
INTRODUCTION: 'THE BREWERIES OF ENGLAND'

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The Victorians extolled the virtues of hard work, enterprise and the compilation of statistics in their accounts of Britain's extraordinary economic growth in the half century after 1830. This growth was best illustrated in narratives of the textile, railway and engineering industries. In them, a plethora of material was included about the leaders of the more prominent firms. They became a staple of 'improvement' literature. Samuel Smiles's *Self Help* (1859) was one variant; another was the biographies of those leading industrialists who, for example, were included in the three volumes of *Fortunes Made in Business* (1883) and the countless lengthy obituaries that crowded the pages of the Victorian press. Alfred Barnard in his well-known *Noted Breweries of Great Britain and Ireland*, beloved by all brewing historians, mined a similar vein in his survey of 113 breweries published in four volumes between 1889 and 1891. He wrote, in an undemanding prose, wonderfully deferential accounts of these breweries and their owners together with, inevitably, somewhat repetitive descriptions of the brewing process in which he contrasted variations in practice in London, Burton, Yorkshire and Edinburgh. Since he relied entirely on the brewers' co-operation in an industry noted for its intense secrecy he had virtually nothing to say about the public capitalisation of many companies at its peak the late 1880s after the famous example set by Guinness in 1886, or about the growing acquisition of tied houses which largely drove the movement, or about sales in general. Yet Barnard drew attention to the great riches made in brewing (they rivalled those in banking) and its importance as a great industry so frequently dismissed by temperance critics and in general lacking spectacular technological advances compared with cotton and engineering, and its negligible, except for Bass and Guinness, export performance.

In fact, although Barnard's essays have obvious links with earlier writings on growth, enterprise and wealth, there is a direct precursor in the eleven essays reprinted in this volume and which first appeared 14 years earlier in the *Licensed Victuallers' Gazette*.¹ Since five of the breweries described in the *Gazette* - Worthingtons, Barclay Perkins, Bass, Trumans and Tennants of Sheffield - are also included in Barnard it is highly likely that he would have known of them (both accounts of the history of Trumans are strikingly similar) and that his own writings were influenced by them. The *Gazette* essays certainly have an interesting gestation.

In the 1860s and 1870s, towards the height of the Victorian Brewing boom a couple of influential journals to promote the interests of the industry were first published; the *Brewers' Journal* in 1864 and the *Brewers' Guardian* in 1871 (succeeded by the *Brewing Trade Review* in 1886). In the public house arm of the industry there was a much longer history of print in the publicans' interests with no fewer than three weekly newspapers: *The Morning Advertiser* founded in 1794, *The Era* in 1836 and the *Licensed Victuallers' Guardian* in 1859. Then on the 27 June 1872 an announcement appeared in the *Morning Advertiser* heralding the launch, with 'a guaranteed circulation' of 10,000 copies, of yet another trade journal, the *Licensed Victuallers' Gazette*. Published weekly from Saturday 6 July it was described as being 'devoted to the Interests of Hotel, Tavern and Innkeepers; Brewers, Maltsters and Hopfactors: Distillers, Wine and Spirit and all Trades connected therewith'.² The two men responsible for the new publication were its publisher, Benjamin T. Gale, and proprietor and editor, Henry Downes Miles. Gale, though still a very young man, had already worked on two other newspapers, the *Leader* and subsequently the

Licensed Victuallers' Guardian, leaving the latter after managing it for two years.³ Miles, some 40 years older than his associate, had also worked on a number of papers, his most recent as leader writer of the *Morning Advertiser*.⁴

However, Miles's time at the *Licensed Victuallers' Gazette* was brief, for by late 1874 it had a new owner, William Henry Bingham-Cox (1841-1898). It was a position he would hold twice, his first ending in 1889. It was during his first 18 months that the 'Breweries of England' articles appeared. Although an author's name is never attached to these pieces, it seems likely that it was Cox himself rather than any of editors he employed. The first of these was Sydney French who had previously edited the *Weekly Dispatch* and was particularly well known for his boxing reports, a subject which with extensive racing coverage Cox introduced to the journal. Yet French's tenure was a short one for by the beginning of January 1876 he had been replaced by Henry Hersee who lasted only a month due to differences with Cox.⁵ His next editor, Willmott-Dixon, a Cambridge graduate, writing under the pseudonym Thormanby, was a renowned sports writer especially celebrated for his columns on boxing. What Cox's three editors seem to share was a lack of any knowledge of the brewing trade itself. This leaves Cox as the most likely candidate for authorship of the brewery articles.

We know something of his life from two pieces which paint two very different pictures. The first comes from an obituary which appeared in the *Herts Advertiser* six days after his death on 3 April 1898.⁶ It describes how he was born in Gloucestershire and educated in London and Cirencester. Due to his father's financial difficulties he did not attend Oxford as planned, but went straight into journalism. Then after some 30 years in the business he changed tack, sold the *Licensed Victuallers' Gazette* and in 1889 bought the Kingsbury Brewery, St. Albans.⁷ Presumably, Cox was seeking a share in the riches most brewers enjoyed and which he had begun to write about in his articles of fourteen years earlier. As well as the fifteen-quarter plant the sale also included Kingsbury Lodge, 26 fully licensed public-houses, six beerhouses and 18 cottages for which Cox paid £24,100.⁸ After only five years, Cox put his brewery up for sale by auction on 23 July 1894. Cox had clearly invested in the business for now, besides the property described in 1889, there were no fewer than 45 freehold

and six leasehold tied houses. The advertisement proclaimed that it was:

an old established business that has of late years been rapidly upon the increase, the proprietor having had awarded to him the Gold Medal, Edinburgh, 1890; the Gold Medal, Jamaica, 1891; and the highest award Chicago, 1893.⁹

The auctioneer's estimate for the whole business was £65,000, yet the highest bid was £44,900, well below the £60,000 reserve price.¹⁰ Eventually the Kingsbury (St. Alban's) Brewery Company was incorporated to acquire it in November.¹¹ Earlier, Cox had enjoyed considerable publicity when he stood as Independent Conservative candidate for the St. Alban's division in the election of 1891.

On the sale of his brewery Cox returned to journalism, repurchased the *Licensed Victuallers' Gazette* and launched a new publication *The Rocket* which his detractors quipped quickly came down like a damp squib. He died four years later, according to a post-mortem, of heart disease. He left property near Cirencester and Malvern and £257 13s. 2d. to his sister.¹²

Some 15 years later another memoir of Cox was published. In his personal reminiscences, *Bohemian Days in Fleet Street*, William Mackay described his fellow journalist, after a racist description of his appearance, as 'one of the queerest fish of our times ... believed by many of his contemporaries as mad as Bedlam'.¹³ Certainly eccentric, Cox was a keen opera-goer and a collector of engravings and musical instruments. In Mackay's version of events Cox bought the *Licensed Victuallers' Gazette* in 1874 after working for some time as a clerk in the Bank of England. Admitting his skill as proprietor, Mackay reckoned he realised over £100,000 when he sold the *Gazette* in 1889. Mackay maintained the brewery 'went smash' and his final brief return to newspapers was a failure: 'the unfortunate man had been drained dry ... In a few short years his fortune had been melted. He was overdrawn at the bank; he had not a cent in the world'.¹⁴

It is difficult to establish any pattern in the breweries Cox selected for inclusion in his new weekly journal: two big London breweries, an odd, small affair in Hoxton to end his series, two of the leading Burton

breweries and the rest a random scattering of country breweries. It is easier to divine the aims he had in putting together the articles for his select readership. The brewing industry had recently been exposed to a growing range of criticism from the Temperance movement. In most of the essays there are barbed references to its leader Sir Wilfred Lawson. Lawson and his fellow MPs, 'seek to treat Englishmen like children and to render us virtuous by Act of Parliament'.¹⁵ Cox simply wanted to set the record straight. Brewing he maintained was an important industry in itself and comparable with any other in its size, in its contribution to the economy, in its patriotism, in its long history and in the respectability and riches of brewers. The only hint of how Cox obtained the co-operation of the breweries included in his series is through their connection with the Licensed Victuallers' Association. It held a great annual dinner to support its asylum and schools. At these well-publicised events, James Agg-Gardner, Robert Hanbury of Trumans and several of the Bass's had all agreed to address the Association. James Moore of Tennants brewery in Sheffield was, Cox noted, a prominent supporter.

Cox's readership was presumably principally of publicans. How was he best to engage them in his message? His formula, honed in the golden age of extended press reporting, but inexplicable to us now in a world of tweets and sound bites, was to present his readers with long passages on the history of each brewery and its location, on the brewers and their families and on the brewing process. In comparison with Barnard, he didn't dwell on the latter, presumably because he was writing chiefly for an audience of publicans well versed in the principals of brewing. In the later articles he was hesitant to repeat material on the various stages of production. In his piece on Cobbolds, Cliff Brewery, Ipswich there is virtually no description of the brewery itself. Essentially, Cox is providing a social history of brewing for his readers with just enough description of the brewing process and the breweries themselves to underline their importance and individuality.

This social history is fascinating in itself. It underlines exactly what Cox was attempting to put across to his readers. Take Trumans, the supreme example of a great London brewery. Its output of a massive 600,000 barrels was at its peak in this year. Its partners, at one time headed by Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton, the great slave reformer, were men of the utmost worth and wealth; the

partners' rooms were graced by four splendid Gainsborough portraits of its founder and his family. The brewery covered five acres; it employed 450 men and 180 horses, its signboard department made, painted and repaired 1,500 signboards a year. The statistics pour out. Its 95 vats of various sizes stored 3,463,992 gallons which 'would fill a swimming bath a thousand feet long, three hundred feet wide and six feet deep which is about five times the capacity of all the swimming pools in London'.¹⁶

Cox was observing the famed, historic brewing of porter at a crossroads. Trumans' vast assembly of vats was already becoming something of a white elephant. At Barclay Perkins he noted 'although the old system of vating has to a great deal gone out of use, it is by no means abandoned'.¹⁷ Such was the demand in London for bright, unvatted Burton-type ales that the leading Burton brewers with their great London rail-head stores and those country brewers with access to London by rail and coastal shipping were making serious inroads into the metropolitan beer market. Since the capital's water supply was not naturally suitable for brewing lighter, bright ales Trumans, Cox reported, made the most remarkable response of any London brewery. In 1873 they began to build a sizeable brewery in Burton itself: 'their plan is alike, simple and efficacious, and consists merely in going to Burton to make beer for the people to drink'.¹⁸

Cox's first article in his series on brewing and breweries was about Burton's third ranking brewery, Worthingtons. He visited it just before Christmas 1874. With metropolitan superiority, he began his piece in fine style, grousing about facilities at the town's station and its lack of cab and rail services. Then in a carefully researched easy on the town's and firm's history he cited several sources (including early letter's about its export of beer and especially William Molyneux's *Burton-on Trent; Its History, Its Water and Its Breweries*) to provide an account of Burton as 'one of the most flourishing, and most rapidly increasing towns in England'.¹⁹ Its mushroom growth, fired entirely by brewing and the railways, generated full employment and hence low poor rates. Its leading brewers had 'a world-wide fame for their public spirit and munificence'. Their charitable effort in providing educational, religious and recreational facilities was so impressive, 'it impossible to do better than commend

these facts to the very careful consideration of Sir Wilfred Lawson'. Cox's penultimate article on Bass is distinctly lack lustre. Was he becoming bored with his task? It reads so limply that it seems possible he didn't visit the brewery before writing his account for already a great deal had been written about the world's best-known brewery and its celebrated senior partner, Michael Thomas Bass.

The country breweries Cox described were in terms of size in sharp contrast with the London and Burton breweries he included in his series. Most of them would be well content with an annual output of 50,000 barrels. Yet they all in different ways fitted Cox's themes about the national importance of the brewing industry and the integrity of its brewers. His selection, however it was devised, is an interesting one. Some such as Cobbs of Margate and Cobbolds of Ipswich possessed a long history. Others, like Tennants Exchange Brewery, Sheffield and the Northampton Brewery Co. were new foundations. Agg-Gardners of Cheltenham was supposedly the largest brewery in the world in single ownership. Edward Greene of Bury St. Edmunds provided a classic example of Cox's themes. Greene started out from modest beginnings (both the descent of his family and its West Indian connection were exaggerated) brewing a mere 2,000 barrels in 1830. Within four decades, chiefly by supplying to the free trade a good, cheap bright beer besides the traditional vatted old Suffolk ales, he had built up a business that produced 40,000 barrels a year. From this base Greene had become the popular MP for Bury St. Edmunds, a master of foxhounds and one of Suffolk's most prominent agriculturists.²⁰ Cox was keen to list how many of his brewers had become MPs and were vital in promoting the interests of the brewing industry and publicans alike. Some brewers such as Agg-Gardner, the Worthingtons, Cobbs, Cobbolds, and Greene himself were also country bankers, yet further testament to their standing and probity. Newcomers to brewing, Thomas Moore of Tennants Brewery, Sheffield and Lipscombe Seckham of the Northampton Brewery Co., who had first made a fortune in London and not a practical brewer, made an enormous contribution to their communities. Moore served as mayor of Sheffield. His entertainments were legendary. In Margate and Ipswich the Cobbs and Cobbolds had been at the core of public life for generations. Indeed brewing was so profitable, so prestigious that it brought landed newcomers to the industry. The Brunswick brewery had

been bought as recently as 1873 by three of them: Reginald Marshall, a Cumbrian landowner and scion of a famous flax-spinning firm in Leeds; the Hon. Cecil Duncombe and Robert Tennant, by 1875 the owner of 11,000 acres in Yorkshire, Argyll and Ross-shire, MP for Leeds and a director of the Great Northern Railway,²¹ Everywhere brewers were adapting to changing taste for lighter beers.

The rush to tie the various outlets for the sale of beer was beginning to gain momentum, together with the spate of company flotations which greatly speeded it up and which were to transform the brewing industry between the 1880s and 1914. Even the trend to set up laboratories in the larger breweries, to introduce recent advances in the science of the brewing and malting processes, was noted by Cox's reference to Horace Brown's pioneering work at Worthingtons. It is Cox's observations about the brewing industry at the peak of its Victorian prosperity that is important. Behind all the verbiage, the common currency of Victorian reportage, about the history of firms and families, the accounts of Gainsborough portraits and Edward Greene's foxhounds, the impact of the industry shines through: in its sheer size; in its contributions to the country's agriculture; in the probity of the brewers themselves and in the provision of a first-rate national beverage. Damn Sir Wilfred Lawson and his crew of temperance reformers.

Notes

1. The eleven essays were quoted extensively in Gourvish, T.R. and Wilson, R.G. (1994) *The British Brewing Industry 1830-1980*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press which pp.23-266, provides a general context for the articles as does Owen, C.C. (1978) *The Development of Industry in Burton - upon - Trent*. London: Phillimore and his (1992) *The Greatest Brewery in the World; a history of Bass, Ratcliff and Gretton*. Chesterfield: Derbyshire Record Society for those on Worthingtons and Bass.
2. *Morning Advertiser*, 27 June 1872. I would like to thank Tim Holt for providing the following information on William Henry Bingham-Cox.
3. *The Sketch*, 6 November 1895.
4. *ibid*.
5. *Wrexham Advertiser*, 8 January and 5 February 1876.
6. *Herts Advertiser*, 9 April 1898.
7. *Bucks Herald*, 3 August 1889.

8. *Hertford Mercury and Reformer*, 20 July 1889.
9. *London Evening Standard*, 4 June 1894.
10. *Herts Advertiser*, 28 July 1894.
11. *Morning Post*, 21 October 1895.
12. *Cheltenham Chronicle*, 28 May 1898.
13. Mackay, W. (1913) *Bohemian Days in Fleet Street*. London: John Long, p.123
14. *ibid.* p.128.
15. See below, p.99.
16. See below, p.39.
17. See below, p.62.
18. See below, p.41.
19. See below, p.16.
20. For an extended account of Edward Greene's career see: Wilson, R.G (1983) *Greene King: A Business and Family History*. London: Bodley Head & Jonathan Cape.
21. *Burkes Landed Gentry* (1937 edn.) 'Marshall of Patterdale Hall and Tennant of Arncliffe Cote late of the Chapel House' and Bateman, J. (1883 edn.) *The Great Landowners of Great Britain and Ireland*. pp.300,437.