

Barclay, Perkins & Co Ltd.

For most of the nineteenth century the prosperity of Westcott was closely linked to the wealth of the Fuller and Barclay families. The Fuller fortune came from banking (see 'Messrs Fuller & Company, Bankers' in the June 2000 Annual Report). The Barclay family also had a banking interest but it was as brewers that the Barclays of Bury Hill were to make their mark.

Robert Barclay was born in 1751 in Philadelphia where his father was a Customs Officer. He came to England at the age of 12 to complete his education and was befriended by David Barclay and Silvanus Bevan, half-uncles who were partners of Barclay's Bank. Walking across London Bridge one day they saw Thrale's Brewery advertised for sale and agreed that "This will do for young Robert". The sale to what Henry Thrale's widow described as "A knot of rich Quakers" was completed on the 31st May 1781 for £135,000. Henry Thrale's executors included Samuel Johnson who, when challenged about the value of the property, famously replied, "We are not here to sell a parcel of boilers and vats, but the potentiality of growing rich beyond the dreams of avarice."

Samuel Johnson was right. The Anchor Brewery proved to be a profitable venture. With financial help from his banker uncles and the technical expertise of John Perkins, Thrale's former manager with whom Robert went into partnership, the brewery was extended and modernised, including the installation of a Boulton and Watt steam engine¹. Production in 1860 had been 30,000 barrels but by 1815 Barclay and Perkins were producing over 337,000 barrels a year, making it – at that time – the biggest brewery in the world.

¹ It is claimed that when Mr Barclay sought some indication of the power represented by the new engine, William Murdoch, Boulton & Watt's installation engineer, compared its performance with that of the pump then being used to raise water from a well on the site. This was driven by horses led round and round a circular track. Murdoch, at James Watt's instigation, compared the energy expended by the horses - judged to be of the order of 22,000 feet pounds per minute – and added 50% to this 'to be on the safe side'. The resultant '33,000 feet pounds a minute' has remained ever since as the standard definition of one horse-power.



The Anchor Brewery

In 1805 Robert Barclay sought a country house away from the hustle and bustle of Southwark. He chose Bury Hill, with its 2,000 acre estate which he initially leased and then bought in 1812.



Bury Hill, Westcott

In 1832 part of the brewery was destroyed by fire but the availability of the first steam fire engine in England helped to limit the damage, and the engine was then retained to pump beer day and night for a month until normal production could be restored.



Entrance to Brewery 1841

By this time Robert had handed over control of the brewery to his son Charles and had devoted the last years of his life to the stocking of his new estate with trees and plants from Asia, Africa and America. As a result his extensive garden attracted many visitors, one of who noted that *'As an accompaniment to the flower garden was a rustic summer house, thatched with the refuse shavings obtained in making wooden barrel hoops'* – no doubt brought down to Westcott from Southwark.

By 1850 the Anchor Brewery employed over 400 men (and had stabling for the 200 horses that delivered beer throughout London) and was one of the principal attractions of the capital. The Visitors' Book included Napoleon III,

Tchaikovsky and Bismark as well as the future Edward VII. However one overseas visitor in 1850 did not receive a warm welcome.



A flea in the ear of General Haynau

and it was only after the intervention of Queen Victoria that a conciliatory letter was sent to Vienna. Even then Austria was still so resentful that it sent no representative to the funeral of the Duke of Wellington in 1852. The incident was not forgotten and when the Italian revolutionary Garibaldi visited England in 1864, he insisted on visiting the brewery to thank *'the men who flogged Haynau'*. The event was, of course, commemorated in the Music Halls, with the following song:

*Jolly boys, who brew porter for Barclay and Perkins,
The prime London stout of our cans and our firkins,
Here's a health, English hearts, what'er may betide,
For the dose you gave Haynau along the Bankside.*

The fame of the Anchor brewery was such that it often featured in Victorian novels. It was a job at the brewery that Micawber had in mind when he was *'waiting for something to turn up'* in David Copperfield, and it was Barclay's beer that Dick Swiveller claimed in the Old Curiosity Shop contained *'a spell in every drop against the ills of mortality'*.

Dr Johnson's influence on the creation of Barclay Perkins & Company was not forgotten. As the Barclay's 'Doctor' brand beer gained fame at home and

abroad Samuel Johnson's face was to be seen on the bottle labels and his figure clutching a pint pot became the brewery's emblem.

It was not only the profits envisaged by Dr Johnson that enhanced Bury Hill and Westcott. In comparatively recent times there were tangible links with the great Southwark brewery. In September 1939 some of the key members of staff were evacuated to Bury Hill House with the Barclay family and their resident staff. At one time there were 46 people living in the house and all available space was utilised for offices and sleeping accommodation.



Before then Westcott's links with the brewery were marked in a much more civilised way. Bury Hill was the venue for outings for the Brewery workers. Tennis tournaments between the Brewery Sports Club and the Directors were held at 'The Chairman's House' and a Barclay Perkins cricket team, accompanied by anything up to 200 supporters, had bank holiday fixtures with the village XI.

In this picture Westcott players take the field against Barclay's Brewery on August Bank Holiday 1937, with Leslie Howard's son Ronald (centre) in the village team

Brewing continued at the Anchor Brewery throughout the 19th century and the first half of the twentieth, during which time successive generations of Barclays and Perkins continued to manage the business. The Bury Hill Barclay interest progressed from father to son:

Robert (1751-1830)

Charles (1780-1855)

Arthur Kett (1806-1869)

Robert (1837-1913)

Robert Wyvill (1880-1951)

Robert(1906-1959).

In the early 1950's, at about the same time that the Barclay Family sold the Bury Hill Estate, Barclay Perkins merged with Courage. The brewery became a bottling plant before finally closing in 1987 when the 12-acre area (including the site of the Globe Theatre) was purchased by the GLC for £2.5m, bringing to an end 300 years of large scale brewing on Bankside.



Although there were excursions from Bankside to Westcott, this photograph from the Barclay, Perkins magazine – The Anchor –shows 21

charabancs leaving the Brewery for an outing to Brighton at 6.30 am on
Saturday 5th June 1926.