

THE FORMER BREWERIES OF BATTLE



The main contribution in the Battle area to brewing cannot have been the final product but the growing of hops. This was a major industry into the twentieth century, and one major brewer owned a large hop farm at Bodiam. Incidentally, it involved them in owning their one inn: the *Castle*. The brewer was Guinness. Their hop farm, begun early in the twentieth century, grew to cover 800 acres. It was convenient for the railway, which could take the product to London via Robertsbridge or Headcorn, and on to Dublin (the Guinness Park Royal brewery did not open until 1933). Quite apart from the demand from Guinness, almost every farm would have had a hopyard, and the presence of the surviving oasts testifies to their universality.

In Battle and its near neighbours there must have been brewing from before the first occupation of the Abbey to the point at which it ceased shortly before the First World War. It would have been first of unhopped ale, and then of hopped beer from the fifteenth century or so. But its history is not as clear as one would wish, despite the unmistakable presence of the former brewery in Old Brewery Yard.

There was a time when every town had its own breweries. It is thought that they developed from pub brewing. Landlords of inns would have found it easy to make a little more beer and sell the excess to local, smaller outlets, thereby freeing those landlords and their wives to do other things, and most of them would have had other jobs. This appears to have happened at Battle: the innkeeper listed in the 1841 census, who is identified as in the line of brewers ending in 1911, is discussed below. In addition to stationary brewers, as it were, there were also brewers who travelled between pubs, brewing for them on their premises.

The first written mention of a brewer was in 1604, when the will of Anthony Aylard describes him as a brewer. The next known occurrence was in 1627, when Henry Sheather is listed; the Martins, in their 2016 book, list a brewer's house in 1662. In 1665 William Longli (i e Longley) was listed as a brewer. In 1791, when Thomas Martin is listed as such; we do not know whether he was connected with the later business of which we know more. Charles Augustus Goodwin was reported in parish records as a brewer's clerk in 1813 and as a brewer from 1818. In 1840 he is listed¹ as a corn factor, brewer and coal dealer, and in the 1841 census as an innkeeper in the High Street. (However, parish records for 1834 suggest that he was a brewer at St Leonards; he might have been a travelling brewer too.) If he brewed independently at Battle, the precise premises are unidentified: a comparison of census data suggests that they could be at the southern corner of Old Brewery Yard where it meets the High Street – and David and Barbara Martin have identified this property as a former inn – or at the old brewery itself. It was *The conquering hero*. It does not appear in any later census. The 1881 census may be best interpreted as showing the then brewer living at the same premises. In 1911 the brewer was living at 15 High Street, but there had been much change of use in the area in the preceding 70 years.

In 1845 Goodwin retired to Kent and was succeeded by Walter Leney, then only about 25, in the same premises. Leney is mentioned in the Cresy report of 1850 as running the *Lion*, which must be the same place, but then, in a directory of 1855, as licensee of the Wellington in the High Street, which he was to give up by 1858.

Leney was a younger son of a Charles Leney, brewer at Watringbury on the lower Medway, whose firm later became a much bigger concern. It became one of the larger breweries in Kent but like so many others in the county it was taken over by Whitbread. (Although theirs from 1927, they did not shut it until 1982.) Walter was not to have long-term success: his business is listed in the 1861 census as employing five men and one boy – a substantial concern for the day – but he died at the beginning of 1863. In the autumn of 1861 he had married his housekeeper, Susannah Wellard, but they had no children. She married again in 1866 and died without children in 1871, leaving a substantial sum.

It is not clear who took over the brewery on Leney's death, or when, though it was probably very soon after it. Without giving a date, one researcher says that it was Henry Runnacles, who is listed as such in Pigot's 1867 directory, and the 1871 census has him as aged 38 and born at Harwich, now employing nine men and one boy. This means that he was the man who in the 1861 census was a master brewer (with his elder brother) at Hilperton by Trowbridge in Wiltshire. The researcher goes on to say that Runnacles went into partnership with a man called Armstrong, who later took one Stephens as his partner. The business does not seem to have been very profitable, at least under Runnacles: in 1864, threatened with prosecution over the brewery's smoky chimney, he pleaded that he had no money with which to lessen the nuisance.

In the 1881 census Charles Armstrong and Henry Stephens were the brewers. Armstrong was then 26, born at Little Paxton in Huntingdonshire; Stephens, from Durnsford in Dorset, was 28. Armstrong lived at the brewery house at the southern corner of the entry to the brewery yard. He left Battle in the summer of 1885², and in 1891 he is recorded as a brewer at Cambridge; the future whereabouts of Henry Stephens are unclear.



In 1887 the Baily family bought the brewery; they were to be the last brewers of old Battle. Their trading name was J and E Baily, the brothers James and Edward. They were sons of a brewer at Camberwell, where Edward John was born (baptised on 7 March 1860).

Ownership seems to have been vested in him and his brother James Jarvis Baily (baptised at Camberwell on 22 July 1858). The *Brewers Journal* is reported as saying that the Bailys' association with the brewery went back 80 years, but that might simply mean an association with brewing: the will of John Baily, brewer of Camberwell, was proved in 1839, and he was Edward's grandfather. He left his business to two sons, another Edward and James (the latter being father of the two younger brothers), and it was later closed.

Ted Baily

In the 1901 census the younger brothers are in Battle, both as lodgers – James at 3 High Street and Edward at Starrs Green, but the partnership had been dissolved in 1894. Edward then took on Walter Mackenzie Levett as his partner, up to December 1899. The business traded as Baily & Co.

Both Baily brothers played an active part in the town: both were on the local board that preceded the urban district council set up in 1894, and Edward continued on the new body. (James was disqualified from the local board for non-attendance shortly before its abolition.)

Both played cricket, and Edward appears to have captained it for some years. He was a member of the vestry (the parochial church council), the Horticultural Society and of the Oddfellows, and a fossil hunter in the neighbourhood. He was also an active Conservative.

BAILY & CO.,
 BREWERS,
 Wine and Spirit Merchants,
 BATTLE BREWERY,
 BATTLE.

PRICES TO PRIVATE FAMILIES.

Brand on Cask.	Per Bot.	Per Kil.	Per Fir.	Per Pen.	Per Gall.
Table Beer	24/-	12/-	6/-	3/-	8d.
X Mild Ale	30/-	15/-	7/6	3/9	10d.
XX " "	36/-	18/-	9/-	4/6	1/2
XXX Strong Ale	42/-	21/-	10/6	5/3	1/6
AK Light Bitter Ale	54/-	27/-	13/6	6/9	1/6
PA Pale Ale	36/-	18/-	9/-	4/6	1/2
P Porter	42/-	21/-	10/6	5/3	1/6
DS Double Stout	36/-	18/-	9/-	4/6	1/6
DS Double Stout	54/-	27/-	13/6	6/9	1/6

Discount for Cash on 1/- per gallon Beers and upwards on delivery.
 2/- Per BARREL, 1/- Per KILDERKIN, 6d. Per FIRKIN,
 3d. Per PIN.

BEER IN BOTTLE.

	Per Doz.		Per Doz.
Light Dinner Ale	2/6	Single Stout	2/6
Extra Strong Ale	5/-	Double Stout	3/-
Cooper	2/6		

Sole Agents for Battle and District for James Buchanan & Co.'s Scotch Whisky.

Of James less is clearly known, but the 1901 census records him as director of a brewing company, living at Tiverton. He died in Somerset early in 1911. By this time things were getting rather harder for small brewers, as indeed they continued to do for at least another century. Changes in company law reduced the risks of being a director; bigger companies were on the prowl.

The small brewers were at the bottom of the food chain; larger ones were anxious to expand, both to increase their profits and to make it more difficult for them to be taken over by even bigger concerns. In rural areas improvement in transport meant that distance was less of an obstacle to takeover than in the past. Many local firms were closing: between 1900 and 1911 the county lost breweries in almost every town and some villages,

from the Hampshire border to those with Kent and Surrey.

Firms like Baily's were ripe for the picking, particularly if they were not being kept warm for heirs to inherit. Edward Baily had two daughters, and one might assume that in those days at least it was unlikely that one or both would take over from him. James had had at least one very young child. So in 1911 the brewery went for sale, described as 'five quarters', meaning that it could brew five quarters of malt at the same time (a quarter was a variable measure, generally about 300 lb). It had a reserve price of £20,000 but the highest bid made was £15,000. Withdrawn from auction, it was sold privately to Ballards of Lewes, and brewing ceased very soon, the premises then being used as a depot for Ballards. The sale included 12 tied houses. The Battle Museum has two pint bottles clearly named for Baily and Co.

Only 13 years later Ballards were taken over by Page and Overton of Croydon, and their brewery was soon shut. Then in 1929 Page and Overton went to Hoare's of London, which in 1933 was taken over by Charrington's; the Croydon brewery remained open until 1954. Edward Baily died at Bexhill at the end of 1939.

Other breweries have appeared since the nation-wide arrival of microbreweries, the latest in 2017.

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Sources

Graham Holter: *Sussex breweries* (S B Publications 2001)

Hastings and St Leonards Observer, various dates

<http://ancestry.co.uk>

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Minutes of the Battle Board of Health (ESRO)

David and Barbara Martin with Christopher Whittick: *Building Battle town* (Domtom Publishing Ltd, Burgess Hill, 2016).

See end-notes.

¹ Pigot's Directory.

² Minutes of the Local Board of Health, of which he was a member.