The ‘Harwood’ story went on to become the most durable brewing legend of all time. It continued to appear in publications too numerous to mention, including many reference books and even in brewing trade journals as late as the 1950s. It was the culmination of eighteenth-century ‘puffing’ and, whether by accident or design, it served as the only mitigation of the porter brewers’ disastrous publicity in the early nineteenth century, when they needed it most.

Summary

Gentleman brewers, who were only just about acceptable in polite society, could not afford to be seen as ‘puffers’. Thus, other ways had to be found to claim exceptional qualities for porter. Vat size was one method. Whilst it satisfied the vanity of each succeeding brewer’s claim to superiority, it also carried the porter-brewers’ collective propaganda that porter could only be manufactured in these huge vessels. The brewers’ list was another method of projecting the porter-brewers’ importance into the public domain, under the cloak of statistical information. However, it was probably the horse-drawn dray that impacted on the public consciousness on a day to day basis. The porter-brewers were masters of semiotics as they displayed their insignia on the trappings of horses which were far bigger than was necessary or economic. The brewer’s names were household words which were emblazoned on the side of the dray and over the alehouse door. This was advertising in the eighteenth century.

At first glance the brewers’ mythologies surrounding the origins of porter seem unimportant, but it is argued here that they are a conduit to the eighteenth-century mindset. The ‘invention of porter’ myth first appeared when the brewing trade were under attack for collectively raising their prices on the back of a tax increase. The story was a collective response from the porter-brewers. Ralph Harwood was probably selected, partly because he was deceased, but also because he had been a judge and therefore his reputation was beyond reproach.

Humphrey Parsons, the brewer who did actually develop porter was a Jacobite politician, would have been a more controversial choice in Hanoverian London. The use of the word *entire* was obviously calculated, as was the mythology that surrounded it concerning the origin of porter. If the hyperbole is stripped away, many other elements of the story are true.

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Chapter 4

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