

REDRUTH AND NEWQUAY BEERS: A BREWERY THAT REFUSED TO DIE

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The area in the far west of Cornwall has always been remote from the rest of the country, especially before the coming of the railways in the mid nineteenth century. Roads, too, were poor, the main lifeline of the area were the numerous small ports on the North and South coast. When large quantities of copper and tin were discovered in the area mines started to spring up all over the county and their remains can still be seen, some being open to the public. With these mines came a large workforce, all requiring beer to quench their thirst.

One of the small breweries established in the area was known for most of its life as 'The Redruth Brewery'. It was founded by William Davey at Spanon Gate in a region North of the town of Redruth in 1742, and no doubt supplied the local area around where numerous mines existed. William was a wealthy mine owner himself in the Redruth district and was no doubt responding to the needs of his workers. By 1792 the brewery had expanded, and a new site was needed. This was found at Tolgus Hill less than a half a mile away and was a former 'undershot' stamping mill consisting of about one and a half acres. Water supply to the brewery was from a bore hole called The Buller from the hills above the premises and carried on supplying the business to the end.

In a lease dated 5 September 1802, William Davey was mentioned as carrying on the trade of beer and porter brewers under the title of 'Redruth Brewery'. Going by the dates it was probably then owned by the founder's son, also William. Equal shares were with James Jenkins, Edward Collins, Reuben Magor and John Michell, (later Jenkins and Michell sold out). In 1834 Magor died and his son, John Penberthy Magor, took over his share of the brewery. John had built a large Georgian mansion on the site of a demolished mansion in Penventon Park, now the Penventon Hotel. The family gained their wealth from the banking interests they owned in Truro.

In 1867 the brewer was J. Sydney Davey and by 1870 the brewery was supplying large parts of Cornwall and even

South Wales, taking advantage of the newly arrived railway. In 1872 the *Royal Cornwall Gazette* carried an advertisement offering 'The sale by private contract a very old established brewery'. This freehold brewery was known as Messrs Magor and Davey and Company of Redruth with depots in Penzance, Falmouth, Helston, Grampound Road, St. Austell, Boscastle and Swansea, (all these locations were at the time connected to railways, except Boscastle which was a small port).

The brewery consisted of a 40 quarter plant, three malthouses with wetting facilities for 80 quarters. Also included were leasehold stables, horses and freehold and leasehold public houses plus a farm of 70 acres. It was stated the brewery's annual production was approximately 20/25,000 barrels per year including bottled beers and mineral waters. The reason for sale was due to the death of one of the partners. It is thought that the purchasers were Messrs Foster & Neame who owned it until 1877 after which it was run by Neame Foster & Cullingford.

Separately, in February 1887, a new company was registered with capital of £100,000 in £10 shares to acquire the brewery of William Crang Wickett of Penryn. In September 1898 the Wickett family sold the Penryn brewery to Sydney Hatch, who ran the brewery until 1943 when he sold it and twelve houses to St. Austell brewery and Devenish, each having 6 houses. The Wickett family then purchased the Redruth Brewery in the same year for £62,750. After purchase the new company was registered on 5 November 1889 and quoted on the stock exchange. The shareholders report for 1890 showed an increase in sales and especially of Burton brewed ales. At the shareholders A.G.M. it was announced that in the previous year a depot had been set up in South Wales, and although extra costs were had, early results were good.

1900 saw the purchase of Richard Pearce's small brewery at Peterville, St. Agnes, having been run by the proprietor for

20 years. In 1891 the company purchased The Commercial Hotel Camborne, The Red Lion Redruth and a house in Portreath. The 115 houses in 1887 had now grown to 140 houses, but extra money had to be spent on house repairs due to winter storms. John Billing's Bodmin Brewery in Honey Street, Bodmin was taken over in 1898 (and used as a depot until 1923). Further expansion took place with the purchase of Thomas R. Orams's Victoria Brewery in Truro in 1906.

This period was a time when trade became more difficult. Copper mining in the area declined further and then tin followed suit, supplies being replaced by cheaper imports from abroad. Many of the mines closed and the workforce left the area going either overseas or to the coal mines of South Wales and Yorkshire. Furthermore, tourism was in its infancy and the start of the First World War meant even more men and drinkers leaving the area.

On 20 September 1915 the Chairman and Managing Director, William Coppin Wickett, died and his son, James William Wickett, took over the company. Five years later the Redruth brewery took over Sleeman & Company brewers of 62 Meneage Street, Helston and Truro, so adding more tied houses. In 1929 the A.G.M. reported that considerable reduction of trade had been experienced in the 15 houses around the Dolcoath area due to mine closures. The 1920s were a very depressed time in Western Cornwall. By 1934 the company had expanded due to its takeovers, but despite the acquisition of numerous public houses a further drop in sales was experienced. A 33-metre-high chimney was erected when the brewery was updated, and new plant was probably installed about this time. However, cash flow became a problem and the Wickett family had run into trouble with the shareholders. One had returned from Australia to pursue his case and the family was advised to sell up or risk being taken to court.

Consequently, in 1934, J.A. Devenish of Weymouth purchased the company. This concern had its own brewery and houses, mainly in Dorset, but had been actively purchasing breweries and public houses in Devon and Cornwall; W. & E.C. Carnes brewery of Falmouth had been taken over in 1921, originally founded in 1756, for £59,000 bringing with it 58 public houses, and Malletts brewery of Truro, founded in 1900, followed in 1923, costing £23,789 together with its eleven freehold, five leasehold and two annual tenancies. In 1925 the Well Park Brewery of Exeter was purchased by private treaty in advance of an auction sale for £33,000. These breweries' houses were integrated mainly with Redruth after the purchase. The two breweries in Weymouth and Redruth were run separately with directors at each location and the breweries producing their own beers and this

continued well into the 1960s, although some beers were produced at both breweries. In 1937 the auditors advised the company to reorganise their finances, considering all the recent acquisitions, so £200,000 of redeemable 1st Mortgage Debenture stock was issued 1942/1975. This was secured on a mortgage of over 220 properties.

In March 1943 the Treluswell Brewery, Penryn was purchased by J.A. Devenish for £33,500, thus going full circle as the Wickett family had previously owned it. Brewing ceased at Penryn, but they carried on bottling Guinness for a while. The premises are now a garage.

During the Second World War the Weymouth brewery suffered from considerable bomb damage which put it out of production. Eldridge Pope of Dorchester and Groves brewery next to Devenish helped with supplies until they too were bombed whilst Redruth continued to supply as normal.

In 1957 the Devenish company purchased Horrell and Sons cider makers of Stoke Canon together with Vallance's brewery of Sidmouth, with their 32 houses from Woodhead's Brewery of London, most of the houses were transferred to the Weymouth Brewery. The cider was made available in all houses.

In 1960 after brewing next door to each other in Hope Square, Weymouth, Devenish and Groves merged giving another 120 houses to the group and the name was changed to Devenish Weymouth and Devenish Redruth. In 1965 the Devenish brand was launched with a new common trademark 'Herbert' the tiger, a gold tiger on a blue background. The lion was taken from the Devenish family crest and was pictured holding a gold cross. This was used on all the houses' bottled beers and advertising, including the cider operation. The public houses also took on a common theme, all being painted matte green. The company's beers were given new identities at Redruth, Pale Ale became Green Top, (then in 1972 Wessex Pale Ale). The bitter was renamed Cornish Best Bitter, brewed at 1042 degrees. Later Saxon replaced High Life in 1969 as the group's keg beer. Top fermented Viking lager was added in 1973 and Crabbers Nip strong ale was brewed until 1982. A result of the merger was that the Weymouth maltings were expanded and malt was supplied to Redruth from the 1963 crop onwards. Eventually the maltings at Weymouth closed and Tuckers of Newton Abbot supplied Redruth with Pale Ale Malt from 1983 in bulk until 1991.

Redruth suffered from great swings in trade, brewing in winter occurred only once a week whilst in summer it was every day, such was the effect of tourism. The operation of the two breweries meant that between them they produced



only 70,000 barrels per year. In 1980 the Redruth Brewery won two awards for their beers in the International Brewing Awards competition at Earls Court London: 3rd prize class 2 (Pale Ale O.G. 1030-1037 degrees) and 2nd prize in the lager class (1038-1056 degrees). In 1983 beers were renamed again the 'Boys' bitter a well hopped beer at 1032 degrees was renamed John Devenish Bitter.

The Weymouth brewery was not so reliant on the tourist trade, but overall barrelage of both were declining and over capacity was a major problem. Early in 1985 employees were informed that Weymouth was to produce only cask ales whilst Redruth everything else. 90 staff members were to go at Weymouth, but 30 employees found jobs within the group. Not long afterwards it was announced Weymouth was to close completely, which it did in November 1985, with all production moving to Redruth. At this time the company was listed on the stock exchange but controlled by the Ludlow family. The expected savings did not materialise with transport costs escalating and several of the depots were closed including Falmouth. The old Vallance's brewery at Sidmouth was replaced by a new depot at Honiton (east of Exeter) and cider production at Horrells Stoke Cannon, near Exeter, ceased. Most of the cider was in low profit draught with falling volumes. This still did not stem the losses, some 15 pubs were closed and sold, but sales still declined.

However, a man had his eye on the struggling company – Michael Cannon, born at Bedminster, near Bristol, in 1939. After leaving school he had worked as a poultry farmer in Avonmouth before joining Berni Inns and learn-

ing the pub trade. In 1975 he bought a stake in the Navy Volunteer pub in Bristol. By 1986 he had become the boss of Inn Leisure, a pub company with 40 outlets around Bristol. Cannon eyed Devenish with the 300 plus pubs and early in 1986 the Minnow merged with the Whale! Chief executive, Bill Ludlow, soon resigned over policy clashes and Cannon was appointed to succeed him. A year later Cannon succeeded Richard Hargreaves as Chairman in a £35 million deal with the support of Whitbread. He was described as a dynamic man, having a low boredom threshold, profit being the number one priority, and sentimentality was never given a thought. Within a short period, tenants had been replaced by managers and rents reviewed and increased. Beers were revamped yet again, Cornish Best made weaker at 1032 degrees, Wessex Best made stronger from 1038 to 1042 degrees. A new beer was produced at 1050 degrees called Great British Heavy (a former Vallance's beer).

Cannon made use of consultants Hampson Partnership, who introduced the idea of new products based on the craft beers of the American Anchor Steam Brewery. Presentation was considered to be the key point, the second being natural beers brewed without 'chemicals'. The name chosen was not Redruth Steam, but Newquay Steam, as it was felt that Newquay, as a holiday resort was known to most people, (many people outside the west country had never heard of Redruth). Paul Hampson of the design company remembers that Cannon had firm ideas on how the labels and presentation should be. Cannon was adamant that the product should have flip tops like Grolsch despite being warned that the price would be high. Another ground-breaking idea was brought in, there would be details of the strength and ingredients on the back label and a picture and signature of the head brewer Tony Wharmby. Special emphasis was put on the fact there were no additives and the beers were to be double fermented, matured for weeks rather than days and brewed with pure spring water. The range was introduced in 1987: Bitter, Strong Bitter, Brown, Strong Brown, Lager, Strong Lager and Stout.

It was marketed as 'Britain's first range of entirely natural strong beers, no preservatives, no additives'. The 450 ml and 500 ml bottles had the largest labels possible and were pasteurised and had a high level of carbonation, 2.5-2.8 values, to ensure a loud 'pop' when opened. The specifications for the new bottles gave the glass company problems, it had to be very exact as was the control over empties returned. To achieve the empties problem an outside company was given the task of inspecting all clips and rubber seals on return to the brewery. The actual glass vacuity was increased from 4.5% to 5.5% to reduce pressure on the clips during pasteurisation. It was found that the air space in the bottle

had to be increased so oxygen levels in the beer were reduced to compensate. The metallic labels gave problems with removal in the bottle washer so extra care was needed there. Even filling caused problems in that bottles became lop sided so filling heads had to be adapted so all the bottles faced the same way. The maximum output was 7,500 bottles per hour, anything more than this needed two fillers. This had the advantage in that if one was down the other could carry on.

The bottling process was as follows: clean bottles entered the rotating machine after water jetting and were turned until all the clips faced outwards. These were then clamped so as not to move. After filling two grooved fingers on the machine transferred the clip onto the bottle and finally as they rotated the swing top was pushed down and clipped. The bottles then went on to the pasteuriser adapted with a higher guide bar to ensure the bottles were kept upright. Labelling came next on a new Alfa Qualtro machine with a specially designed device to apply the neck label, which went over the wire of the stopper to indicate any tamper. Bottles were located on the machine using a small lug in the glass at the rear of the bottle below where the back label was fixed. This was carried out by making the bottles swivel 180 degrees until they were the right way around. This labeller was replaced in 1991 by a new Krones Starmatic model where a magnet detected the clip and lined the bottles up correctly. The number of different labels was mind boggling, a great boon to the label collector, being very colourful and winning the Labologists best set of beer labels. Each bottle had three different labels and they were exported to three different countries so there were some 191 different combinations. Special crates were required as the bottles were taller.

On the other bottling line the company had introduced the Churchill brand in 330 ml bottles in specially made non return glass which also had three labels plus a foil over the crown cap. These were also exported and were produced in a range: Amber, Dry, Lager, and Stout, in different strengths for different countries. The labels showed the Houses of Parliament and were very eye-catching.

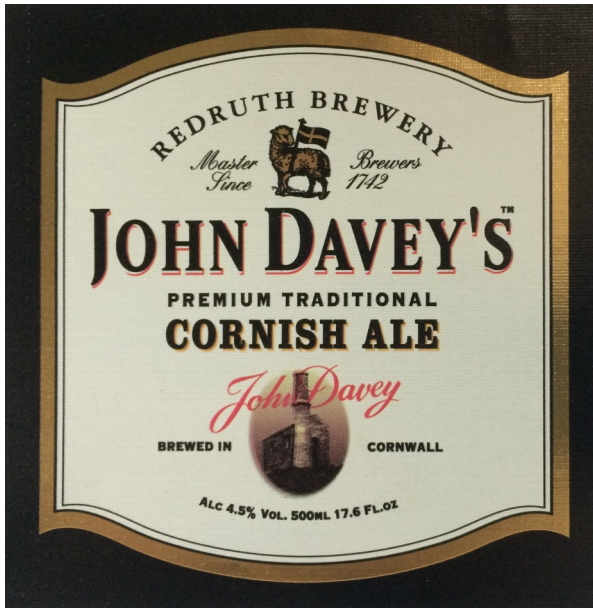
The brewery purchased a second hand Steineker brewhouse from Wilsons Brewery of Newton Heath, Manchester for £1.5 million. This was installed in April 1974 at Manchester and was a plant capable of using barley as well as malt, the conversion carried out in an automated cycle monitored from a semi-automated control point by one person. The Newton Heath plant had closed in August 1987 and this was installed alongside the old brewhouse which dated from the 1930s. The new brewhouse was only half of the Wilsons' original one and had a capacity of 8 x 360 barrels per day. The other half was not required as Wilsons' production was

much greater than was needed.

In the same year Anchor Brewing of San Francisco was taken to court to block their proposed U.K. launch, which delayed the launch of their beer into the U.K. It was felt that as they also used the 'Steam' name drinkers may be confused. The beers were an immediate success especially in the pubs frequented by young drinkers. Production went from nil to 35,000 barrels a year in 1988. A new site was purchased on the edge of Redruth and a new depot opened to complement the existing one at Honiton. A further £6 million was spent on the tied estate giving a 50/50 split Managed/Tenancy over some 400 houses. As well as the plant from Wilsons some £600,000 was spent on extra equipment; a reverse osmosis system supplied by Elga, for the new Prohibition Lager, and a new Starmatic Labeller from Krones for one of the bottling lines. The new plant was also able to label the Jester range of soft drinks produced by the brewery.

In 1987 the company acquired Seligman & Co. Ltd. so providing a depot in Birmingham and the following year it purchased Canonbury Beer Wholesalers of London and Portsmouth giving a distribution over the whole of the South of England. May 1989 saw the introduction of draught Steam Traditional bitter at 1036/1040 gravity. The company introduced numerous bottled brands, including cider and spring water. Success brought problems; Boddingtons Brewery made a hostile bid for Devenish which was supported by Whitbread who sold their 15% shareholding to Boddingtons. It was seen off by Cannon but in May 1991 the Newquay brands were sold to Whitbread for £9,750,000 and a deal made for the Devenish houses to take Whitbread beers. The free trade of the company was also included in the deal.

Then at 8.30 am on 25 May 1991 it was announced to a group of 145 employees that the Redruth brewery was to close, Devenish had spent £7,500,000 modernising the brewery and with the Newquay brand sold and the supply agreement the brewery had been left with mainly contract brewing, bottling and canning. Surprisingly they continued to bottle Newquay beers, now brewed elsewhere by Whitbread and sent to Redruth. Most of the production was given over to packaging beers from other breweries including Wadsworths, Brakspears, Fullers, Gales and Eldridge Pope. The company's main brand was John Davey Bitter plus a contract for 100 barrels a week of Cornish Original for Whitbread. Profits were eroded by supermarkets, the introduction of draught flow and late payments. Consequently, the company went into receivership and Ian Walker Pannell partners were called in as receivers.



In August 1991 the *Brewers' Guardian* reported that Director, Paul Smith, and Head Brewer, Tony Warmby, had paid £700,000 (scrap valuation) in cash over three years for the plant and a long lease on the brewery site of 3.8 acres thus saving some 30 jobs. Cannon was quoted as saying 'We are obviously delighted that the brewery will continue in operation and that some 30 jobs have been saved, Devenish can now concentrate on pub retailing'. Had not the deal taken place the brewery would have closed by 15 September 1991. Smith and Warmby had purchased a production facility consisting of two brewhouses, one a modern Steinecker and the other a traditional plant, at an unbelievably low price. Also included was malt handling equipment, consisting of bulk silos and feed gear, 15 lined open square fermenters, twelve deep fermentation tanks and nine large conical fermenters, a variety of processing equipment and tanks from 60 barrels to 720 barrels, a brand new cold store and a fully automatic cleaning in position plant. The canning line at the time consisted of a flexible plant capable of 275 ml and 550 ml cans and two bottling lines covering all sizes, both non-returnable and returnable, with 5 labelling machines box packers and skin wrap facilities. On the kegging side there was a four lane Burnett and Rolph kegging plant and a brand-new filter room containing bright beer tanks. There was also a cask racking plant to rack into Whitbread casks the Cornish Original at some 4,000 barrels per year under contract. However, no containers were included in the deal.

The reaction at the time from Wharmby, who had been involved with Newquay Steam from the start, was that he was sad to no longer be involved with the brand, but was delighted that Whitbread had agreed to brew it. He remarked that

they had no wish to acquire an estate and was concentrating on brewing and packaging. Funding for the purchase was by way of a grant from the Department of Trade and Industry, Barclays Bank and the shareholders. Staff were again slimmed down to 34 persons whilst extra staff were only taken on at peak times. All full-time members of staff were given the opportunity of a share purchase scheme. In December 1991 Neville Mart was appointed as Sales Director and joined the new board. He was formerly with the Cornish Brewery, with 17 years of service, five years of which were as a director. A decision was taken in May 1992 to cease returnable beer bottling and a second canning line was introduced in its place which could fill 1,000 cans per minute. The end of Devenish as a pub owning company came in 1993 when, under Cannon, it was sold to Greenal Whitley for £214,000,000.

Meanwhile, back in the brewery, early in 1994 cash became a problem and excess equipment started to be sold. Volumes had grown to some 400,000 barrels per year, but margins were very poor. Several 720 barrel conical fermentation vessels were sold and six others sold to the newly independent Ushers Trowbridge Brewery.

In August 1994 the receivers were called in for a second time and Keith Morgan and Ian Walker, the receivers, offered the brewery for sale. The business was described as having a £24,000,000 turnover (but with poor profit margins), two brewhouses, two high speed canning lines, two bottling lines and being leasehold. 90 enquiries were received and in 1995 The Dransfield group were the successful applicants. They had agreed to pay the receivers £2,000,000 with the intention of running the brewery profitably and had a technical training centre for their staff at the Yixing Brewery Shanghai China. Their Chairman's son, Kenneth Fung Junior, remarked that it was just what they had been looking for in that the brewery was the third oldest brewery in the U.K (after Shepherd Neame and Morlands) and had advanced technology and skilled staff. The intention was that they would launch their Yixing Premium lager and Indianhead, a 5% U.S. type lager (to be brewed under licence from Rock Springs Brewery, part of the group). Fung went on to say they were looking for some 30 to 40 outlets in the South West. At the time losses were running at more than £160,000 per week and the brewery was running at only 16% capacity.

After the takeover Richard Sommerfield, one of the Dransfield directors, was dispatched to Redruth and encountered numerous problems, over staffing being the main one. However, on the plus side, the company had purchased a very flexible brewery capable of some 7,000 barrels per week of

beer or lager. Staffing levels were reduced by about 25% to 68 persons and an aggressive purchasing policy adopted with the assistance of an experienced buyer from the main group. A year later bright packaging which stood out on the shelves was adopted and at the same time new canned beers were introduced in the form of 1793 Special Edition Lager, 1793 Special Edition Bitter plus Super Strength lager and stout.

All seemed to be going well as the brewery started exporting its products to Hong Kong and China. Especially well received was the 1793 Stout, (dark and slightly sweet), and the losses turned into profit.

In 1997 John Davey Cornish Bitter came on stream in 500 ml bottles and two new products, Piledriver lager and Scream'n Beaver, both 5%, were added to target younger drinkers. Much was made of the fact the brewery used pure spring water. A range of 'Heritage' beers was introduced in 500 ml bottles designed to tap into the supermarket trade. Ed Englis was taken on from Allied Breweries to lead an eleven strong team of salespersons and the ditching of supermarket own brands led to increased profits.

Elsewhere, after Whitbread had paid a vast amount for previous brands, they ditched the Newquay swing top bottles and instead canned and bottled it in crown capped bottles at their own breweries. Not surprisingly the beer faded and the brand disappeared very quickly.

Meanwhile the Redruth canning line was kept working, helped by a trading agreement with St. Austell brewery, who sent their Wreckers and Tinner beers for canning whilst some of the Redruth's products were stocked in St. Austell pubs. Exports to Hong Kong, Canada, U.S., France and Spain were given high priority.

With all this activity little advertising had been carried out. Many British drinkers may remember Newquay Steam, at least those over 50, but most of the other products such as 1793 lagers were unknown outside the South West and Piledriver and Scream 'n' Beaver were only recognised by young drinkers. The crunch came in August 1997 when it was announced that Summerfield had been dismissed over disagreements about advertising budgets for the new lagers. Even worse, Head Brewer Steve Even had resigned, and production had returned to 16% of capacity. In 1998 the new company introduced a new cask range; Crofty bitter at 3.6%, Cornish Rebellion at 4.8%, Steam bitter at 5%, Cornish Original at 4.1%, and Miners Mild at 3.6%. These brands never seemed to take off outside the South West, the Hong Kong beers were never promoted properly and by the end of

January 2004 the brewery went into administration for the third time. This time there was no rescue and at the end of April 2004 the Redruth Brewery closed with the loss of 26 jobs. The place was locked up, some of the equipment went for scrap and some sold. There were numerous break-ins and fires occurred in 2007, 2010, and 2011. By 2014 the site was overgrown and looking very decrepit. However, new life came in the form of The Cornish Records Office who were looking to relocate from their premises in Truro. The brewery, or what was left, was transformed into Kresen Kernow, the new Cornish Records Office and community area, opened in September 2019.

As for Michael Cannon, after the sale of the Devenish pub company to Greenall Whitley for £214,000,000, (purchased for £35,000,000) he went on to 'rescue' Morrells brewery in Oxford (since closed) and sold to Greene King in 2002. In 2005 he 'rescued' Eldridge Pope of Dorchester paying £42,000,000 plus £40,000,000 debt and sold to Marstons on 26 January 2007 for £155,000,000 with 153 pubs (since closed after being stripped of their houses and merging with Burtonwood). Cannon is now ranked the 238th wealthy man in the U.K. in the *Sunday Times* list, worth £300,000,000, and owns a large estate in the Yorkshire Dales purchased from the Queen Mother's family.

Newquay Steam and Redruth have all gone but will always be remembered as a pioneering brewery that fought against all the odds, a lesson all brewery companies should strive for. Major credit must go to Tony Wharmby especially for the Newquay Steam Beer range and the efforts he made to save a great brewery.

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