

THE DECLINE AND RESURGENCE OF BREWING IN KENT

PETER MOYNIHAN

Introduction

In common with most counties in the British Isles, the story of brewing in the historic county of Kent¹ is one of an increasing decline in the number of breweries in the late nineteenth century, and for most of the twentieth, and of a resurgence in the late twentieth century, continuing into the twenty-first. This piece is an attempt to chronicle that decline and resurgence, to explain how and why that decline came about, and to record those brewers who pioneered the resurgence and those who continue it today.

Part One: Decline

'As we close a brewery we mai at wunce open an asylum.'

The above quotation is from a Kentish local newspaper from 1886;² although perhaps something of an overstatement, it tells us that brewery closures have long been a concern for the consumer. The decline in the number of breweries in the historic county of Kent in the twentieth century, and the resurgence in that number towards and since the millennium, can perhaps be seen as a microcosm of the state of the brewing industry in the United Kingdom in general. There were over one hundred common breweries in Kent in the year 1900;³ the ongoing industrialisation of the brewing process and the application of scientific principles had seen the common brewers largely supplant the home-brew beerhouse and both farm and domestic brewing. By the mid-1970s, when the author first took an interest in the subject, only three breweries remained in operation in the county. Shepherd Neame⁴ and Whitbread Fremlins⁵ still faced each other across Court Street in Faversham and Whitbread Fremlins were still operating their Phoenix Brewery in Watlingbury. The latter was an anomalous survival, a small country brewery, owned by a large national combine, and by that time brewing only barley wine for export to Belgium.

The reasons for this decline are many and varied; the rise of the Temperance movement played its part, as did an antagonistic attitude to the public house by licensing authorities, who may perhaps have been influenced by temperance reform. Also, a factor was disinterested management by second or third generation brewery proprietors; the incorporation of many family-owned breweries during the 'brewery boom' of the last decades of the nineteenth century meant that financial gain became a consideration when a larger concern came knocking on the brewhouse door. The takeover of smaller concerns by their larger brethren in order to secure tied outlets for their products accelerated, delivering economies of scale and improving profitability.

Two World Wars had seen steep rises in the duty payable on beer; these increases, and the consequent reduction in the strength of the beer being brewed, served to reduce the profitability of smaller concerns. The large London brewers, having seen increased trade between 1939 and 1945,⁶ and having been unable to spend on maintenance and refurbishment under wartime conditions, found themselves entering the 1950s cash-rich and looking around for opportunities. However, in the late 1950s and into the 1960s the larger companies began to increasingly huddle together in order to resist marauding overseas brewers; which process led to what became known as the 'Big Six' brewers.⁷

But perhaps the major influence on the decline in the number of breweries in Kent was what came to be known as the Whitbread Umbrella. This benevolent-sounding scheme was the brainchild, one of many, of Sydney Nevile (later Sir Sydney), in which small brewers around the country, not just in Kent, could become Whitbread associate companies by allowing Whitbread to take a financial stake, and thus be protected from unwanted takeovers. In the event it became what Richard Boston, in his seminal 1976 book *Beer & Skittles*,⁸ described as being like '... the story of the mice who hired a cat to protect them from the fierce creature that they heard miaowing at night ...' and it led to Nevile's entry in



Figure 1. Sir Sydney Nevile 1873 - 1969.

the *Dictionary of National Biography* describing him as 'a key figure in Whitbread's rise as a national brewer'.⁹

The Whitbread concern had its origins in London in the eighteenth century as brewers of Porter, and by 1900 they had built up a large nationwide trade in bottled Cooper,¹⁰ Ale and Stout through a network of agencies. Their first takeover foray into Kent was in 1891, when they acquired H. & V. Nicholl Ltd., of the Anchor Brewery in Lewisham; brewing ceased and the Anchor Brewery was converted into a bottling depot to supply Whitbread's customers south of the Thames. Then 1902 saw a minor acquisition with the purchase and closure of Jones's Steam Brewery in Bromley.

Sydney Nevile became the Managing Director of Whitbread in 1919; he had been born in 1873, the son of a Vicar, the Reverend Christopher Nevile, and his third wife Mary Ann Tooth. Sydney's father died when he was a child and while his older brothers had been sent to Eton, there was no money left for such an education for young Sydney. At the age of just fourteen he was apprenticed to Messrs. Robins at their Anchor Brewery in Hove, Sussex, no doubt under the influence of his mother who was a member of the Tooth brewing family of Cranbrook; her relatives also had brewing interests in Burton on Trent and in Sydney, Australia. The young Sydney proved to be an able pupil, later moving to Brandon's Putney brewery where he became their Head Brewer at the age of just 21.

When Nevile joined the Board at Whitbread he had to work with three members of the Whitbread family and a Lubbock

(he was very distantly related to the latter by marriage), all of whom were Public School educated and who employed a gentlemanly style of management. He had been appointed on merit and applied himself to improving the quality of everything that the company did. To this end, in 1924, he promoted Whitbread's acquisition of the Forest Hill Brewery Co. Ltd. in order that Whitbread might benefit from their technical expertise in bottling bright beer. Previously, all of Whitbread's bottled products had been bottle-conditioned and therefore threw a sediment. The processes used at Forest Hill were thereafter employed at Whitbread's other bottling depots and the brewery in Forest Hill was closed and the premises sold to the United Dairies Ltd.

But the Umbrella proper really began to have a major effect in Kent in 1927 when Nevile brought his foresight, professionalism and negotiating skills to bear upon a group of Kent breweries which had become available. This resulted in Fredrick Leney & Sons Ltd., of Watlingbury, being used as a holding company to control not only their Phoenix Brewery and its tied estate, but also those of Jude Hanbury & Co. Ltd. and Ash's East Kent Brewery Co. Ltd., whose breweries in Canterbury and Sandwich were closed. Two years later Whitbread acquired control, via Jude Hanbury, of Mackeson's Hythe Brewery from the Reading brewers Messrs. H. & G. Simonds; this proved to be another very astute and important move for Nevile and Whitbreads.

Just prior to 1907 Mackeson had been developing what proved to be a new beer style; their sweet and smooth Milk Stout became an instant success, so much so that its produc-

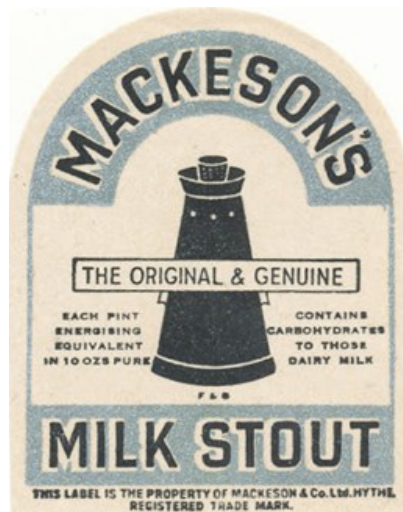


Figure 2. Mackeson's Milk Stout.

tion was licensed to other brewers. Simonds had purchased Mackesons in 1920. Simonds speciality was catering to military canteens, both at home and abroad, so their rationale was more likely to have been the trade at the large Shorncliffe military barracks than purely to gain an interest in the Milk Stout market. Furthermore, by the end of the 1920s that market was in decline, hence the sale to Whitbread whose interest would have been mainly in Mackeson's tied houses. However, Nevile had Whitbread's brewers tinker with the Milk Stout recipe, but more importantly he was able to negotiate an arrangement with H.M. Customs & Excise regarding the duty payable on Milk Stout. Duty was payable on the original gravity (O.G.) of the wort before fermentation, and the O.G. of Milk Stout was higher because it contained lactose, an un-fermentable sugar derived from whey, a by-product of cheese making. Lactose gave the stout a smooth body and some nutritive value but did not affect the alcoholic strength of the finished product. Having succeeded in making it cheaper to brew, Whitbread relaunched Mackeson Milk Stout and backed the product with an ample advertising budget; the result was that they created a national brand of sweet Stout, mostly brewed in Sheffield, to rival the market leader, Guinness's drier Stout. Readers of a certain age may remember the long-running Mackeson television commercials in the 1960s featuring the character actor Bernard Miles opining that 'It looks good, it tastes good, and by golly it does you good!' Indeed, it was popularly believed that his income from these advertisements, together with his promotional work for the Egg Marketing Board (Go to work on an egg!), provided the main financial support for the Mermaid Theatre, which Miles and his wife founded in 1959 at Puddle Dock, Blackfriars. The resulting greatly increased

demand meant that Mackeson Milk Stout (the latter nomenclature was dropped in the late 1940s) was also brewed elsewhere within the Whitbread empire. The Hythe Brewery closed in 1968, with local Stout production being moved to Faversham, although the biggest seller in the Mackeson tied estate had always been their draught Mild.

In 1948, Messrs. E. & H. Kelsey Ltd., of the Culverden Brewery in Tunbridge Wells, had been taken over by Messrs. J.W. Green Ltd., of Luton, which had in turn become Flowers Breweries Ltd. in 1954. Whitbread acquired Flowers in 1961 and brewing at Tunbridge Wells ceased. Messrs. Fremlins Ltd., by then the largest brewer in the county, came under the Umbrella in 1960 when the Maidstone concern bought Frederick Leney & Sons Ltd. from Whitbread in exchange for cash and Fremlins Ltd. shares. Five years later Whitbread exchanged the trade in their Kentish pubs for the trade of Fremlins' pubs north of the Thames. Whitbread gained complete control in 1967 when Whitbread Fremlins Ltd. was formed. In the following year Whitbread further extended their influence in Kent, and particularly in the east of the county, when they acquired in rapid succession both Messrs. Cobb & Co., of Margate, and Combined Breweries (Holdings) Ltd., the parent company of Messrs. Tomson & Wotton Ltd., of Ramsgate, which had been created when the latter concern acquired the Ash Brewery of Messrs. Gardner & Co. Ltd. in 1951. Both the Margate and Ramsgate breweries were promptly closed.

So, we have seen that Whitbread had directly closed nine breweries in Kent by the end of the 1960s. However, the overall total is significantly greater when one takes into

consideration the fact that these nine had themselves taken over and closed a number of smaller breweries; the overall total affected is more like 35!

Of the Big Six brewers, only Scottish & Newcastle had no influence in Kent. The remaining four had varying impacts on the number of breweries in the county; let us deal with them in alphabetical order. Allied Breweries' influence in Kent was via Messrs. Ind Coope & Allsopp, of Romford and Burton. They took over Messrs. Budden & Biggs Ltd., of Strood, in 1931 and brewing ceased there in 1938. The Black Eagle Brewery in Westerham, itself a consolidation of three Kent breweries, had been purchased in 1948 by Messrs. Taylor Walker Ltd., of Limehouse, who were taken over in turn by Ind Coope & Allsopp; brewing at Westerham ceased in 1965.

Bass Charrington's influence in Kent was relatively minor; Charringtons had bought Messrs. Walker & Son Ltd.'s Wellington Brewery in Gravesend in 1905 and closed it three years later. Their only other direct acquisition in Kent was Messrs. Thompson & Son Ltd.'s Walmer Brewery in 1951; it ceased brewing in 1953 but continued in use as a local depot for many years.

Courage had purchased Messrs. C. N. Kidd & Son's Steam Brewery in Dartford in 1937 and almost immediately closed it. Messrs. Style & Winch Ltd., of the Medway Brewery, Maidstone, had been a subsidiary of Messrs. Barclay Perkins Ltd., of Southwark, since 1929 and they became associated with Courage in 1955. Style & Winch had been very acquisitive and had already taken over and closed eight breweries in Kent. Courage & Barclay Ltd. bought Messrs. Reffell's Bexley Brewery Ltd. in 1956 and closed it in the following year. They then acquired Messrs. Charles Beasley Ltd. in Plumstead in 1963 and closed it within two years. The ex-Style & Winch Ltd.'s Medway Brewery, then trading as Courage (Eastern) Ltd., was closed in 1965.

Perhaps Grand Metropolitan's major involvement in Kent was via their takeover of Trumans in Brick Lane, East London, in 1971. Trumans had an extensive trade along the north coast of Kent and had taken over Messrs. Russell's Gravesend Brewery Ltd. in 1930, mainly for their 223 licensed houses, closing the brewery shortly thereafter although the premises continued to serve as a depot and bottling store for some years. Russells had themselves previously taken over and closed two breweries on the Isle of Thanet. Messrs. Watney, Combe, Reid & Co. Ltd., which had joined Grand Metropolitan in 1974, had bought Messrs. John Samuel Bligh's Holmesdale Brewery in Sevenoaks in 1911, mainly for its pub and private trade. The brewery was closed but the premises were used as a depot for about ten years.

Messrs. Kenward & Court Ltd.'s Close Brewery in Hadlow was purchased by Messrs. Hammerton's Stockwell Brewery Ltd. in 1945 and Hammertons were taken over by Watneys in 1951. Brewing had ceased at Hadlow in 1949 although malting continued.

Part Two: Resurgence

The above may read like a somewhat gloomy catalogue of takeovers and closures, but in the mid-1970s there was a glimmer of light on the horizon. Many of the big brewer's customers – the beer drinkers – were beginning to resent what they saw as the tide of bland, fizzy, keg beers which were threatening to swamp traditional cask-conditioned ales. A consumer resistance began, resulting in the formation of the Society for the Preservation of Beers from the Wood (SPBW) in 1963,¹¹ and later the Campaign for Real Ale (CAMRA) in 1971.¹² As interest in cask beer grew, its promotion and consumption gained momentum. There were people, both within and without the brewing industry, who began to think that there might again be a market for small-scale brewing. The first manifestation of this movement in Kent came in February 1979 when brothers Simon and Anthony Taylor, with assistance from David Cobb, the last independent proprietor of Cobb's Margate Brewery, established the Canterbury Brewery in the sample room of the old Flint's Brewery in Roper Close, Canterbury. This operation lasted only until 1983, during which time Whitbread had closed their Phoenix Brewery in Watlington. However, what came to be known as the microbrewery revolution was also beginning to gain momentum, as this list of breweries which opened in the county in the 1980s will show:

- Fox & Firkin brewpub, Lewisham, 1980-99
- H&B Brewery, Gravesend, 1981-85
- Sevenoaks Brewery Ltd, Seal Chart, 1981-86
- Royal Tunbridge Wells Brewery, Rusthall, 1982-83, restarted as Kentish Ales, 1984-86, became Larkins Brewery, from 1986, moved to Chiddingstone and still brewing in 2022
- Spencer King, Ashford, 1982, renamed Ashford Brewing Co Ltd, 1983-85. Acquired by Sapphire Ltd & merged with Kentish Ales above
- H&B Brewery, Strood, 1983-85
- Martin Ales, Martin, nr. Dover, 1983-89
- McDonnell's Brewery, Woolwich, 1983-85, moved to Charlton, 1985-89
- Goachers, Bockingford, 1983-90, moved to Tovil, 1990 and still brewing in 2022
- Jolly Fenman brewpub, Sidcup, 1984-88.

The attrition rate in the above list seems to indicate that perhaps the time was not yet right; there were insufficient



Figure 3. Goachers, the second oldest brewery in Kent. Image: Simon Hurst

free trade outlets to ensure a ready market for the new small brewer's products. Those brewers that have survived are the ones who produced a small core range of good quality cask beers for a small distribution area, and who have invested in one or two pubs. To bring the decade to a close, Whitbread Fremlins closed their Faversham brewery in 1990, so the number of operational breweries in Kent remained at just three! The list above also reveals the happy fact that Goachers are now the second oldest continuous brewery in Kent!

During the 1980s, the Government of the day began to have concerns about the Big Six brewers and the sizes of their tied estates. In December 1989 the Secretary of State for Trade & Industry published the 'Supply of Beer (Tied Estate) Order, 1989', soon to become popularly known as the 'Beer Orders'. The Orders stated that the number of tied houses owned by any brewery company should be capped at 2,000 and that their remaining tied houses be allowed to source a guest beer free of their tie. The Beer Orders revolutionised the brewing and pub trades almost overnight; the Big Six began to spin off pub-owning companies, soon to be known as 'Pubcos', and some chose to retain their entire tied estates, but get out of brewing altogether. Naturally, one of the effects of the Beer Orders was to enlarge the potential

market for local small-scale brewers; this, in turn, encouraged more small brewery start-ups. These new small breweries were often started by people who had been enthusiastic home-brewers, who saw that their chances of commercial success were now better than in the previous decade, as indicated by the following list:

- Packhorse Brewery, Ashford, 1990-93
- Flagship Brewery, Chatham, 1995-2003, reformed as Nelson Brewery in 2003 and still brewing in 2022
- Minnis Brewery, Stelling Minnis, 1995-96
- Swale Brewery, Milton Regis, 1995-2000, moved to Newnham as Tun, Vine & Press Ltd, 2000-1, Swale & North Weald Brewery, Newnham, 2001-3, moved to Grafty Green, re-named as the Whitstable Brewery, Grafty Green, from 2003 and still brewing in 2022
- Viking Ales, Broadstairs, 1995-97
- Great Stour Brewery, Canterbury, 1996-97
- Philatelist & Firkin brewpub, Bromley, 1997-99
- Ales of Kent, Chatham, 1998, moved to Boxley, 2000-2
- Kent Brewery, Broadstairs, 1998, moved to Betteshanger, until 2000
- Meantime Brewery, Charlton 1999, moved to Greenwich and still brewing in 2022. Acquired by SABMiller in May 2015
- Tap 'n Tin, Chatham, 1999-2000
- Kent Garden Brewery, Faversham, 1999-2000

We have seen that only two of the breweries that started up in the 1980s lasted until, and beyond, 1990. Of those starting up in the 1990s, seven lasted until the end of the decade, although several failed shortly thereafter. So, at the millennium the total number of operational breweries in the county stood at ten. Clearly conditions were improving for small brewers and would continue to do so in the first decade of the new century:

Old Kent Brewery, Borough Green, 2000-3
 Swan Microbrewery, West Peckham, 2000 and still brewing in 2022
 Zero Degrees, Blackheath, 2000 and still brewing in 2022
 Gravesend Brewing Company, 2000-3, moved to Darenth and in 2003, renamed Millis Brewery, now known as Dartford Wobbler Brewery and still brewing in 2022
 Hopdaemon, Canterbury, 2001, moved to Newnham 2005 and still brewing in 2022
 Gadd's Ramsgate Brewery, Ramsgate, 2002, moved to Broadstairs 2006 and still brewing in 2022
 Westerham Brewery, Crockham Hill, 2004, moved to Westerham 2017 and still brewing in 2022
 Moodley's Microbrewery, Rusthall, 2008-10, moved to Penshurst, 2010-12.
 Wantsum Brewery, Hersden, 2009-17, moved to St Nicholas at Wade and still brewing in 2022
 Old Dairy Brewery, Rolvenden, 2009-14, moved to Tenterden 2014 and still brewing in 2022
 Royal Tunbridge Wells Brewing, 2009-12, restarted in 2013 as Pig & Porter and still brewing in 2022

Although the number of start-ups in the first decade of the new century was broadly similar to each of the previous two decades, the survival rate was markedly better, doubling the number of Kent brewers at the end of 2009 to twenty. This growth in small-scale brewing was not a local phenomenon, nor was it even national, it was international. In the United States the new small brewers began, as a reaction to the predominant 'industrial pilsner' produced by the giant brewing corporations, to develop new beer styles, notably India Pale Ales. This proved to be the beginnings of what was to become known as the Craft Beer movement.

Meanwhile, in the UK, another movement was beginning. A change in the way pub licences were administered, together with the increasing rate of pub closures as the Pubcos realised that the properties that they owned were worth more as development opportunities than as places of alcoholic refreshment, led to the opening of modern versions of the alehouses of old – micropubs. The micropub movement started in Kent in 2005 when Martyn Hillier gained a licence to turn a tiny shop in the village of Herne into a pub – the Butcher's Arms. The idea caught on and soon micropubs

began to spring up all over the county, and indeed the country; they were generally small, sparsely furnished and mostly sold only cask beer. This boom in the number of outlets for cask beer naturally had a stimulating effect on the small-scale brewing industry, as it had by now become. In addition, the rising popularity of Craft Beer (a nebulous term at best) prompted a new breed of beer drinkers who wanted tasty beers, made from quality ingredients, but who were not particularly concerned with its method of storage and dispense. So rapidly did this market grow that some microbrewers ceased the production of cask beer altogether. Couple this with ongoing technical developments such as small-scale canning equipment, the Keykeg air-pressure dispense system from the Netherlands, which uses disposable plastic containers (which are hopefully recycled), and the ready availability of vacuum-packed hop varieties from around the world and brewing in Kent really took off! In the twenty-teens the following new breweries have opened:

Old Forge Brewery, Mersham, 2010 and still brewing in 2022
 Three Hounds Beer Company, Beckenham, 2010, a cuckoo-brewer
 Tonbridge Brewery, Tudeley, 2010-13, moved to East Peckham 2013 and still brewing in 2022
 The Canterbury Ales, Chartham, 2010 and still brewing in 2022
 Abigale Brewing Company, Ashford, 2010-12
 Kent Brewery, Birling, 2010 and still brewing in 2022
 The Old Brewery, Greenwich, 2010-15, a development by the Meantime Brewery
 Tir Dhá Ghlas Brewery, Dover, 2011 and still brewing in 2022
 Canterbury Brewers, Canterbury, 2011 and still brewing in 2022
 Hop Fuzz Brewery, West Hythe, 2011 and still brewing in 2022
 Rockin Robin, Maidstone, 2011, moved to Boughton Monchelsea in 2014 and still brewing in 2022
 Ripple Steam Brewery, Ripple, nr Dover, 2011-19
 Goody Ales, Herne, 2012 and still brewing in 2022
 Caveman Brewery, Swanscombe, 2012 and still brewing in 2022
 Mad Cat Brewery, Faversham, 2012 and still brewing in 2022
 Alpha State Brewery, Horsmonden, 2012 and still brewing in 2022
 Spencers Brewery, Ashford, 2012-14, then G2 Brewing, 2014-18
 Musket Brewery, Linton, 2013 and still brewing in 2022
 R&R Ales, Eastry, 2013-16
 Brockley Brewing Company, Brockley, 2013 and still brewing in 2022
 Cossack Brewery, Canterbury, 2013-14, a pub brewery at the Phoenix
 Honest Brew Ltd, 2012-13 Cuckoo brewers at Truefitt Brewing Co., Middlesbrough, then Late Knights Brewery, Penge, 2013-16, then Southey Brewing Company from December 2016, still brewing in 2022
 Range Ales, Lympne, 2013-20
 Maidstone Brewing Company, 2013-18
 Hop Stuff Brewery, Woolwich, 2013, went into Receivership in July 2019, acquired by Molson Coors
 Time and Tide, Walmer, 2013-15, then moved to Eastry and still brewing in 2022

Pig & Porter Brewery, Tunbridge Wells, 2013 and still brewing in 2022. Originally cuckoo-brewed at Downlands Brewery, W. Sussex.

Bexley Brewery, Erith, 2014 and still brewing in 2022

12Bar Brewing, Marden, 2014-16

Four Candles, Broadstairs, 2014, and still brewing in 2022

Monkey Chews Brewery, New Cross, 2014-16

Isla Vale Alesmiths, Westbrook, 2014-17, restarted in 2018 and still brewing in 2022

Sunshine Brewery, Smeeth, 2014-16

Turnstone Ales, Whitstable, 2014-20

Black Dog Craft Brewery, Wingham, 2014-15

Romney Marsh Brewery, Lydd, 2014-15, moved to New Romney and still brewing in 2022

Samphire Brewery, Folkestone, 2015-17

Brick Brewery, Deptford, from 2015 and still brewing in 2022, established in Peckham, which was originally Surrey, in 2013

The Brewery of Angels & Demons, Capel-le-Ferne, 2015 and still brewing in 2022

Simply Hops, Paddock Wood, 2015-18

Gemstone Ales, 2015 and still brewing in 2022, cuckoo brewer

Folkestone Brewery, 2015-16

Breakwater Brewery, Dover, 2015 and still brewing in 2022

Amazing Brewery, Sandgate, 2015-19

Attwell's Brewery Ltd, St Nicholas at Wade, 2015-16

Brew Buddies, Swanley, 2015 and still brewing in 2022

Ignition Brewery, Sydenham, 2015 and still brewing in 2022

By the Mile Brewery, Broadstairs, 2016-18

Boutilliers Brewery, Faversham, 2016 and still brewing in 2022

Docker Brewery & Bakehouse, Folkestone, 2016 and still brewing in 2022

Stag Brewery, Woodchurch, 2016 and still brewing in 2022

No Frills Joe, Greenhithe, 2016 and still brewing in 2022

Brumaison, Marden, 2016-22

Villages Brewery, Deptford, 2016 and still brewing in 2022

Volden Brewing Ltd, Forest Hill, 2016 and still brewing in 2022

Coalition Brewing Company, Beckenham, 2016 and still brewing in 2022

Koomor Brewing Company, Dartford, 2016 and still brewing in 2022

Iron Pier Brewery, Northfleet, 2017 and still brewing in 2022

Oak Tavern Brewery, Sevenoaks, 2017 and still brewing in 2022

Fonthill Brewing Company, Tunbridge Wells, 2017 and still brewing in 2022

Arden Beer Company, Faversham, 2017-18, pilot brewery only in Faversham, the product was contract brewed in Cornwall

Hildenborough Brewery, 2017 and still brewing in 2022

Clarkshaws Brewery, Erith, 2017 and still brewing in 2022, established in East Dulwich in 2013, main brewery is at Loughborough Junction

PWA Brewery, New Cross, 2017-18, re-named Cellar Boys Brewery in 2018 and still brewing in 2022

Rock Leopard Brewing Company, Welling, 2017 and still brewing in 2022, cuckoo-brews at Missing Link Brewery, West Hoathly, Sussex

Cellar Head Brewing Company, Flimwell, 2017 and still brewing in 2022, while the postal address is Flimwell, East Sussex, the brewery is actually in Kent

Br3wery Craft Brewing Company, Beckenham, 2017, a commercial home brewery, although it is believed that latterly the beers have been brewed in Birmingham

Kettledrum Brewery, Burham, 2017-18

Mutineers Brewery, Petts Wood, 2018 and still brewing in 2022

Northdown Brewery, Margate, 2018

Brithop Brewing Company, Belvedere, 2018 and still brewing in 2022. Pilot brewery only in Belvedere, the product is contract-brewed in East Sussex

Broken Drum Home Brewery, Belvedere, 2018 and still brewing in 2022

Greenwich Brewery, Greenwich, 2018 and still brewing in 2022

Running Man Brewery, Chatham, 2018 and still brewing in 2022

Headcorn Hop Brewery, Headcorn, 2019 and still brewing in 2022

Hinks Craft Brewery, Ruckinge, 2019 and still brewing in 2022

Curious Brewery, Ashford, 2019 and still brewing in 2022

XYLO Brewing Ltd, Margate, 2019 and still brewing in 2022

Common Rioters Brewery, Plumstead, first commercial brew produced by Brew Buddies and launched in June 2019

Moot Brew Company Ltd., Court Farm, Upper Halling, 2021 and still brewing in 2022. Initially cuckoo-brewed at the London Beer Lab, first brewed at Halling in April 2022

Early in 2019 there were over sixty operational breweries in the historic county of Kent. The survival of this number of small brewers has come about in a number of ways. Keen home-brewers are still coming into the industry, but so are shrewd businessmen with a love for beer. Many of these latter have grown their operations by canny investment and sound marketing, built their brands to the stage where some have realised their assets by selling out to the multinational brewers who had watched the growth of Craft Beer and now wanted a few pints of the action! Indeed, such has been the growth of the Craft Beer movement that a number of established Kent microbrewers, seeing the promotional benefits, have repositioned themselves as 'Craft Brewers'. Others have remained small, very small; there are now several in operation which can only be described as nanobreweries. These are little more than home-made kitchen sink operations with a licence to sell their products, mostly in bottle at farmer's markets, with the odd cask supplied to pubs and beer festivals. Others operate as cuckoo-brewers, using spare capacity at existing breweries. Most of the middling-sized Kent brewers, seeing the success of the micropub boom, have used this well-established principle to open their own taprooms as guaranteed outlets for their products and to foster a closer social contact with their customers.

Many Craft Brewers are keen experimenters with new beer styles and flavours, while others are keen to re-create styles



Figure 4. The offending cow. Label design registered as a Trade Mark on 22 August 1933, withdrawn 1943

and flavours from the past. Milk Stout, Kentish brewing's claim to fame, is being brewed again by Craft Brewers searching for old styles to recreate, and although production of Mackeson has never stopped, its sales are minimal. 'But,' I hear you ask, 'Wasn't the term Milk Stout banned?' Well, no, it seems that it wasn't. Here we must return to Sir Sydney Nevile who, in his autobiography *Seventy Rolling Years*,¹³ stated that after World War Two the Board of Trade launched a campaign to regulate food labelling; they took the view that as Milk Stout did not actually contain whole milk then the term was misleading and that if the brewers did not stop using the term, then a Government Order would be issued forcing them to do so. However, no such order was issued, although research has shown that in 1943 and 1944 a number of prosecutions were made in the north-east of England with regards to Milk Stout not containing milk and to the image of a cow on the label being misleading to the public.

The brewers concerned in these cases were Messrs. James Calder & Co. (Brewers) Ltd., of Alloa, and Messrs. J. & R.

Tennent Ltd., of Glasgow. In one case, tried in February 1944 in Berwick, the Sampling Officer, Mr. Aldridge, had purchased a bottle labelled Milk Stout and upon analysis found that it contained only ordinary Stout.¹⁴ Mr. Foster, on behalf of the defendants, maintained for the defence that the article in question was not ordinary stout as it contained a certain proportion of lactose sugar, but not the quantity of lactose that had formed a part of pre-war milk stout. The defendants had been informed by the suppliers about a month after the date of the offence that the milk stout sugar with which they were now being supplied had not the same content as previously, and immediately took steps to have the stout label withdrawn. They were fined £5 with costs. In another similar case the suppliers stated that lactose sugar had previously been imported from New Zealand but that the war had interrupted that supply, so they had been obliged to carry out experiments to find a substitute.¹⁵ It would seem therefore that the term was discontinued voluntarily and never banned; it remains to be seen whether modern Milk Stouts will fall foul of any current trade description or labelling regulations!



Figure 5. Craft Beer from Kent's oldest brewer. Image: Shepherd Neame/

History, it has been said, starts yesterday and it is the purpose of this work to record and to preserve the resurgence of brewing in the county of Kent, even as it is happening. The Craft Beer boom continued into the 2020s; however, it is unclear what the long-term effects of the Covid 19 pandemic will be on the industry. Enforced lockdowns meant that retail outlets have certainly struggled. Much beer, both on pub premises and at the breweries, went to waste but the number of breweries in the county seems to be holding up well. The brewers have had to adapt to the new conditions by offering both 'click-and-collect' services and home deliveries to ensure that their customers in lockdown did not go thirsty. Post-Covid, the author is so far aware of only three brewery closures in the county; Range Ales, Lympne, cited the pandemic as having compounded pre-existing trading difficulties, while Turnstone Ales, Whitstable, was due merely to the proprietor having moved to Suffolk. Bru-maison, Marden, is listed on the Quaffale¹⁶ website as having closed in 2022, but the author has no information as to the reason at the time of writing. Indeed, there seems to be little diminution in the numbers of eager beer enthusiasts keen to enter the industry. New breweries are still opening and more established concerns continue to install new plant to increase their production capacity. The 2020s have seen four new Kent breweries so far and at the time of writing

plans have been announced to build a 'visionary brewery' at Manor Farm, Watlington:

Constellation Brewery, Tonbridge, 2020 and still brewing in 2022
Shivering Sands Brewery Ltd., Manston, 2020 and still brewing in 2022

Floc. Brewing Project, Margate, 2020 and still brewing in 2022. In March 2021, having found their kit inadequate to meet demand, it was announced that it would henceforth be used purely for product development and that the Floc beers would be brewed by the Attic Brew Co. at Starchley, and at the Gypsy Hill Brewery, while larger premises were sought. Having failed to find suitable premises in Margate, in 2022 Floc moved to new 7,000sq ft premises in Canterbury, installing a new 30hL brewhouse together with a taproom.

Born and Bred Beer Ltd., Lynsted, 2021 and still brewing in 2022

So, Kent now has a plethora of relatively small breweries, each striving to survive in an ever more competitive world of supply and demand in the 'new normal' world of post-Covid brewing. Thankfully, it does not yet seem that the whole cycle might be in danger of starting over again.

Throughout this tale of brewery closures and the re-awakening of the brewing industry in Kent one brewery, Shepherd Neame, has outwardly sailed serenely on, like the

proverbial swan on a lake, or perhaps rather a swan on a Kentish village pond. But, like the swan, there must have been times when the firm was paddling frantically beneath the surface as sales of cask beer, their core product at the time, dwindled. Like the other family-owned breweries which have survived, they have moved with the times, introducing processed beers like Top Hat Keg, with its cheerful promotional slogan 'Give your laughing gear a treat!', later re-launched as Draught Abbey. They also introduced a Lager in a successful collaboration with Swiss brewers Hurlimann. These moves enabled Sheps to survive until the market for cask beer revived; they benefitted from the Beer Orders and extended their tied estate considerably by buying pubs being sold off by the Big Six and the resultant Pubcos. They have invested wisely in modern plant and are now a thoroughly modern concern with deep roots, being arguably the oldest brewers in the UK. Indicative of how this venerable company has ever moved with the times is the fact that they too now have their own 'Craft Beer' brand – Bear Island.

References

1. The historic county includes areas which now form the London Boroughs of Bexley, Bromley, Greenwich, and Lewisham
2. *Gravesend Reporter*, 15 May 1886, British Newspaper Archive
3. From the author's own research
4. An independent family-run brewery dating back hundreds of years and arguably the inheritor of a tradition of monastic brewing
5. A relative newcomer by comparison with Shepherd Neame, dating only from the 18th century, and by this time part of a national brewing combine
6. There were fewer restrictions on brewing during the second world war and many thirsty servicemen and women, both domestic and foreign.
7. Allied Breweries, Bass Charrington, Courage, Grand Metropolitan, Scottish & Newcastle, and Whitbread
8/ Collins, London, 1976
9. Oxford University Press, 2004, website at oxforddnb.com
10. Ostensibly a blend of Double Stout and Porter, but latterly mostly just bottled Porter
11. <https://www.spbw.beer/about-us/history/>
12. Initially named the Campaign for the Revitalisation of Real Ale. <https://camra.org.uk/about/about-us/our-history/>
13. Faber & Faber, London, 1958
14. *Berwick Advertiser*, 17 February 1944, British Newspaper Archive
15. *Newcastle Evening Chronicle*, 22 December 1943, *ibid*
16. <http://www.quaffale.org.uk/php/county/S28>