

BREWING FOR THE ROYAL NAVY IN PORTSMOUTH 1700-1756

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In 2012, this journal published a paper by Helen Moore describing the findings of the archaeological excavations at the King's Brewhouse in Gosport, Hampshire called Weevil.¹ In her introduction, she recounted some of the earlier history of the Weevil site as a commercial brewery prior to it being bought by the Navy in 1751. By 1705 the Royal Navy's Victualling Board had built or rented brewhouses in London, Dover and Plymouth to meet much of the Navy's needs for beer in those ports. However, for the first half of the eighteenth century, naval beer in Portsmouth continued to be supplied exclusively by commercial brewhouses, including Weevil, notwithstanding numerous complaints about beer quality and price, and also a major fraud by some of the brewers. This article explores the Navy's troubles with beer in Portsmouth during that period, examining how the beer supply operated and asking why acquisition came so late to Portsmouth?

The Royal Navy in the eighteenth century required vast quantities of beer: the ration was one gallon per man per day for ships at sea around the British Isles (overseas the ration was often substituted with wine or spirits).² Recent research into the reasons why beer was so important to the sailor has shown that it was a much more complex set of arguments than the simple explanation that is commonly proffered: that the water was unfit to drink. It was partly cultural in that working men were used to a very high consumption of beer, and also that the naval authorities considered beer to be an antiscorbutic – it prevented scurvy.³ The beer drunk was of two main types: sea beer being the strongest; petty-warrant beer was weaker (victualling was styled 'petty-warrant' when a ship was not in full active commission and was in harbour).⁴ Some documentation also refers to channel beer which was probably used by ships deploying for short periods of time and thus did not need the extra shelf life that stronger sea beer provided.

Prior to 1683, the Admiralty Board (hereinafter referred to as the Admiralty) provisioned the Fleet by letting a large

annual contract for all its food needs with a single contractor however, in that year, the Victualling Board (hereinafter referred to as 'the Board') was established by the Admiralty, and it was delegated the responsibility for providing what was required by whatever means it considered most efficient.⁵ Beer was increasingly provided by the Board through its owning and operating naval brewhouses. Within 20 years of the Board being established it took over direct management of the Hartshorne Brewery in East Smithfield, on the Thames adjacent to the main Victualling Yard at Tower Hill. In 1705 it purchased the Hartshorne lease and, by renting other land, it established the navy's (and one of London's) largest brewery; capable of producing over 4,500 tuns of sea beer per year.⁶ With Plymouth starting to emerge as a port of strategic importance (the threat from the Dutch had diminished but that from France was ascendant) in about 1690 a small brewery was rented on a site adjacent to a tidal grist mill, and close to the major fleet anchorage in the Hamoaze but on the Cornish side of the Tamar; eventually a naval brewhouse was established at nearby Southdown which grew into a very large operation indeed. But Portsmouth remained without a naval brewhouse.

This paper therefore reviews the situation between 1700 and 1751, during which time several proposals for the acquisition of a Portsmouth brewhouse were made by the Board to the Admiralty; these were never carried through until the Weevil Brewery was finally purchased in 1751. The records documenting these various proposals are very informative about why the Board considered a naval brewhouse preferable to dealing with contractors' beer, the requirements and characteristics of such a brewhouse and how these might have been met by either acquiring one of the existing establishments in Portsmouth, or by a new building. Along with the details of the breweries, a further story emerges during research on this subject of the men and women involved, and particularly the several strong characters who were powerful in local business and politics, and who in some respects considered themselves above the law.



Figure 1. Detail from Talbot Edwards' A Plan of Portsmouth Harbour and Spithead, 1716. TNA,ms. MPH 1/29 .

Portsmouth Harbour in the eighteenth century was not yet the large naval base it became in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and the geography is best understood by viewing a portion of Talbot Edwards' map of 1716 (Fig. 1). Portsmouth itself is shown as a heavily fortified old town, with the naval dockyard that had started to develop to the north of it and the undeveloped parts of the Island of Portsea beyond the ramparts. The small town of Gosport is directly opposite across the harbour, and the main naval anchorage is shown in the Solent at Spithead. This map also indicates the Player (Weevil) Brewhouse in Gosport, the Ridge Brewhouse lying outside the fortified town, and Dickson's (sic) Brewhouse adjacent to Ridge. All three are integral to this story.

Why a Naval Brewhouse?

Early in this period, the Board clearly identified the advantages of having a naval brewhouse in Portsmouth as an

alternative to contractor supplied beer and, in 1703, informed the Admiralty:

Had we a Bakehouse and a brewhouse there we should just as now depend on contractors for bread and beer but be able to set them a standard for the fitness, goodness and prices for these specie and of having a store of our own prevent them taking advantage by combination and improving their own prices on every little rise of the market.⁷

This extract acknowledges that a naval brewhouse would not supply the whole of the navy's need and contractors would still be required but the quality standard could be established against which contract beer would be judged. Quality was an important issue, less for the Board's care for the tastes of the seamen but more because of the keeping qualities essential for long periods at sea. This correspondence goes on to point out a major problem emerging from the navy not having an adequate storage facility for beer in Portsmouth: that the

contractors were required to deliver directly to HM ships. This invitation to malpractice presaged the events that emerged seven years later.

The Requirements of a Naval Brewhouse

When researching naval brewhouses it soon becomes clear that there are several key features that distinguished these establishments from those commercial brewhouses solely supplying inns and alehouses for the retail trade (however naval contractors also supplied the retail trade as well as the navy). In common with all breweries, naval brewhouses needed a good water supply and the ready availability of malt and hops. However, unlike commercial producers, the navy had a level of demand that was beyond most rural and even urban brewhouses, it also required greater storage capacity than its commercial counterparts and, thirdly, it needed proximity to a suitable embarkation point. Each of these three requirements will now be discussed in detail.

The output of all brewhouses in the early eighteenth century was largely limited by the catchment area for selling the product. Because of the difficulties of transporting a bulky liquid on unmade-up roads, brewers were generally confined to a supply radius of about six miles.⁸ Thus their output was dictated by the consumption of the population within that circle. As is well documented, it was the large and concentrated population in London in the later eighteenth century that allowed the growth of the super brewers, particularly in the porter trade. In small towns, however, the demand was much less and these smaller markets dictated the output of county town brewers. In 1710 the Navy was victualling 13,500 men in Portsmouth, almost twice the population of the town.⁹ Whilst there is, perhaps, some overlap in these figures, the navy's presence clearly hugely inflated the local demand for beer.

In addition to its output capacity, a much larger area for storage was required in a naval brewhouse. As both Mathias and Hornsey identify, the difficulty of brewing good beer in the summer, because of high ambient temperatures, provided a particular challenge when supplying the fleet.¹⁰ Whilst naval warfare in the eighteenth century was moving away from being a largely summer activity, need often arose to store ships in early and high summer. For example, a large squadron (comprising some 12,000 men) might sail in May with only a few weeks' notice at the time when most brewers had ceased brewing for the summer. To address some of this problem, naval brewhouses hoped to produce sufficient beer in the winter and spring to have enough in store to meet unexpected demands – although money and space were limited and all requirements were never satisfied. Commer-

cial brewers, however, would not hold large stocks to avoid tying up capital, unnecessary costs for storage, and the added chance of deterioration. In their survey of potential brewhouse acquisitions in Portsmouth, in 1721, the Board, when looking at both the Ridge and Weevil breweries, made careful note of the storage capacity at each.

The third feature of naval brewhouses was the need for easy access to the sea for the embarkation of the barrels into naval vessels. In photographs of the Portsmouth Naval Base in 2020 we see warships alongside wharves but, in 1700, because of the extreme difficulty, without powered tugs, of moving sailing ships through the narrow entrance to Portsmouth Harbour, most warships in commission were anchored in the Solent at Spithead. Thus victuals, as well as all other manner of stores and people, were generally conveyed from the town by hoys – small sailing craft that would run between the dockyard and the ship.¹¹ A naval brewery thus needed to be as close as possible to a pier head. The Weevil Brewery had a great advantage in this respect: it was situated so close to Forton Creek that barrels could be moved to the water's edge along a rolling way. This was a far better situation than Thomas Ridge's Brewery, situated outside the town and over a mile from the Portsmouth Key (sic) which was the place for embarking other victuals, and this required the barrels to be loaded onto carts, and then unloaded at the Key. The Board identified in 1721 that, if it acquired Ridge's Brewhouse, this would not only involve extra cost, but could also cause damage to barrels and thus the possibility of leakage or reduction in quality.¹² In addition to proximity of the brewhouse to the shoreline, tide was a further factor. The more distant a location from the mouth of a harbour, the smaller the tidal window – that is the number of hours each side of high tide that there is sufficient depth of water for a hoy to come alongside a pier to load. This factor could lead to men being required outside normal working hours to load hoys to take advantage of the window but, more significantly, it was a severe limitation if many ships were being stored in a hurry to meet a crisis situation. The Board noted in 1750 that the Portsmouth Key was the best location from this perspective, and thus it favoured a brewery on the east side of the harbour. However, the Weevil Brewery had the potential to overcome this problem by extending the rolling way along a new pier out into the deeper water. A less practical site for building a naval brewhouse suggested by the Treasury in 1712 was Portchester Castle.¹³ Whilst this represented a large open site it was rejected by the Board not only because of its difficult and tortuous access by water and limited tidal window, but also the lack of sufficient water from the well.¹⁴

Having considered the nature of the breweries, we turn to the men and women who owned them.

The Brewers

Throughout this period there were several contractors who supplied beer to the Navy in Portsmouth. The field of potential tenderers was limited, firstly, to those who owned premises big enough to brew to meet the navy's needs and, secondly and maybe more importantly, to businesses that had the capital to withstand the navy's lamentable system of payment: by interest-bearing navy bills that matured at a future date and were often liquidated through the money market at significant discount. Although the large volumes meant the returns were potentially great, the requirement to meet fluctuating demand, particularly during the summer, and with the contractor having to warrant the quality of the beer for six months from delivery made naval business less attractive than it may seem.

Two families occur repeatedly throughout this period: the Ridges of Portsmouth, and Henry Player and his descendants operating across the harbour in Gosport. A further party was James Dixon (or Dickson).

Richard Ridge was contracted to supply beer in 1683 a few months after the Victualling Board was formed, and the record provides one of the best examples of such contracts.¹⁵ Ridge was to

... deliver to his Majesties Shippes in the Port of Portsmouth ... all such Sea-beer, and petty Warrant beer as his Majesties service shall there require for one whole year.

It goes on to require Ridge to warrant the beer for 6 months following delivery. He was also given charge of casks and staves owned by the Crown and he had to account for them at the end of the contract and, further, he was prevented from the use of them in his commercial trade. The significance of the requirement to deliver direct to the ships will become clear when various malpractices were revealed in 1710/11. Richard Ridge was succeeded in his brewing business by his son, Thomas, and subsequently his grandson, also named Thomas. Their status as Portsmouth tradesmen is apparent when it is considered that Thomas senior was MP for Poole, Thomas junior was knighted, and all three generations served at various times as burgesses of Portsmouth. Thomas senior's will, written in 1730, indicates significant wealth including South Sea stock,¹⁶ two farms, two large breweries and extensive property in Portsmouth, as well as a coach chariot and four coach horses.¹⁷ Thomas Ridge's house in Portsmouth was the only one deemed suitable for the future Queen of Portugal to stay in during her visit to the town in 1708.¹⁸ Despite this apparent wealth, and his diversification into other areas of business such as owning interests in privateers,¹⁹ he refers to himself in his will as

a brewer. Philip Eley points out the Ridges' disdain for local bye-laws and it is this haughty arrogance that emerged in the beer fraud; it is also clear from the archival record that the family had a healthy appetite for litigation.²⁰

Henry Player also had wider interests than just the Weevil brewery and indeed supplied other services to the Navy but he was perhaps not as affluent as Thomas Ridge. He was forced to write in 1705 to the MP for Hampshire, Thomas Jervoise, asking him to intercede with the Board and to point out that, unless he was paid the £20,000 owed him by the Board, his ability to supply beer the following year could be in jeopardy.²¹ Like the Ridges, Player also served as a Burgess of Portsmouth. He died in 1711 but his wife Joanna took another husband, Leonard Oakes, who continued to provide contract beer, as in turn did Henry and Joanna's two daughters and their several husbands who carried on managing the Weevil brewhouse.²² The younger daughter (also Joanna) subsequently married Robert McCarthy who styled himself the Earl Clancarty, and it was as Lady Clancarty that Joanna dealt with the Victualling Board in its final acquisition of Weevil Brewery.²³ It is also clear from examination of various wills that the Player descendants were extensive local property owners, including other breweries and inns in Gosport.

The Ridge and Player dynasties sometimes worked independently and sometimes together. A contract tender in 1712 is from a consortium including Ridge, Dixon and Player's son in law, Colby Aspley. However, there was litigation in 1720 between Mrs Oakes (Player's widow) and Thomas Ridge over sums of £150 and £300 allegedly owed by Ridge to Mrs Oakes.

Beer Fraud

The beer fraud of 1710/11 is a significant part of the Portsmouth victualling narrative, not least because of the sums involved. With the Board's brewhouses operating successfully in other ports, even the discovery of a major fraud by Portsmouth's contract brewers did not bring about a naval brewhouse in the port. Although sharp practice applied to contract brewers in other ports, notably Harwich and Deal, it was the Portsmouth trio of Ridge, Dixon and Player who perpetrated the greatest fraud by value. The basis of the deception was that these brewers were indenting for the quantity of beer contracted, but were delivering lesser quantities direct to the ships' pursers, and paying them cash for receiving less than they signed for. That they were able to do this stems from the lack of a naval storage facility in Portsmouth big enough to receive and store beer prior to its embarkation. Such a facility would have enabled the staff of the

Agent Victualler, the Board's representative in Portsmouth, to account for the volumes when beer was delivered prior to its issue to ships. How this fraud came to light is not clear from the records, but there is correspondence in late 1710 from a Purser by the name of Griffiths about differences occurring in 1704 between his indents and the quantities delivered from Ridge, Player and Dixon to HMS *Oxford*.²⁴ Soon after this, a flurry of demands came from the Treasury to the Board to present to them various beer accounts for the previous year. On 5 January 1711, a Committee of Investigation was established in the House of Commons, and demands for further evidence were sent to the Board. Thomas Ridge was called before the Committee on 9 January and he informed them that his actions were common practice by all contractors and had been so for many years. The investigation widened and the Board was asked to furnish the committee with all contracts back to 1702. The Committee reported on 15 February 1711 and Thomas Ridge MP defended himself in the House of Commons. The House found he was 'pleading custom for the ancient usage of cheating the Queen's Government' and passed a motion that he was guilty of 'notorious embezzlements and scandalous abuses'.²⁵

The quantum of the losses is contained in a paper from the Attorney General to the Board which also contains details of a line of defence that was presented by Thomas Ridge.²⁶ In 1709, Ridge, Dixon and Player as a consortium contracted with the Board to meet all the Navy's beer needs for 1710 at 56/- a tun for sea beer and 46/- for petty-warrant. Ridge and Dixon were paid (or at least navy bills were issued to them) for 8,217 tuns and Player for 7,764. Ridge and Dixon actually delivered only 4,482 tuns, and Player 4,164, the total value of the fraud amounting to £18,846. Ridge, in his defence, offered the explanation that it was normal practice that if seamen did not drink the full ration of a gallon per day then the purser made a personal profit, the brewers were merely advancing this profit by anticipating the underconsumption. The Attorney General pointed out that not only were pursers forbidden to take money from contractors but that the sums Ridge advanced to the purser did not equate to the same price that the Ridge was paid by the Board for the shortfall.

The aftermath of this fraud was that Ridge lost his seat in the House of Commons and the Attorney General sought compensation from Ridge and Dixon. Oddly, since Henry Player died in early 1711 and as his executors did not admit the fraud, they were not pursued. That no criminal charges were levied perhaps lends some credibility to Ridge's defence. Further, the Board Agent in Portsmouth, Robert Wilkins who had held this position from 1705 and prior to it had served as Secretary to the Board, was dismissed from his

post for certifying the deliveries. It was revealed that he was receiving payments from the brewers, including one of £1,488 from James Dixon for three years dealing.²⁷ Most surprisingly however, in 1712 a consortium involving Ridge, Colby Apsley (Husband of Anne Player) and Dixon again tendered for the beer contract. They offered it at a significantly cheaper price than the other bidder (38/- a tun, rather than 44/- for sea beer). The Board, acknowledging that Ridge and Dixon were under censure, sought guidance from the Admiralty; who responded curtly 'that their Lordships would have you govern yourselves as you were directed by your instructions'.²⁸

The whole fraud incident is perhaps indicative of the difficulty the Board had in persuading the Admiralty to fund brewhouses, despite the loss to the Crown, and despite the savings we will see would have accrued from Crown ownerships; one wonders what it would have taken to make them fund one

Attempts to Acquire a Brewhouse

We have seen above that, in 1703, the Board argued for a brewhouse in Portsmouth, and their inspection of the various contractors' establishments in that year stated that Ridge's beer was 'very flatt not sufficiently hoppt nor in ways agreeable to his contract'.²⁹ In 1705, their argument was again sent to the Admiralty stating that the proposed contractors were

insisting on a much higher price than we give the London Brewers ... all inconveniences attending the brewing house in Portsmouth as well as the quality and price would be effectively remedied had Her Majesty a brewhouse of her own at that place.³⁰

However, no Admiralty response exists (or at least has not been found) to these two requests.

In 1711, following the fraud enquiry and perhaps as a result of it, the Treasury invited the Board to consider Portchester Castle as a site to build a brewhouse. They further invited the Board to

view not only this but other places which are said to be convenient both for a Brewhouse and a Cooperage and to consider what other Regulation may be made at the Port for the better carrying on of the service of victualling.

The Board sent two of the Victualling Commissioners to view not only the castle but other potential sites in Portsmouth. They subsequently reported, some seven months later (May 1712), that Portchester was not a suitable site.³¹

Whilst an open site suitable for building, the water supply was insufficient: a single well produced six tuns per 24 hours and a brewery would have required 30. Additionally they stated that with the distance from their offices in Portsmouth, as well as the narrow channel and shallow draught: ‘... we cannot by any means be of the opinion that it is a place proper for a Brewery’, however they believed that some of the brewers in Portsmouth might be willing to sell their brewhouses to the Queen. They reported on the brewing capacity of Ridge’s, Mrs Player’s, and Dixon’s Brewhouses and also the access to the water. About Ridge’s they stated that it lay: ‘at about a mile distances from the Towne Key, to whence the Beer is Shippd’. They were much more enthusiastic about Mrs Player’s establishment stating:

... (it) is plentifully supplied with good water to answer any further enlargements for a Brewery, and having a wharf near the Brewhouse where two vessels at a time may load and unload every tyde, and without the charge of Cartage, Wharfage and Cranage, which attend the other Brewhouses, with respect to which, and all other conveniences necessary for a Brewhouse, it would in our opinion be the properest Brewhouse to be purchased for her Majesty’s Service.

An Admiralty response to this submission has not been found, but it can be conjectured that with peace being imminent and lesser requirement for sea beer as a consequence, the proposal was taken no further.³²

However, the want of a brewhouse again caused concern in 1719: Admiral Sir John Norris needed beer to revictual ships that had been operating in the Soundings,³³ but were then being redeployed in June to the Baltic. The Portsmouth contractors had no beer stockpiled to meet his demands.³⁴ Against this background the need for a naval facility was again apparent. On 19 June 1721, Mrs Oakes, widow of Henry Player (and the Mrs Player referred to above), offered the Weevil brewhouse to the Board at £100 per annum rent. This led the Board to prepare its first full proposal for in-house production in the port arguing for it on the basis of economy, and freedom from corruption and combination.³⁵ The submission to the Admiralty was extensive and showed, for comparison, all the costs of the other King’s brewhouses making a strong case (see Table 1).

These figures are illuminating regarding brewhouse management at the time: the equal salaries paid to the Master Brewer and the Clerk show these two were considered of similar status and responsibility. It also clearly indicates that malt was by far the largest of any of the costs and this perhaps explains the presence of so much correspondence throughout the Board’s records about purchasing malt at the best price. More specifically, it shows that this acquisition in Ports-

mouth would not only have delivered a considerable annual cost saving with the added benefit of providing the Board with a more reliable source of supply. The projected Portsmouth costing looks ambitious in relation to the established brewhouses elsewhere but, even applying the highest rates from London, the annual saving would still exceed 25%.

This seemingly compelling argument was followed up several weeks later with the submission to the Admiralty of a detailed survey of both the Weevil premises and that of Thomas Ridge, containing plans of both and detailing the storage capacities mentioned above. The surveyors estimated the cost of repairing Weevil, including repairing the copper and making a new crane, as £238. The cost to repair Ridge’s brewhouse was less at £143, despite extensive work being required to the utensils including repairs to the mash tun, underback and one of the three guile tuns. They also considered the location of both brewhouses, as they had in 1712, looking at the need to dredge Forton Creek for hoys to gain access to the Weevil pier and the possible cost of extending that pier and adding a further crane and a jetty head at the low water mark but they also pointed out the distance of Ridge’s establishment from the harbour requiring four additional hands to transfer beer by cart to the waterside. Further, the surveyors contrasted the 125 tuns per week that Ridge’s brewhouse could produce compared with 140 at Weevil. The final factor was that Mrs Oakes was offering what seemed a better lease as regards both the length and the conditions for returning the premises at the termination of it.³⁶

As a result of their report, the Board Commissioners were summoned twice to meetings at the Admiralty but eventually the proposal was turned down on the argument that the country was then at peace and the only ships requiring beer in Portsmouth were those in ordinary (reserve) and their minimal requirements for petty-warrant beer could be served cheaper using existing contractors.³⁷ Doubtless the Admiralty Commissioners had forgotten this false economy when war again led to increased demand as soon as 1739 and it was not until 1749 that the Board addressed Portsmouth brewing again, and in some detail.³⁸

In 1749, the Commissioners of the Admiralty had visited Portsmouth and had been subjected to complaints there about the quality of the petty-warrant beer being issued in the port. Quantities were small, with the country at peace, but the Board was directed to look at possible supply to Portsmouth from the King’s brewhouses at Plymouth and Dover as an alternative to contractors and they were also invited to consider in their report building a Portsmouth brewhouse. In response, the Board recommended against supplying from the other ports because of the costs of shipping full and empty barrels, and the potential impact of the

Brewery History Number 182

	Qty	Unit	Price £	Cost £	
Rent				100.00	2.4%
Labour Costs					
Master Brewer				50.00	1.2%
Clerk				50.00	1.2%
Miller, Stoker, Cooper & Two Labourers				127.39	3.1%
Grinding the Malt & Raising the Liquor				30.00	0.7%
Other Operating Costs					
Repairs				50.00	1.2%
Candles, Brooms, Baskets, Locks & other Incident Charges				20.00	0.5%
Raw Materials					
Malt	2,192	Quarters	1.26	2,767.40	67.4%
Hops	153	Cwt	4.23	645.89	15.7%
Coal	156	Chaldrons	1.25	195.00	4.7%
Freight, by one hoy in addition to the two now Employed				70.00	1.7%
Total				£4,105.67	100.0%
Volume	Tuns	Cost per Tun (£)		Cost (£)	
Sea Beer	2,048	1.82		3,735.17	
Petty Warrant Beer	247	1.50		370.50	
				£4,105.67	
Compared with prices charged by Portsmouth Contractors					
Volume	Tuns	Cost per Tun (£)		Cost (£)	
Sea Beer	2,048	2.87		5,883.90	
Petty Warrant Beer	247	2.37		586.13	
				£6,470.04	
Potential Saving				£2,364.36	36.5%
Comparative Price per Tun in Naval Brewhouses at other Locations					Projected
	London	Plymouth	Dover	Portsmouth	
	£	£	£	£	
Sea Beer	2.11	2.15	1.80	1.82	
Petty Warrant Beer	1.56	1.54	N/A	1.50	

Table 1. An Estimate of the Annual Charge of the Brewhouse offered by Mrs Oakes . Extracted from ADM/110/8 f 395 (pence rounded).

weather on beer being transported by sea. The Board visited Portsmouth and looked at Weevil again, but considered that it represented poor value: Lady Clancarty (Daughter of Mrs Oakes) had offered it for £7,000 to buy or a lease of £300 per annum, but it had only one copper and the buildings were in severe need of repair. Having also rejected Mr Ridge's premises, which were again considered to be too far from the harbour, they looked at the Portsmouth Victualling Yard to see if a brewhouse could be built there. This was a rather restricted site within the ramparts of Portsmouth from which other specie were issued, particularly meat and bread. Their conclusion was that, whilst there was room for a brewhouse as big as Hartshorne with two coppers, a well would have to be sunk, at some distance from the yard. Whilst a single copper at this site would have met the peacetime need, the Board proposed moving one of the three coppers at Southdown to Portsmouth to ensure there was sufficient wartime capacity, in Portsmouth if not in Plymouth. They also noted that storage of beer on this site would have taken scarce storage space then used for other victuals. Although the Victualling Yard was some distance from the Victualling Key, and too far for a rolling way, the Key provided greater access with an extra hour of tide over Forton Creek in Gosport. They also commented on the greater supervision of work which would come from having the brewhouse within the premises of the Victualling Office, and particularly the flexibility of deploying the labour. Therefore, on 21 December 1750, they recommended to the Admiralty that the building of a Brewhouse in the Portsmouth Victualling yard was the preferred option.

Nothing seems to have happened until, three months later, Lady Clancarty offered the Weevil Brewery for a £300 a year annuity and the Board pointed out to the Admiralty that this not only now represented good value but also that the Gosport site had room for expansion in time of war.³⁹ On this basis the Admiralty gave assent on 26 March 1751 and Weevil was acquired. The annuity proved reasonable value as Lady Clancarty lived a further 8 years, thus Weevil cost the Board £2,700. The repair work was, as the Board had forecast, extensive, effectively a major rebuilding of the brewery and, early in the Seven Year's War, an additional larger brewhouse was built with two coppers each 18ft in diameter, and a horse pump for moving liquids. The storage capacity was increased on several occasions, and a new pier, complete with cranes and rolling way, built.⁴⁰

Conclusion

Thus, eventually, the Victualling Board acquired its fourth brewhouse. However, despite acquiring the Weevil Brewhouse, the demands of the Seven Years' War meant

that some contract supply continued in Portsmouth, particularly from Thomas Ridge junior, but this steadily reduced and Ridge went bankrupt in 1764. The navy again declined the opportunity to purchase his brewhouse, even presumably at a knockdown price.⁴¹

Instead, as Helen Moore charts, Weevil was further developed and expanded and, as J Merritt describes, transformed into the Royal Clarence Victualling Yard, which supplied food to the fleet until 1991,⁴² even though the beer ration itself was abolished in 1831.

The period prior to the eventual purchase of Weevil, when the Board was forced to persevere with contract supply of beer in Portsmouth, provides a fascinating perspective on the administrative workings of the Admiralty and the Victualling Board. There emerges a constant tension between the Board's need for capital investment to save long term costs, to control the quality of beer, and also to try to avoid corruption, balanced against the Admiralty's short term need to keep down its annual expenditure whilst still maintaining a fleet at sea. This tension emerges particularly as the Nation fluctuated between the different demands of wartime and peace. Reviewing this period also shows the difficulties all brewers faced of controlling quality in the summer with rudimentary technology, and for the navy this is balanced against the very large quantity of beer required and the formidable logistic challenges this presented to those responsible for providing it.

References

1. Moore, H. with contributions by Philpott, C. (2012) 'Historic Brewery Excavations at the Former Royal Clarence Naval Victualling Yard in Gosport', *Brewery History*. 148, pp.16-40.
2. This was 1 Gallon Wine Measure and equivalent to about 6.6 Pints Imperial.
3. Kelly, M.D.R. (2019) '*Want of Beer*': *Supplying Beer to the Fleet in the Early Eighteenth Century*, unpublished MA dissertation, University of Portsmouth.
4. The National Archives, ms. ADM 110/1, *Out letters of the Victualling Board*, 12 December 1683.
5. The Admiralty Board, comprising a political First Lord of the Admiralty, and several senior naval lords, was responsible for the direction and control of the Royal Navy. It had a number of subordinate boards including the Naval Board (responsible for dockyards and ship building) and, from 1683, the Victualling Board.
6. The Tun was a standard measure and comprised 252 Wine Measure Gallons, 209 Imperial gallons.
7. ADM 110/2 f11.
8. Mathias, P. (1959) *The Brewing Industry in England 1700-1830*. Cambridge: CUP, p.139.

9. National Maritime Museum, ms. ADM/C/368, *In letters to the Victualling Board*, 2 Jun 1710; Stapleton, B. & Thomas J. (1989) *The Portsmouth Region*, Gloucester: Sutton, Table 2 p 91.
10. Mathias, P. (1959) op cit, p197; Hornsey, I. (2003) *History of Beers and Brewing*. Cambridge: Royal Society of Chemists, p.452.
11. Hoys came in many different specifications depending on their use, an example however is a model in the National Maritime Museum collection SLR0225. They were usually manned by civilian not naval crews. Some were owned by the Victualling Board, others were taken up as required for single voyages or long term charter.
12. NMM, ms. ADM/D/17, *Admiralty Board In-Letters from the Victualling Board*, 14 August 1721.
13. TNA, ms. ADM 111/1, *Minutes of the Victualling Board*, 8 December 1683.
14. NMM, ms. ADM/D/11, dated 8 May 1712.
15. TNA, ms. ADM 110/1, 12 Dec 1683.
16. After the 'South Sea Bubble'.
17. TNA, MS. PROB 11/636/260, *Will of Thomas Ridge*, 23 March 1730.
18. Stapleton, B. & Thomas J. (1989) *The Portsmouth Region*, Gloucester: Sutton, p.64.
19. Bromley, JS. (1987) *Corsairs and the Navy*, London; Hambledon Press, p471.
20. Eley, P. (1988) *Portsmouth Breweries 1492-1847, Portsmouth Papers no 51*. Portsmouth: Portsmouth City Council, p.9.
21. Hampshire Records Office, ms. 44M69/F6/8/16, *letter to Thomas Jervoise*, 7 August 1705.
22. The complexities of the Player dynasty are explained in Williams, G.H. (1976) *Weevil before the Royal Clarence Yard, Gosport Records no 12*. Gosport Historic Records and Museum Society (ed. LA Burton), and the names Oakes, Colby Astley, Holmes and Clancarty all appear in naval contracts and records.
23. The ODNB describes the colourful Clancarty lineage, and how Robert's father lost his title having supported James II in the Glorious Revolution.
24. NMM, ms. ADM/C/360, December 1710.
25. UK Parliamentary Papers, 15-16 February 1710, p.502.
26. NMM, ms. ADM/C/368, 4 December 1712.
27. TNA, ms. ADM 110/8, f18-24.
28. NMM, ms. ADM/C/368, 13 November 1712.
29. TNA, ms. ADM 111/1, 14 August 1703.
30. TNA, ms. ADM 110/4, f22.
31. NMM, ms. ADM/D/10 17 May 1712.
32. The Treaty of Utrecht was then under negotiation to end the War of Spanish Succession
33. 'Soundings' was the term used by the eighteenth century navy to refer to the South West approaches in the region where ships returning from the Atlantic crossed the continental shelf and could then take soundings for depth.
34. TNA, ms. ADM110/8, f169.
35. TNA, ms. ADM 110/8, f414.
36. NMM, ms. ADM/D/17, 14 August 1721.
37. NMM, ms. ADM/C/404, 25 October 1721.
38. TNA, ms. ADM 110/16, f270-274.
39. ADM 110/16 f317.
40. Moore and Philpott, Op Cit, pp.17-25; The National Archive DA0128-0132: Plans of Victualling Premises, undated.
41. Eley, Op cit, p.9.
42. Merritt, J. (1986) 'Victualling the Fleet – a History of the Royal Clarence Yard, Gosport'. *'Attentive to Our Duty' Aspects of Local Maritime History*. Gosport: Gosport Society, pp.37-43.