

Frederick Leney & Sons - an essay

FREDERICK LENEY & SONS LTD PHOENIX BREWERY, WATERINGBURY by Keith Hetherington

This article first appeared in Bygone Kent and the Society is grateful for the kind permission of the Editor to reproduce it.

The Phoenix Brewery Wateringbury, whose history was well covered by Geoffrey King in the above article, was first leased by Charles Leney in 1843 on a 21 year lease and then bought by Frederick Leney in 1861. The family also had fruit and hop farms and, later, a gasworks, which was worked in conjunction with the brewery. To extend their business they set up stores and offices in other towns, such as Tunbridge Wells, Sittingbourne and Chatham. They also bought public houses, when they came on the market, such as the Camden Hotel, Pembury, bought by Charles Frederick Leney at auction for £3,150 in 1883. In 1892 Augustus Leney managed to lease all the pubs owned by the Tonbridge brewers Benjamin Baker and James Taylor Baker. These amounted to 31 pubs, twelve in Tonbridge, two in Hadlow and two in Hildenborough, with others in East Peckham, West Malling, Borough Green, Edenbridge and Yalding. The highest rent that the Leney's had to pay for these pubs was £160 per year for The South Eastern Hotel, Tonbridge and the Swan, West Malling. They paid £150 for the Beech Tree at St Mary Cray and the lowest rent that they paid was £40 per year for the Good Intent at Tonbridge.

In connection with their brewery interests they had introduced a patent beer tap which, besides being novel in its construction, had proved its usefulness to their publicans. The tap, in its operation, prevented the loss of any contents from the barrel. It was fixed before leaving the brewery and the user only needed to screw on the end portion, insert the key and the process was completed. The operation took only a few seconds to carry out and once fixed, it was impossible to remove the key without closing the aperture, so being made of the best metal and fitting very neatly, no leakage ensued.

The firm became a limited company in 1895. Several of the staff stayed with the firm for many years. One long serving member of staff was Mr W.H. Downs, who in 1923 had completed 48 years with them. He was their agent in Tunbridge Wells for most of that time.

The amount of trade done by a typical F. Leney pub in Tunbridge Wells can be shown by the following figures for the Grosvenor Mount Hotel which was bought by the firm in 1895 for £4,020. In 1911, 197 barrels a year were sold, in 1915, 249 were sold, in 1916 it was 205 barrels and in 1918 it was 188 barrels. These figures show the effect the first world war had on trade.

The driving force behind the expansion of the brewery, for many years, was Mr Augustus Leney. He was Master of the Mid-Kent Staghounds and while out on November 3rd 1915, with the Cornwallis beagles, his horse stumbled taking a wire fence and threw him heavily to the ground. He was taken home unconscious and only regained consciousness briefly before he died at 7 pm the same evening. He was aged 68 and left a widow and three sons. One son had died in 1908 after a polo accident in Pretoria, South Africa, where he was serving with the 3rd Hussars. As well as his success as a brewer, Mr Leney was also a successful agriculturist and hop grower and was a member of the County Council. During the first world war the brewery was charged with over-brewing. In the quarter ending June 30th 1917 they had over-brewed by 245 barrels. They admitted the error and offered every assistance to the Excise Officers. The reason for the mistake was that Mr Bertram Leney, who was in charge of brewing, had been called to the colours just before the beginning of June and the excess had been brewed in his absence. They were fined £100. In 1921 the firm expanded the business by paying £20,000 for the Yalding brewery of H.T. Wickham & Co. plus eleven licensed houses.

In 1927 Whitbread & Co. Ltd acquired the whole of the ordinary share capital of F. Leney & Co., which they then transferred to Jude Hanbury & Co. Ltd in 1929 in exchange for ordinary shares in the latter company. In 1929 one of the managing directors, Mr Percy Jude, retired and went to live in Folkestone.

The other managing director, Mr Montague Ratcliff, was the representative for the brewery in the Kent Brewers Union and served on the Committee. Wages paid by the brewery in 1929 were as follows:-

- Manager £1,000 per annum plus £200 Motor Expenses
- Secretary £500 per annum
- Branch Manager £650 per annum
- Surveyor £350 per annum
- Spirit Storesman £206 per annum plus cottage
- Clerk £206 per annum
- Engineer £280 per annum
- Loading Bay Clerk £242 per annum
- Cashier £280 per annum plus residence
- Inspector £325 per annum
- Traveller £204 plus expenses
- Under Brewer £330 per annum
- Typist £123 per annum

They also worked out that a motor could deliver 40 barrels a day at a cost of £1 per day:-

- Cost of motor £500
- Cost to run per week £6
- Depreciation at 20% pa £100
- Total cost to run pa £412

The cost of keeping a horse was £36 per annum.

They also spent £104 a year on sending beer by rail to some depots.

When Whitbreads finally took over Jude, Hanbury Co. Ltd in 1930 brewing continued at Watringbury at the Phoenix Brewery and at the Dane John brewery at Canterbury, which Jude, Hanbury & Co. Ltd had taken over from Ash & Co in 1923. The firm of Jude, Hanbury had started in Watringbury in 1810 but moved to Canterbury in 1924 after selling the brewery to the Yalding Soap Company.

They also owned Mackeson's brewery at Hythe which they had taken over from Simonds Ltd of Reading in 1929. Whitbreads took control of the firm in 1930 and at the Phoenix brewery they designed and made their famous Whitbread Inn signs. Among some of the design specialists used for their original signs in 1950 were V. Chalker, T.C.R. Adams, Miss K.M. Claxton, Miss Violet Rutter and Harvey James. The quality of design of the Whitbread signs can be seen today in the miniature card and aluminium reproductions of their Kent Inn signs. These are much sought after as collectors' items at flea-markets and antique fairs. The first series was launched in spring 1949 and the second, also on Kent Inn signs, in 1950. To promote the series Whitbreads produced maps of Kent, showing the fifty signs thumbnail size. These were designed by David Burley and displayed in Whitbreads houses in the county. The beer that was brewed at Whitbreads, Watringbury was mostly for export, among them were Whitbreads Light Ale, Gold Label Barley Wine and English Ale, which was once known as Fremlins Gold Top.

In 1981 it was decided to transfer the brewing to Whitbreads, Faversham and close the Phoenix brewery in January 1982. Mr Richard Tapply, Watringbury

The story of Mr Tapply is a real rags to riches one. He started his working life as a pupil at Frederick Leney's Phoenix Brewery in 1873 and graduated to become joint Managing Director with Mr Percy Jude. To mark his fifty years with the firm a dinner was held at the King's Head Hotel, Watringbury where he was presented with a silver salver and silver coffee service from the directors and many other gifts from employees and tenants Mr Tapply, a member of the parish council. died in January 1927.