

Norwich Pubs and Breweries

Past and Present



Frances and Michael Holmes

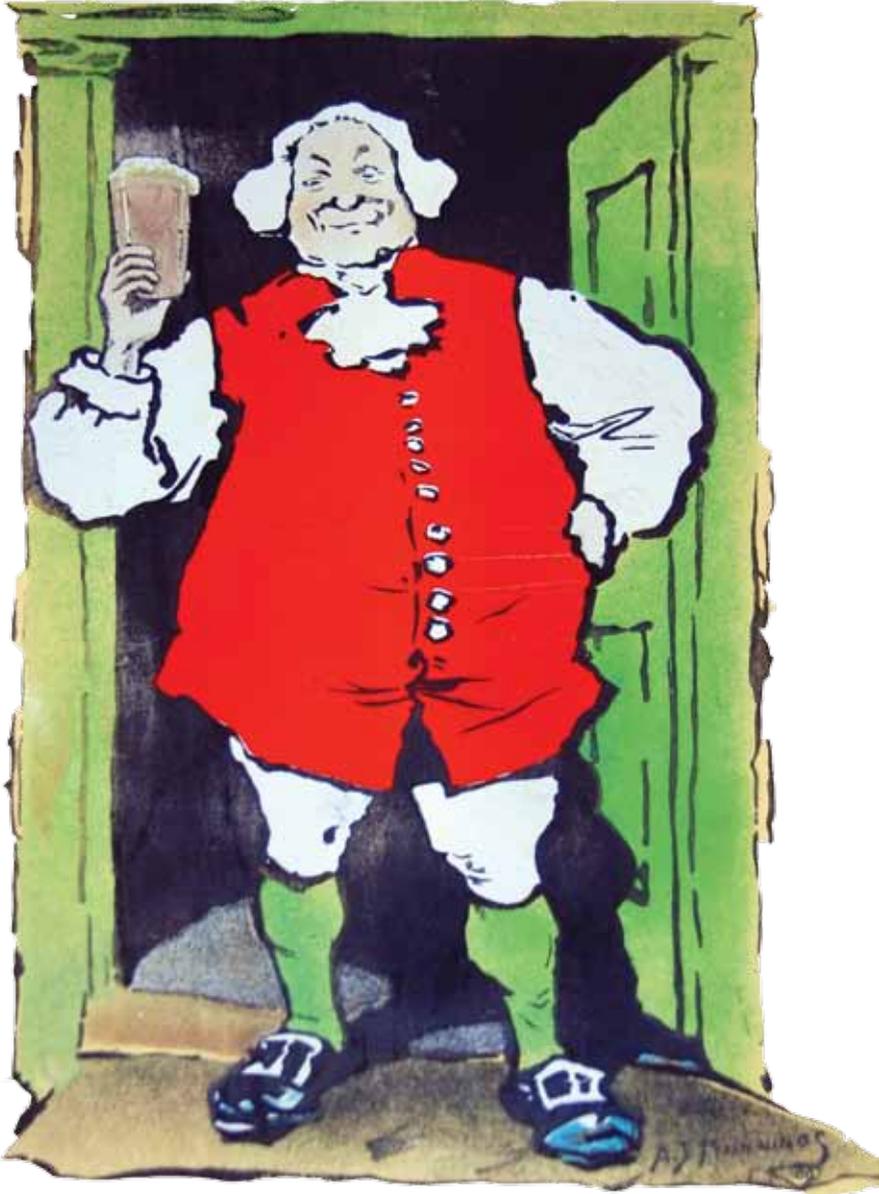




Morgans' Brewery Yard, c1900

Norwich Pubs and Breweries

Past and Present



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Albert Cooper: 63 (Albert Cooper), 64 (Black Anna and Albert Cooper), 148, 212 (Black Anna), 214

Andy Field: 63 (Continental), 164

Antony Murray: 57 (Prince of Denmark images)
Arthur Houlston: 21

Arthur Pank's family: 48, 49 (sign), 51 (Rose & Crown), 52 (sign), 53 (Lord Nelson and Mariners' Tavern), 59, 84, 189 (Plough Inn sign), 206, 217 (sign)

Barry Berwick: 17, 18

Barry Lambert: 211 (Harry and Ethel Lambert)

Basil Gowen: 114, 136 (Great Hospital), 139, 158 (Elizabethan room), 167 (postcard), 212 (Billy)

Carol and Peter Turner: 45, 118, 119

Cass Hooton: 61

Chris and Glynis Higgins: 202 (exterior), 203

Derek McDonald: 19, 23 (emblem), 41 and 158 (Backs' bar), 72, 73 (St Faith's Tavern), 75 (Little John), 97 (exteriors), 107 (Leopard building), 137 (Goodsons), 140 (Prince of Wales), 144 (exterior), 145 (Turkey Cock), 146 (Wild Man), 157 (Coach & Horses, 2003), 158 (exterior), 170 (Vine), 200 (Coachmakers), 201 (exteriors), 211 (exterior)

Derek Spanton: 34, 35

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E. H Butt: 157 (Coach & Horses, 2003)

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George Plunkett (permission from Jonathan Plunkett): viii, 14, 49 (exterior), 64 (Jolly Butchers), 70, 81 (Clarence Harbour), 85, 90 (Cat & Fiddle), 92, 93 (1935 exterior), 95 (Rose), 96 (Royal Oak), 98, 101, 104, 105 (churches), 106 (Cellar House), 107 (Horse Barracks), 108 (exterior), 116, 120, 121 (Morning Star), 123 (buildings), 124 (Woolpack), 137 (Bishop Bridge Inn and Briton Arms), 156 (photo), 159 (George & Dragon), 162, 166, 168 (Arcade Stores), 169 (photo), 171 (photo), 182 (Bell, 1936), 182 (Cock), 184 (Nag's Head), 187, 189 (Plough), 190 (Shirehall), 191 (exteriors), 192 (exteriors), 195, 199 (hospital), 204 (Trumpet), 207, 213, 216 (photo), 220

Gloria King: 16

Janet Hope: 74, 75 (fishing club)

Jarrold & Sons: 181

John Hutson: 12

Jon Tydeman: 179

Leonard Thompson: 54 (sign), 94 (sign), 171 (White Swan)

Maddy Bartle: Black Anna

Mike Dixon: 13 (2011), 52 (exterior), 56, 57 (Coachmakers), 93 (2011), 115 (Micawbers), 117, 122 (Dog House), 137 (Glass House), 138, 141, 147,

184 (Gardeners' Arms), 185, 189 (number 12), 190 (Queen of Iceni), 200 (Moray-Smith), 204 (Trowel & Hammer), 215 (exterior), 217 (exterior),
Norfolk County Council Library and Information Service: inside front cover, 1, 3, 4, 7, 8, 9 (cellar), 10, 11, 13 (chimney), 15, 33, 40 (exterior), 41 (exterior), 42, 43, 65 (Orford Arms and Black Anna), 67, 77, 78, 80 (barge), 82 and 218 (Thompson's Ferry), 88, 90 (Bess of Bedlam), 94 (exterior), 96 (Rose Yard), 97 (William Drake), 105 (Horse Barracks), 123 (Rumsey Wells), 144 (Edith Cavell), 145 (Waggon & Horses), 151, 165 (exterior), 157 (Boar's Head), 160 (photo), 161 (Barking Dickey), 167 (sketch), 175, 178, 180 (exteriors), 182 (Bell pre-trams), 188, 198, 199 (hall), 210, 215 (river), 216 (painting), plus all images in the 'Photo Galleries' attributed to George Swain and the NCC Library & Info Service.

Norfolk Museums & Archaeology Service

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(painting), 186, 219 (Cinder Ovens)

Ollie Potter: 163

Ordnance Survey Department: 86, 87, 102, 103, 112, 113, 131, 132, 152, 153, 176, 177, 196, 197, 208, 209

Pat Burrows: iii, 50, 51 (Man on the Moon), 53 (Kett's Tavern), 55, 58, 60, 108 (sign), 121 (sign), 191 (sign)

Paul Venn: 39 (Chris & Glynis Higgins), 79

Philip Cutter: 183 (Crisps)

Ray Ashworth: 6, 25 (Ray Ashworth), 26, 27, 28, 80 (wherry), 165 (Bram Lowe)

Ray Lince: 192

Roger and Anthea Cawdron: 143

Woodforde's: 29

www.norfolkpubs.co.uk: 157 (Coach & Horses, 2003)

Yale Centre for British Art: 169 (Star)



Steward & Patteson workers checking the brew, c1950

Contents

Introduction

Section 1 - Norwich Breweries

2 Brewing in Norwich

7 The Breweries and their Workers: Past

- 8 Youngs, Crawshay & Youngs Ltd – The Crown Brewery
- 10 Bullard & Sons Ltd – The Anchor Brewery
- 14 Steward & Patteson Ltd – The Pockthorpe Brewery
- 19 Morgans Ltd – The Old Brewery
- 22 Watney Mann (East Anglia) Ltd and the Norwich Brewery Co.
- 23 Lacons – The ‘Falcon’ Brewery (Great Yarmouth)

24 A Brewery and its Workers: Present

- 24 Woodforde’s – The Broadland Brewery

33 Horses and Drays

36 The Beer Festival

Section 2 - Norwich Pubs, Inns and Taverns

42 Origins and Evolution

47 Themes

- 48 Signs and Names
- 54 The Artists
- 62 Entertainment
- 66 The Coaching Inns
- 69 Sporting Links
- 71 Pub Games
- 72 Community and Clubs
- 76 Murder and Mayhem
- 77 The Norwich Yards
- 80 The River

83 City-centre Pubs, Inns and Taverns

- 85 North-West Norwich
- 101 North-East Norwich
- 111 Coslany and St Benedict’s Street
- 129 Cathedral and Historic Heart
- 151 Market Place and Surrounding Area
- 175 South-East Central Norwich
- 195 South-West Norwich
- 207 South-East Norwich
- 221 The Fat Cat

222 In Conclusion

223 Acknowledgements

224 Bibliography

225 Norwich Heritage Projects

226 Index

Introduction

In 1925 Walter Wicks wrote the ‘Inns and Taverns of Old Norwich’, followed in 1947 by Leonard Thompson’s ‘Norwich Inns’. More recently, in 1975, John Riddington Young produced his own version of Walter Wicks’ work. All of these books contain wonderful stories, and give brilliant insights into the pub scene and the characters that inhabited it at the time. They also share another feature . . . they are all out of print. Therefore, with some trepidation, we decided that it was time to make another foray into a subject that has contributed so much to Norwich’s heritage.

When we first proposed the book a number of people raised the question of combining the story of the pubs with that of Norwich’s breweries. It made sense to do this, after all for the majority of the 20th century they owned around 95% of the pubs.

In all of our projects we try to bring history to life by including personal stories and photographs. In this respect we owe many thanks to the numerous people who have contributed. Additionally we are particularly grateful to both Richard Bristow (www.norfolkpubs.co.uk) and Derek McDonald, experts in this field, for so generously sharing their material with us.

Structuring the book has been a challenge. We had so much material! In the section on breweries we have been able to include the memories of people who worked at all of the major breweries. These give a real insight into a world long since gone. We were also able to come right up to date by including a section on Woodforde’s, which originated in Norwich. The pub section tested our ingenuity more. Eventually we decided to have an in-depth look at general topics all linked with pub culture e.g. names, artists and entertainers, and then to research some establishments in more detail. But which ones? In the end we based our selection around the 1884/5 OS map of Norwich, which highlights all of the pubs and inns in the centre of the City which were open at the time. We have included extra information on many of the pubs which are still open today, together with interviews given by City landlords.

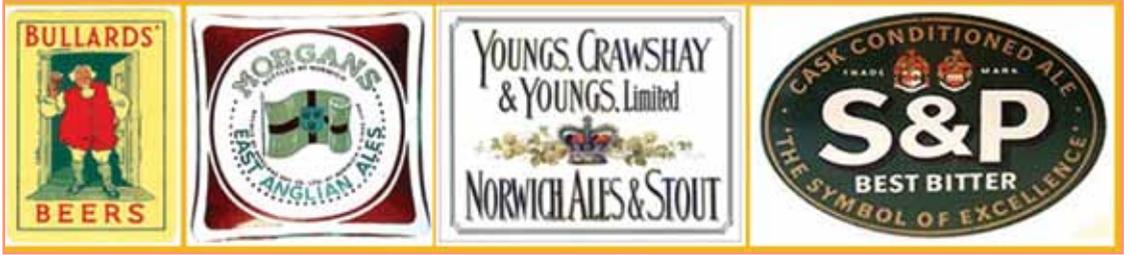
Finally this is not a beer guide. We leave advice on this subject to the authorities at CAMRA. Our goal is quite simple. We aim to show the outstanding contribution that pubs and breweries have made, and indeed continue to make, to Norwich’s culture in an informative but light-hearted manner.

Cheers

Frances and Michael Holmes



Blue Bell, Lower Goat Lane, 1935



Section 1 - Norwich Breweries



Steward & Pateson brewery workers, c.1900

Brewing in Norwich

Early Days

Ale, which can be dated back to 3,000 years BC, is believed to be the world's oldest form of alcohol. When ancient nomadic civilisations such as Babylonia settled down to grow grain they were able to produce the two staple elements of their diets, namely bread and ale. At a time when water was often contaminated, ale was the healthy option. As soon as farming became established in the British Isles, tribes started to brew their own varieties of ale. It has been a common drink in England for about 1500 years, in fact until the early 15th century it was the principal drink.

The very early brewers produced malt by first soaking barley (or wheat) in water and then burying it in the ground to allow it to germinate. The malted cereal would then be dried, crushed and baked into large flat cakes which would be brewed by the simple process of being soaked in warm water and pressed through a sieve. The resulting liquid (or wort) was then fermented in large earthenware vessels. As can be imagined the resultant ale would not meet today's standards being somewhat cloudy, furthermore it was often so thick, with unfiltered barley husks, it had to be drunk through a hollow reed to enable it to be filtered.

For many years the Church exercised control over both brewing and the supply of ales. Monks were some of the earliest brewers in Norwich. Their breweries can be traced back to around the 11th century and were situated in their priories. For example the Benedictine monks had their brewery in the Cathedral Close whilst the Austin friars produced ale between Mountergate and St Anne's Staithe in King Street. It was also brewed in homes and on farms.

To produce ale the early brewers used herbs and spices to balance the sweetness of the malt. However, in the 15th century beer was introduced to this country from the Low Countries. Unlike English ales, beer

was brewed with the addition of hops which added bitterness to the beer and extended its life.

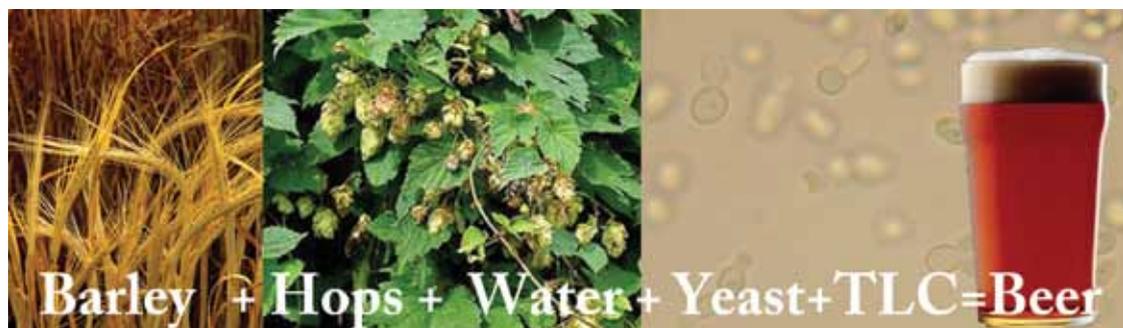
Later in the same century, during the reign of Henry VI, the hop vine was first grown in England. At the time it was considered an adulterant and its use for brewing was banned by the monarch. It was more than a century before Henry VIII repealed the prohibition after which it became universally used and the terms 'ale' and 'beer' became largely synonymous.

At this time 'small beer' (of around 2% alcohol) was an important source of nutrition. Unlike the higher alcohol beers, which were served for recreational purposes, this weaker alternative contained just enough alcohol to act as a preservative. It provided hydration without causing intoxication.

During the Middle Ages brewing was mainly carried out in the home or by innkeepers, who produced beer solely to be drunk on their own premises. It was only during the 17th century that 'common breweries' (i.e. breweries which distributed products to a number of outlets) were established.

Until 1750, in terms of population, Norwich was the third largest city in England. However, by the end of the 18th century Norwich was in decline. Quite simply it did not have the natural resources that were essential in the new industrial age. As such the Industrial Revolution largely by-passed the region. Manufacturers were pushed towards industries based on agriculture, one of which was brewing.

Norwich was a natural site for the brewing industry being situated at the centre of an area which grew some of the best malting barley in the country. It also had the advantage of having access to good quality water, essential to the brewing process, from the chalk that underlies much of the City.



Growth and Expansion

In 1783 there were nine breweries in Norwich serving a population of about 35,000. Most would have been small. Additionally, publicans continued to brew beers for their own establishments.

As major brewers came to dominate production a new phenomenon emerged, namely the 'tied house'. This development played a huge part in the subsequent expansion and eventual demise of the Norwich breweries. It would appear that the early growth of the tie, whereby a publican agreed to take the product of a particular brewery and came under its control, was not a deliberate strategy. It often arose because the publican became indebted to the brewer, or a future landlord with insufficient capital may have sought financial help from the brewery. As it became more expensive for licensees to enter the trade it was seen as a sensible marketing strategy for the brewers to offer credit since it secured an outlet for their beer. Eventually the majority of houses were either owned, or leased, by the breweries. Subsequently a trend developed whereby the dominant producers took over their smaller competitors not for their breweries, which were often subsequently closed down, but as a means of getting their hands on the tied estate. One wonders if the 19th-century industrialists were aware that this strategy, which gave them early dominance, would eventually lead to their own downfall.

By 1836 there were 27 breweries in the City. However, new production methods were beginning to give significant advantages to the larger producers. In particular:

- Technological developments, e.g. the increased use of the steam engine, benefitted the larger companies who further gained from economies of scale
- An increase in popularity of porter (a malt liquor) which required longer, and hence more, storage. Steward & Pateson began producing it in 1840
- Greater control of the brewing process produced beer of a more consistent quality
- The growth of tied houses.

In Norwich there was a relatively high level of production and control by 'common brewers' such that in 1841 the industry was highly concentrated. By then over 75% of Norwich's 558 public houses were in the hands of seven firms, with Steward & Pateson controlling 33% of them. This concentration was probably linked to the relatively early growth of the larger brewers, indeed it is believed that Norwich had a lower proportion of pubs brewing their own beer than anywhere else in England. In fact the 1830 excise returns indicate that in the country as a whole one



Steward & Pateson's Pockthorpe Brewery, c1900