

**Marston's Brewery, Shobnall
Road, Burton upon Trent,
Staffordshire**

Project No. 1146
January 2004

**Marston's Brewery, Shobnall Road,
Burton upon Trent, Staffordshire**

**A Comparative Assessment of the Brewhouse and Fermenting Block and
its Fittings**

By
Malcolm Hislop

For further information please contact:

Alex Jones (Director)
Birmingham Archaeology
The University of Birmingham
Edgbaston
Birmingham B15 2TT
Tel: 0121 414 5513
Fax: 0121 414 5516
E-Mail: bham-arch@bham.ac.uk
Web Address: <http://www.barch.bham.ac.uk/bufau>

Contents

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Historical and Architectural Significance
- 3.0 Conclusion
- 4.0 Acknowledgements
- 5.0 References

Marston's Brewery, Shobnall Road, Burton upon Trent

A Comparative Assessment of the Brewhouse and Fermenting Block and its Fittings

1.0 Introduction

This report describes a comparative historical assessment undertaken by Birmingham Archaeology during January 2004 of the brewhouse and fermentation block, Marston's Brewery, Burton upon Trent, a Grade II listed building dating from 1875. The work was a sequel to an assessment of the building carried out by Birmingham Archaeology in September 2003 (Hislop 2003), and is to be regarded as an addendum to the main report to be read in conjunction with it. The main purpose of the supplementary report is to provide an historical and contemporary comparative assessment of the importance of the building and its historic fittings, with particular respect to the Union Room on the first floor of the fermenting block.

2.0 Historical and Architectural Significance

The Architecture

Marston's is one of many breweries that were erected in the later half of the 19th century when profitability in the industry was at its zenith (Richmond and Turton 1990, 8). In a national context, many of these breweries survive, and although the main building at Marston's is built to a competent and effective design, in architectural terms it is arguably of regional rather than national importance. Nevertheless, the brewery has a national profile through its leading product, Pedigree, and holds a special position within the town of Burton on Trent, which at the time of Marston's construction was a nationally important centre of the brewing industry.

The significance of Marston's within Burton can be gauged from a survey of 19th-century brewery buildings in the town, undertaken for the Victorian Society in 1985 (Cooksey 1985). This review recorded that of the thirty-eight 19th-century breweries and maltings known to have existed in the town, twenty had been totally demolished and nine partially demolished. Since 1985 there have been further casualties, notably the important Bass New or No.2 Brewery, of which only the Union Room survives as The Brewhouse Arts and Community Centre.

Of the survivors, the former Allsopp and Ind Coope breweries, both on Station Street represent the best examples of large 19th-century breweries in Burton, whereas Marston's and the former Everard's brewery are the best examples of small breweries to remain in the town. These buildings with their towering elevations articulated with regularly placed arched windows, are typical of their time, and though not exclusive to Burton in architectural terms, make a vital contribution to maintaining and understanding the town's peculiar historic townscape.

The Fittings

Regarding the industrial heritage of the Marston's building, the plan is not too far removed from the one that existed in 1889, at the time of Alfred Barnard's visit (Barnard I, 396-406). Items of 19th-century plant survive, and the 19th-century functioning of the building can be readily discerned. However, there have been several changes in respect of the fixtures and fittings. These have involved the replacement of the malt hopper, removal of the line shafts, modification of the grist bins, replacement of two of the three coppers, removal of the racking vats and yeast tanks, removal of the engine, and replacement of the first and second floors of the fermentation block. Certainly, at a national level, there are breweries with better preserved 19th-century interiors, such as Hook Norton in Oxfordshire which boasts a steam engine of 1899 still in use, boilers of 1891, line shafting, still driven by the steam engine, a grist mill of 1899 and water pumps supplied by Buxton and Thornley of Burton.

Nevertheless, in a regional context, Marston's importance has been heightened over the last fifty years, as a result of the substantial losses suffered by Burton's brewing heritage. Few of Burton's surviving buildings retain their original plant. The fermenting and conditioning house of the Bass Middle Brewery had new plant installed by 1985 (the brewhouse was demolished in 1960). Allsopp's brewhouse is now used as office accommodation, Clayton & Co. was only in operation between 1875 and 1895, and has long been converted to other uses. Possibly the most significant survival in respect of the internal fittings is Everard's Brewery. The entry in the Statutory List of Buildings of Special Architectural and Historic Interest of 1986 records a cold liquor tank, hot liquor tanks, grist hoppers, mash tuns, malt mill, coppers and fermenting equipment. It is summed up as 'a complete example of a small late C19 town brewery retaining its traditional internal planning, fixtures and fittings'.

The Burton Union System

However, Marston's greatest significance is perhaps as the last brewery in the country to use the Burton Union fermenting system and to retain equipment dating from the 19th-century. This system was one of a number of different fermentation methods that were in use during the late 19th century (Barnard III, 137). To a large extent these methods were regional in their distribution, as is suggested by such names as the Edinburgh, London and Yorkshire systems. A Burton union is a double-decker gantry with a series of fermentation casks fixed at the lower level and a trough above. Tubes extend from the casks to the trough. During fermentation the liquid is pushed up through the pipes and into the trough, where it subsides and returns to the casks. The process leaves yeast trapped in the trough from where it is gathered for use in the next brew, in order to maintain consistency in the character of the product.

The Burton Union system was principally a Burton phenomenon, where it was once universal. Barnard recorded its use in the Burton breweries of Bass & Co., Allsopp & Sons, Truman, Hanbury, Buxton & Co., Charrington & Co., Mann, Crossman & Paulin (now Marston's), Worthington and Co., Marston & Co., Ind Coope, A.B.Walker & Sons,

Salt & Co., The Trustees of the Late Peter Walker (later Everard's and latterly the Heritage Brewery), J.Eadie and Bindley & Co. In addition, it was in widespread use across the Midland region, e.g. at Derby (Alton & Co.), Lichfield (City Brewery Co. & Trent Valley Brewery Co.), Kimberley (T. Hardy), Stone (J. Joule & Son), and Wolverhampton (W. Butler & Co.) and was even adopted as far afield as Reading (H. & G. Simonds) and Edinburgh (William Younger & Co).

The Burton Union system is an expensive method of production and has now all but disappeared. At Marston's it is only used to produce Pedigree, a premium bitter highly rated by real ale enthusiasts. Many breweries that used it are either redundant or have been demolished, whereas those that are still in use have changed to more cost-effective techniques. Whilst it is possible that other union sets survive it must be considered that the likelihood is remote. It may well be that those at Marston's may be the last examples in existence, certainly in a working brewery.

Regarding the historical significance of the existing union sets at Marston's, three union rooms were recorded by Barnard in his 1889 description. It is clear that one of them was in the main building, the current Union Room 1. This room has already been discussed (Hislop 2003, 6). It formerly housed four union sets of which 2/3 Set remains. Close attention to Barnard's description, however, suggests that this was not the original arrangement, as in 1889 the union casks were 'ranged on either side of seven wide avenues' (Barnard I, 404). It does seem, then, that the four unions that were housed in Union Room 1 until recently represent a post-1889 reorganisation. Like many union sets depicted by Barnard, 2/3 Set was constructed of timber, and during reconstruction in 1989 most of these were replaced with new material (Kirkham 2003, 3).

The other two union rooms mentioned by Barnard were housed in a separate building and accommodated ninety-six union casks altogether. They were mounted on iron frames, and are very probably to be identified with some of those that currently occupy Union Room 2, which lies immediately east of the main building. It contains six sets of twenty-four union casks, five of which are identical in construction comprising cast iron columnar feet and cast iron beams, some of which bear the embossed name of Buxton and Thornley, a Burton engineering firm. The sixth set has feet of a different pattern, and steel rather than cast iron beams. In each case the troughs are made of stainless steel and the union has been modified by the addition of steel stanchions to support an upper walkway. Union Room 2 itself is a later 20th-century red brick construction but appears to be a northwestern extension to a late 19th-century single-storey structure roofed in two spans, which may have been one of the 19th-century union rooms described by Barnard.

3.0 Conclusions

Architecturally (using the term to denote its external composition), the main building at Marston's is fairly typical example of a late 19th-century brewery, of which there were many, and it is essentially of regional rather than national significance. However, its importance, as a relatively unaltered example in a nationally important centre of the brewing industry, has increased as demolitions of its contemporaries have proceeded. Its

main architectural interest lies in its role as the centrepiece of the Marston's complex, which has other noteworthy aspects, and as part of the wider industrial landscape that gives Burton its unique character.

Although in most other breweries the internal changes that have taken place would mean that the interior was of no more than regional interest, Marston's is probably unique in retaining a number of union sets, possibly the last survivors of an almost obsolete procedure. Of the two groups recorded by Barnard, that in Union Room 1 in the main building (2/3 Set) is in a more secure context, but its authenticity is suspect. Those in Union Room 2 very probably include the original sets noted by Barnard, and are in a very good state of preservation, and if not in their original positions, are arguably close to their former sites. These Union Room 2 sets have an intrinsic historical value and are well worth preservation.

4.0 Acknowledgements

This report was prepared by Malcolm Hislop, who would like to thank Steve Kirkham of Marston's for his co-operation and assistance.

5.0 References

Barnard, A. 1889-91, *The Noted Breweries of Great Britain and Ireland*, 4 vols.

Cooksey, J. 1984, *Brewery Buildings in Burton on Trent* (Report for the Victorian Society).

Hislop, M. 2003, *Marston's Brewery, Shobnall Road, Burton upon Trent, Staffordshire: An Historic Building Assessment, 2003* (Birmingham Archaeology Report No. 1102).

Kirkham, S. 2003, *Brief History of the Albion Brewery Building*.

Richmond, L. and Turton, A. 1990, *The Brewing Industry: A Guide to Historical Records*.