

THE PORTSMOUTH UNITED BREWERIES LTD 1896-1953

GEOFF DYE

The Portsmouth United Breweries was first registered as a company on 14 October 1896. It was founded by Sir William Dupree who, between 1896 to 1933, ran it as a family concern, which he dominated.

Brewing in Portsmouth goes back a long time, private breweries supplying the local trade and the Navy. Towards the end of the seventeenth century publicly owned brew houses that brewed for the Navy were set up in London, Plymouth, and Dover. The treasury, having been convinced that it was a good idea, the Victualling commission took steps to acquire Oates's Weevil brewery at Gosport to serve the Portsmouth ships. This plant was at first leased and finally purchased in 1753 - previously the Navy had established a brewery in 1513 under Henry VIII.

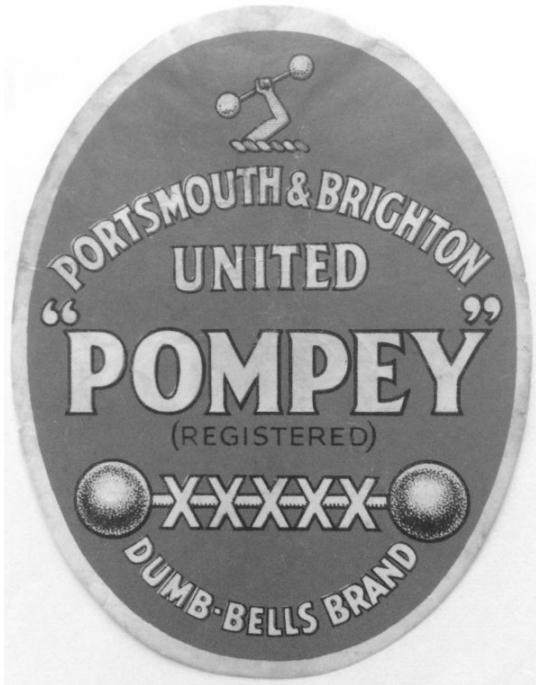
Other companies had also come to the conclusion that there was room for more competition. Accordingly, in 1878 H.G. Simonds of Reading decided to open a branch office at 3 Gresham Buildings, Marmion Road, Southsea. They appointed a most promising young man, William Thomas Dupree. On his arrival in Portsmouth he was only 22 years of age and recently married. He had been born at Twickenham on 4 September 1856 and was from an old Huguenot family who had been forced to flee from France to England during the eighteenth century. Dupree's grandfather's family property had been confiscated so return was not an option.

It did not take long for the young Dupree to settle in and make acquaintances. He became a member of the Masonic Guild and joined both the volunteer and territorial movements, participating in local affairs for the rest of his life. By 1885 he had been elected Master of

his Lodge and had become friends with one of the greatest Freemasons known to the order, John James Jenkins. In 1893 Mr Dupree contested the seat of St. Simon's Ward, Southsea in the local elections. On winning the seat he entered the chamber for the first time so making more acquaintances such as George Dean, the owner of The Steam Brewery Cosham (situated to the rear of the George and Dragon pub, Cosham). At the beginning of 1895 Dupree purchased the brewery from Dean who stayed on as an employee as well as founding The Portsmouth New Building Society, becoming the chairman until his death in 1930.

Dupree left the employment of Simonds and joined in partnership with William Gibbs of the Phoenix Brewery, Southsea. Soon afterwards the partnership was dissolved and Dupree started to expand his business by purchasing other breweries. By the summer of 1895 he had acquired Alec Stannard's Beehive brewery in Warblington Street (established in 1832) and John Miles' Elm Brewery owned by a Mrs Whicher. He was now the owner of three breweries and some 86 licensed houses (the third largest group in Portsmouth). Now aged 40 Dupree set about integration and invited directors to join him in his new venture, The Portsmouth United Breweries Ltd. One such person was a 40 year old Londoner, Richard Glasspool, the proprietor of the Hailey Brick works, Ware (later to die in 1904 after an operation aged 48).

On 14 November 1896 the newly formed company issued a prospectus. Share capital was £100,000 divided into 5,000 5% preference shares of £10 each and 10,000 ordinary shares of £5 each. The directors were W.T. Dupree, chairman and managing director, G.H. Dean, R.



Glasspool, J. Jenkins, R. Clover, (secretary). Including the 86 houses the valuation was £114,500, excluding goodwill and short leases. Audited accounts show average earnings were £7,617, 19s 5d per year, sufficient to pay interest on the £65,000 4% debenture stock and dividend on £35,000 ordinary shares. It was stated that the company was also to acquire the freehold premises of the aerated water company and wine and spirit business attached to the Elm Brewery. Detailed valuation as below.

86 Licensed houses-brewery and offices-		
	fixed plant	£108,500
5 long leases		£ 3,200
Loose plant , horses, carts, trade effects		£2,850
	Total	£114.550

Dupree was to receive a salary of £500 per year, other directors £52 10s per year. In settlement for the valuation Dupree accepted £35,000 ordinary shares and a balance of £84,550 in cash.

Before the first meeting of the directors, set for 28 November 1896, Dupree had to decide on where the new company would establish its headquarters. Initially

the Steam Brewery, Cosham was considered to be the best, but later changed his mind and selected the Elm Brewery in Eldon Street. On the 2 December 1896 he accompanied his fellow directors to the site with a view to rebuilding the brewery. Towards the end of the following year the new address was announced in *The Brewing Trade Review* and that the establishment had been rebuilt and the Cosham one would close.

The Elm brewery, established by Miles in 1840 to supply beer to track workers in France, now formed the main site. It was decided that the aerated water factory was surplus to needs and was sold for £35 13s after an earlier offer of £58 for the plant and £3 10s for the sugar and essences was withdrawn. Later the whole Cosham site was sold for £2,500. The new brewery had cost over £10,000 including several licensed and unlicensed properties and a corner site at Fratton Bridge. Some £308 19s had been spent on improving the drainage of 28 licensed houses.

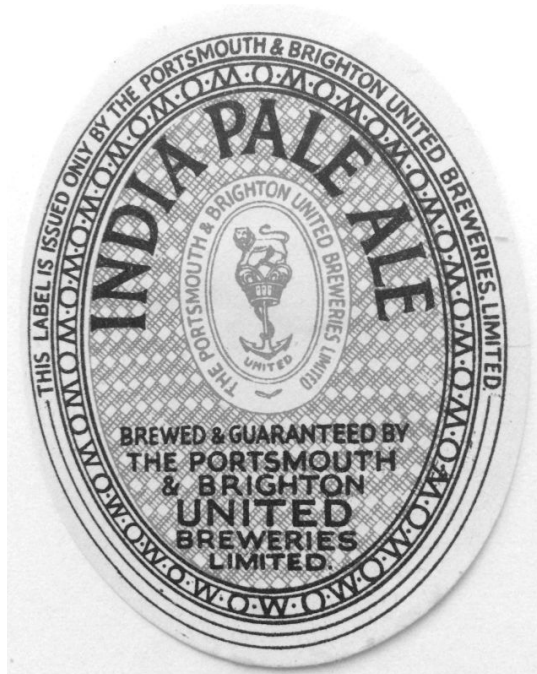
In August 1899 the Wheelwrights Arms Stamshaw was purchased for £2,800; in August 1900 the Kings Arms, Fareham for £2,750; in January 1901 The Star And Garter, Copnor for £6,000 and three months later in March, the rebuilding of The Fratton Hotel commenced at a cost of £9,244. 1901 was indeed a good year for both the company and the family. Dupree was given the honorary rank of Major for his long service in the 2nd Hants Artillery Volunteers.

On 9 November 1901 he was elected as mayor for the city of Portsmouth after a long and bitter struggle as a number of councillors who had pledged support for him later withdrew when they found it would also be a Coronation year. His chief opponent was Alderman Scott Foster who had been persuaded to stand against Dupree. However, after a vote 34/20 he was finally appointed and then set about the task of answering his critics. So successful was he in carrying out his duties he was re-elected in 1902 coinciding with the honour of a Knighthood being conferred upon him in recognition of his efforts.

At the time the new company was experiencing a shortage of space. Demand had doubled since inception and the Eldon Street bottling store had become cramped. Bottling had increased from 11,877 barrels in 1898 to 24,629 barrels in 1902. As a consequence

Bransbury and Company's Crown Brewery, Church Street, Landport was purchased for £86,500 and converted into the company's bottling store. With the deal came 40 freehold and leasehold properties increasing the number of houses by some 75% between 1896 and 1904 to a total of 150. An interesting acquisition was made in 1906 when the company purchased The Coach and Horses at Hilsea from the War Department for £10,000. In the following year the Liberal Government introduced a licensing bill aimed at reducing the number of outlets, so infuriating Dupree as The Coach and Horses was delicensed and only expected to be worth £2,500. As it happened the bill never reached the statute books. However in May 1924 the Town's Borough Engineer contacted the company as they required a piece of land for road improvements and only valued it as £2,000. This land would have meant the house would lose most of the area given to car parking and thus reduce its worth even more. The result in the end was a decision to rebuild at a cost of £9,500. A.E. Cogswell was chosen as the architect, a well known pub architect, and the house reopened in 1931. The design was what became typical of 1930s road houses; massive brick walls, castellations and painted tile panels. Coloured tile replicas of Furness's cartoon are to be found over the Public Bar entrance on the East wall, it became Dupree's dig at the Government's highway robbery, a unique political statement in tiles on a public house.

Other deals were forthcoming over the next few years; a controlling interest was purchased in Lush and Company in St. Georges Square, Portsea with 44 Licensed houses, and bought outright was Hobbs brewery in Gosport with its 11 houses for £36,000. (Castle Tavern, Somers Road; Castle Brewery, Somers Road; When Shall We Meet Again, Crasswell Street; 62 Hereford Street; Shipwrights, Edinburgh Road; Mary Arms, Havant Street; Clarence Tavern, Gosport; Windmill Tavern, Gosport; Whitworth Arms, Gosport; Eagle Tavern, Gosport; and the Queens Hotel, Gosport). Further deals with brewing concerns brought more houses such as that with J.W. Peters brewery on 6 April 1910. This cost £32,250 and included The Duke of Wellington and two shops; Bush Hotel shop and bowling green; Royal Standard, Ryde; Commercial Inn, Cowes; Grapes, Newport and shop; and The Marine Hotel, Shanklin. Deals were made with Courages of Alton in 1914 which brought a further 17 houses. The



Courage houses were mainly ex-Red Lion brewery, Landport houses that Halls of Alton had acquired before they sold to Courage in 1902. These were purchased for £16,000.

By the start of the First World War - that is within a period of some 16 years - the company's assets stood at £579,625, controlling over 200 houses and managing all of the city's catering and refreshment rooms. These included South Parade Pier rooms at a rent of £550 per year. Railway refreshment rooms at The Town station, Fratton, Ryde and trade on the Ryde steam boats. The company had depots and agencies in Plymouth, Aldershot and even as far as Malta and Gibraltar.

In the early 1900s Dupree's eldest sons, William and Vernon, entered the business. Following the resignation of Vernon Hawkins, the company secretary, in March 1904 the 22 year old William, a graduate from Birmingham University and a qualified brewer, accepted the position and subsequently joined the Board of Directors when Mr Glasspool died unexpectedly. On 22 April 1907 William was appointed assistant manager with full powers to act in the absence of the managing director at a salary of £400 per year.

William's position as company secretary was taken up by his younger brother, Vernon, who in 1912 was himself appointed as director. At this time the company was expanding quickly and numerous decisions had to be taken by the directors. One such question was who should fit the oil engine and dynamo for the freezing plant, the gas or the electric company. After a long discussion it was decided to go with the electric company if they agreed to supply cheaply. Ten days later it was reported that the National Gas Engine company had agreed to supply at £398 with United supplying all unskilled labour and bricklayers.

1914 saw the outbreak of the First World War and first Vernon and then William were granted leave of absence to join their regiments. Numerous workers were called up. A regrettable occurrence happened towards the end of 1914 when 13 of the employees were killed in action in one day. Brewery production was increased and supplies to the Army and Navy rose considerably. Net profit for 1914 was £52,951 increasing to £92,404 by 1918. Sales to public houses were restricted during this period and the gravities were reduced. It was down to Dupree to run the company with the help of Dean and Jenkins. At this time he was concerned with the effect on the brewing industry by the government's actions. Lloyd George had introduced in the November 1914 budget measures that had doubled personal income tax and had increased the duty on beer by 17s 3d per barrel. Other measures were introduced curtailing opening hours, but landlords did have a small reduction on their licence fee. Dupree wrote at the time that production for the week ending 14 November 1914 was 2,455 barrels with a duty paid of £951 while just two weeks later it was 897 barrels with duty of £1,031. The increases were affecting the company and the drinking public and the 9pm closing time was viewed unnecessary. A deputation was appointed to meet the mayor of Portsmouth to ask him to use his influence to obtain an extension to 10.30 pm. The mayor was sympathetic, but to no avail and the restriction carried on.

With problems paying the rent for the refreshments rooms a request was made for them to be reduced. When this was denied Dupree set his eyes on opportunities northwards, on Salisbury Plain, where thousands of troops were billeted. Until 1911 he had been commanding the first Wessex Brigade and still had contacts in the area. During March 1915 he travelled to Salisbury to

purchase at auction The Stonehenge Inn and a pub in Durrington which also included the Crossway Brewery for £9,050. It was in an area surrounded by Military messes and very close to Stonehenge. He then quickly purchased an acre of land adjoining the Inn for £700 from Winchester College, rebuilt the pub and erected a bottling store alongside at a total cost of £5,589. Wagons delivered hogsheads of beer direct to the stores where it was bottled for the troops. The site remained a depot until Whitbread days and closed in 1982. The pub is still in operation.

This new venture was an even greater success when the following year the government's Army Canteen Committee, concerned that beer was travelling vast distances, came to the decision that districts should be divided up and military camps served by local brewers, i.e. zoning. Many of the larger brewers lost out especially, Youngers and Ind Coope. However, Simonds, United, and even Hall and Woodhouse gained. The Output of Beer (Restriction) Act, 1916 came into force and the company were served with a notice.

Extensions to the Elm brewery went ahead. The work under contract included a new bottling plant in Brunswick Street, main roof and two new roofs over the loading stage and garage at a total cost of £2,933 10s. By April 1916 these alterations had been completed and were commemorated by a keystone at the entrance of the Offices on 16 November 1916. In a cavity was placed a sealed bottle with coins, the company's balance sheet and newspapers. At the same time Dupre had eyes on further expansion by purchasing cottages on South Street, a street separating four cottages used as offices from the main brewery. By April 1918 half of South Street had been purchased and gates erected at each end. A complaint had been made by The Portsmouth Ice And cold Storage Company but was withdrawn when it was pointed out that United's offer for £400 was very generous as the ice company had only paid £50 for them. The acquisitions of public houses had now come to a trickle with The Bulls Head, St. Vincent Street purchased for £1,550 on 18 January 1916; the St. Georges Hotel, St. Georges Square for £3,000 on 10 July 1917; The Crown and Anchor on the 5 March 1918 together with the Berkeley Arms and the Alton Ale House for £3,000; and the much sort after Oyster House, Milton at a cost of £6,800. The policy of buying property with a view to expanding the brewery was paying off with much of the



area now under brewery control. The site was now contained in an area covered by St. Vincent Street, Brunswick Street/South Street, Eldon Street and King Street.

On the wider front Sir William was looking at Biden's of the Sea Horse Brewery, Gosport who in turn had, since 1906, had a controlling interest in the Cygnet Brewery, West Street, Havant. This completed the acquisitions under United control.

Reference should be made to a regrettable accident that happened on the morning of 29 October 1914, William Jasper Leeman a 24 year old tunman living at 23 Belmont Street, Southsea, whilst walking around a vessel containing 750 gallons of boiling liquor, slipped and fell into the vessel of some 10-11 feet deep. Attracted by the man's scream Herbert Jones, a brewer, and Herbert Worrel, an assistant tunman, pulled Leeman from the vat. His clothing was stripped off and oil applied to his body, but he later died. The Coroner, Sir T. Bramsdon J.P. asked Jones what provisions had been made by the

company to prevent accidents of this kind happening. Jones replied there was no rail or protection of any sort, but since the accident a temporary barrier had been erected. An accidental death verdict was recorded and the company paid £162 18s 9d in compensation to his widow.

One would have thought the company would have checked the entire brewery, but no, a month later they were summoned to appear before the Portsmouth Police Court for failing to fence a flywheel on a compressor in the cooling plant. A fine of £5 14s 6d was imposed in spite of the Head Brewer Mr Gregory arguing that the factory inspectors had never picked up the fault.

By 1916 over two thirds of the company's 300 employees had left for active service with only 6 applications for exemption. The situation was becoming desperate. Large advertisements appeared on the front pages of local newspapers appealing for coopers, drivers, draymen, and carpenters. When two of their key workers were called up on 15 September 1916 the court of



appeal, sitting to hear persons challenging their call up papers, heard that one, the head bottler at the Crown Brewery, Church Street, was in charge of 44 staff, mostly under 18 years of age. The other was a foreman in the wine and spirit department and the only one experienced in the breaking and blending of spirits and was the only one left out of a staff of six. The court granted an exemption for the bottling foreman and a temporary one for the wine and spirit man.

In 1918, 17 days after the Armistice, Sir William Dupree stood as Coalition Candidate for the central Division Portsmouth in the so called 'Soldiers Election'. In his speech he called for those who had started the war, German brewers, steel magnets and the German nation, to pay compensation. The company entered the 1920s a period of gloom, with sales falling to £234,800 by 1924, but even worse was the fall in contract trade, a staggering 80% since the peak of 1918. Unlike nearby Brickwoods, the company had relied upon earnings from the armed forces. This had fallen in line with the vast demobilisation that took place.

Since the founding of the company some 25 years previous its growth and success was continuous due to the

skill and optimism of Sir William. In spite of the declining trade 17 of the domestic properties that adjoined the brewery (seven in King Street and ten in Brunswick Street) had been acquired and demolished for brewery extensions. These included a new wine cellar, chilling room, hop store, fermenting room, and a new office block which were completed in 1922. The offices consisted of a Manager's and Cashiers Office, with the second floor containing a board room, brewer's office, clerks room and lavatories. Houses 13/21 King Street it was said may never be required unless trade picked up. During this period a general tightening up was made all-round with an instruction that all purchases and repairs be submitted to the board for approval. At this time a request from Wadworth Brewery, Devizes for United to take up a controlling interest was declined. It was at this time George Henry Dean decided not to stand for re-election to Director. He died in his Havant home seven years later aged 79 on 29th December 1923.

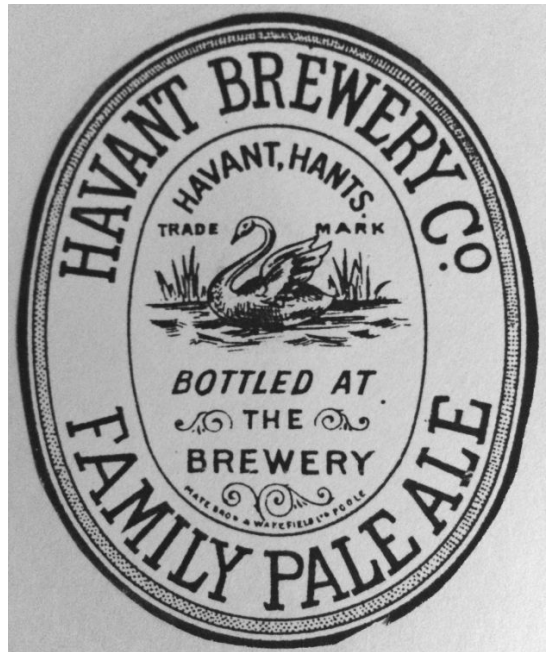
Always to be seen as a leader in the city Sir William appointed an Employee Director. The company had been one of the first in the city to introduce an eight hour working day but the directorship was cancelled some 18 months later. During the depression the company managed to avoid laying off staff and no reductions of wages were made. Neither were they increased, but the company maintained a comparable wage to those at Brickwoods which was making more profits.

By the spring of 1927 the gloom began to fade, beer sales were again on the increase. Between 1925 and 1927 profits had increased from £43,426 to £87,443, and Totterdell's Hotel in St. Georges Square had been purchased in 1923 for £12,000. The Central hotel was also purchased for £57,000, (a leading commercial hotel in the City). During this period a new boiler house had been built for the sum of £57,000 (reported on 28 February 1927) with the installation of two new Lancashire boilers, 30 foot long by eight and a half feet in diameter, with a working pressure of 160 lbs, costing £6,327. In December 1927 a debenture stock at 6% was issued and raised £500,000.

Running parallel to the Portsmouth United Breweries was the Rock Brewery, Brighton. It had its beginnings in 1901 with a capital of £200,000, formed by the amalgamation of nine breweries, and had by the 1920s was one of the largest concerns in Sussex. Originally known

as Willet and Company it had taken over the Black Lion Brewery Brighton 1911. This was one of the earliest breweries in the area, founded in the mid 16th century and later converted into a pub called The Deryk Carver. The Tipper Ale Brewery, Newhaven 1912, Ellis and Company, Walberton Arundel 1922 and the West Street Brewery, Horsham. In 1926 a special agreement had been made between the Rock and Steyning Breweries Ltd., whereby the latter closed their brewery and the Rock supplied both. Combined they had over 100 licensed houses.

In 1918 Sir Richard Dupree personally paid £114,000 for Bidens Brewery Gosport and later in 1921 sold the brewery to United. Also in 1918 Lush & Company was personally purchased by him. Lush was resold to United in 1924. This amalgamation formed the basis for the new company the Portsmouth and Brighton United Breweries Limited. A controlling interest was made in the Rock Brewery by the purchase of 15,000 £10 Ordinary shares for £315,000. The Steyning properties were acquired for £200,000. On the 12 March 1928 the company's registered offices were changed from Eldon Street to King Street. Shortly after the takeover brewing ceased at Brighton, but it was retained as a bottling plant and offices. The Rock Company became a property owning company in name only. At that time the group controlled 467 licensed properties in an area from Hastings and Horsham to Stonehenge to Portsmouth. Annual barrelage exceeded 100,000 barrels and assets stood at £1.5 Million. In 1929 Sir William refused an offer from Beards brewery of Lewes for their 31 houses, the reason given being that they did not fit in with the present delivery area. (Beards carried on later forming links with Harveys of Lewes and closed their brewery to concentrate on pubs). However, United purchased 16 Portsmouth based properties from the Kemp Town Brewery, Brighton for £96,500 - 14 in Portsmouth, one in Chichester, one in Gosport. This became Sir William's final fling as ill health started to take a toll. On 22 April 1931, his eldest son William was elected Managing Director and three months later Sir William relinquished the offices of Chairman and Managing Director of The Rock Company and was replaced by Mr Harry Dupree and his fourth eldest son, James. He died on the 2 March 1933 leaving the board comprising of Vernon Dupree, Harold Smith, William Dupree, James Jenkins, and James Dupree.



The next 20 years became a period in the doldrums. It is easy to say the company deprived of their leader lacked flair and initiative. However, the country had only just recovered from the depression and the war was yet to come with the pressures this brought. Time was needed for consolidation. As in The First World War the brewery suffered from lack of staff, with many joining the Armed Forces, and a shortage of brewing materials. However, with the outbreak of war a devastating blow was felt when on 10 January 1941 when the King Street Brewery was badly damaged by an air raid. So extensive was it that brewing could not recommence until later in the year and then only in a small way and bottling did not recommence until 1947. Other brewers supplied the houses with Brickwoods helping out. That was not to last for long as on 10 March 1941, exactly two months later, the Admiralty Road brewery was itself damaged. The United vehicles then had to travel even as far as Ramsgate for supplies.

The style of houses owned by the company evolved into some of the most attractive designs ever seen. The United houses tended to be clad in green tiles with either 'United' or the full name shown, often with colourful pictures as with the Tangier pub in Copnor which is said to have been inspired by Sir William's trip on holiday to

that area. Brickwoods on the other hand went with a maroon/red glazed tile effect with their name and the house name displayed. Numerous examples still exist in the area of both United and Brickwoods but are disappearing fast.

Just when everything seemed to be getting back to normal after the war with production and rebuilding the considerable damage to houses it was announced that the second Sir William had died unexpectedly whilst on a yachting holiday in South America on 31 January 1953, he was in his 70th year. This led to a big gap on the board. An offer was received from the company's only rival left in Portsmouth, Brickwoods, who offered £630,000 to purchase United's Ordinary Shares. This was accepted and completed in November 1953.

The brands remained and brewing was transferred to the Admiralty Road site in 1962 when the new refurbished Brickwoods brewery opened. Brewing ceased in 1962 at King Street and the United site was then used for wines and spirits, bottling and the production of mineral waters. Later it was known as S.O.T.A. (Southern Table Water Association) and produced brands like Old King Cola, lemonade, and bitter lemon. Finally, before closure, eventually in Whitbread Wessex days R. White's brands of mineral waters were produced. These were discontinued in the late 1970s with R. Whites Lemonade in 25oz returnable bottles being the final product.

Even now, in 2019, the United name is seen all over the south on pubs and former pubs, but alas all brands disappeared many years ago. Brands included XXXX (Dumbbells Brown) with The Dumbbell as their trade-

mark as well as Pompeys Pillar appearing on many of the Labels. The Pillar is a familiar sight on the common at Southsea and was also their trademark. As with most takeovers the United's houses and workers were integrated into Brickwoods and even after the takeover of Brickwoods by Whitbread the author remembers there was a rift between United and Brickwoods men. And after the Whitbread takeover in 1971 another rift occurred as the newer employees' pension terms were not as good as the Brickwoods or United ones.

Nothing is left of the United site, and indeed the Brickwoods site, the name living on only in the names left in tiles advertising United beers and the occasional windows on Pubs. Pompey Royal one of the United brands was revived by Whitbread Wessex, the then owners, and the name given in 1977 to the former Brickwoods Best Bitter. This bitter lived on after closure being brewed at Horndean by Gales.

Sources

Based on an original manuscript (unpublished) by Michael Olding, 1975. Also using records kept at Portsmouth Museum and records office, cuttings from *Portsmouth Evening News*, *Brewing Trade Review*, *Brewers Guardian*. Plus own notes and references

In Copies of The Portsmouth papers by Philip Eley.

The author joined Whitbread Wessex in 1974 at Admiralty Road and left after brewing ceased in 1984. Please contact Geoff Dye on dye.helen@gmail.com if you have further information on United or Brickwoods. Any information on the Stonehenge operation would be most welcome.