

Brewing in the Community

Before the days of main water in pipes the inhabitants of our valley had to rely on wells or even streams. Often the water was polluted and people of all ages drank locally brewed ale which was safer. Nearly every pub brewed its own beer. In 1868 Mr Archibald Beckett of Hindon bought the old workhouse next to the church. The new Workhouse had just been built on Union Hill. Mr Beckett turned the old one into a Brewery and laid out the present High Street. The Brewery was destroyed by fire and his name is carved above the gateway of the new Brewery which he rebuilt in 1885, naming it The Wiltshire Brewery. It continued to slake the thirst of beer drinkers in the area, eventually being owned by Eldridge and Pope of Dorchester who closed it in 1914. In 1984 the Tisbury Local History Society produced a useful history of the building's subsequent many uses and Rex Sawyer tells the school children the story of the brewer's monkey that jumped into a vat and drowned.

There were gallant attempts to reuse the Brewery for its original purpose between 1980 and 1983 by The Tisbury Brewery and from 1984 to 1986 by The Wiltshire Brewery (again). The 1980 revival happened when a Scots biochemist, Alastair Wallace saw the building from the railway and bought it. His team included Tony Boyce who was the marketing man. John Hooper and Steve Jay worked for both companies. The first beers were called Tisbury Local, Tisbury Heavy and Old Grumble. One won Supreme Champion at Bristol in 1982. Later Stonehenge and Old Devil appeared. Both companies owned the Southwestern Hotel during their short lives. The Old Brewery has recently been converted to flats but the carved stone inscription has been restored by Eddie Closier so Archibald Beckett lives on. Incidentally one of the previous generation of Becketts was excitable that he had to be locked up by his family in Hindon during the Swing riots in 1830. Local men were transported or hanged for rioting against the introduction of new agricultural machinery but he was saved.

More recently local small scale breweries have been appearing. There is the Hidden Brewery at Dinton and this summer Alasdair and Charlotte Large, who live in Tisbury Row, have opened the Keystone Brewery in the old carpenters workshop at Berwick St Leonard. Their mothers, keen real ale drinkers, have been acting as guinea pigs for the new brews. The Royal Oak at Swallowcliffe was honoured to sell the first barrel of The Large One. Fonthill Spring water is the "liquor" and malting barley will be specially grown next year on the estate.. Four beers are available kept in barrels painted with Alasdairs regimental colours. One priority is for light low alcohol beers with an eye to ladies' preferences but the real ale enthusiast should be interested in the result. Already the beers are available throughout the Nadder Valley and have been spotted as far away as the Isle of Wight and Manchester. The name Keystone was suggested by the wedge-shaped stone at the top of the Fonthill Archway: the masonry theme will be followed in the names of the other beers to follow; Bedrock and Cornerstone.

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