

Forest Brewery Mitcheldean - Les Tuffley born 1925 - his Notes

The Forest Brewery was founded in 1868 by Thomas Wintle.

In 1870 a new Malthouse was built of local red sandstone and was in production by 1872.

The premises were initially lit by gas, later replaced by electricity.

Francis Wintle, son of Thomas Wintle ran the business from about 1893.

In 1904 they employed some 60 men.

In 1923 Francis Wintle, due to his ill health offered the business for sale by auction but it was withdrawn at £174,500. Mr Kenyon Homfray was Managing Director.

A new business was registered in September 1923 and the brewery was sold to a consortium headed by Kenyon Homfray.

It is said by old employees that a condition of sale was that the brewery would be kept open for at least 7 years.

The Malthouse was damaged by fire on Saturday 28th March 1925.

The new company was eventually acquired by Cheltenham Original Brewery Co. Ltd. together with 72 properties.

The brewery was closed on Saturday 5th April 1930.

Some storage did take place after that date and the Maltings were leased to Colletts Lud, Gloucester until about 1945.

I remember about late 1929 standing by the Mitcheldean Brewery gates watching the traffic entering and leaving the building. My father drove one of the lorries and together with a mate delivered beers to the Abergavenny area.

There was always activity in and around the brewery with lorries, horses and wagons, customers and people after grains, the left overs from the barley used for making malt. Nearly every household had 1 pig or more.

There was a Steam Lorry at the brewery called 'Dorothy' named after Francis Wintle's daughter. Some many years ago it was at a steam rally at Ross-on-Wye and it was owned by Brooks, brewers of Northampton. It is now believed to be in the possession of a private collector.

When supplies of barley were received into the brewery the bags were lifted to the top floor of the maltings. This done by a chain being put through the top of the sack, which was then winched up the outside of the building to disappear through a split trap door. It was the loud bang the doors made as they dropped back into position that could be heard all over Mitcheldean.

My grandfather was a maltster at the brewery. When Colletts of Gloucester took over the maltings after the brewery closed an uncle of mine became head maltster. My father also became a maltster under him. Mr Reg Daniels was Chief Clerk.

I would at times go into the maltings in the evenings with my father when the barley in the hot kilns had to be turned. Each person wore canvas shoes and the shovels were all made of wood to avoid the barley being damaged. The day ended when the large fireplace on the ground floor of the maltings had to be banked up for the night.

The roads through Mitcheldean were very narrow with pavements each side but sufficient for that time, as the village was very much smaller than it is now.

Beers from the brewery were sold throughout the Forest of Dean, parts of Wales and Herefordshire, also Gloucester City.

I remember that Francis Wintle would walk from the brewery to Forest House where he lived, everyone acknowledged him and as young children we had to keep out of his way.

Mr Alfred Brain held a high position at the brewery, he lived in the last house in Belmont Terrace going up Stenders Road. There was a large monkey puzzle tree in the gardens of the house. He was always immaculately dressed and carried a rolled up umbrella.

I actually became involved in the brewery when I was fifteen years old. I had worked for a short while in a Saw Mills and on a farm but they were not for me. I got a job with James Mills a builder from Cinderford, this was in 1940. The brewery, excluding the malthouses, had been taken over for war work and we were preparing it for a company called British Acoustic Films from London. I well remember James Mills bring to me a roll of coloured prints of the brewery and told me to burn them, in fact he stood over me to make sure that I did burn them. I never forgave him for doing it.

The first BAF employees arrived in 1940, just a few. I joined them on 3rd June 1941. Colletts of Gloucester ceased malting in 1945. British Acoustic Films went on to become Rank Xerox and the plant covered 68 acres and at one time employed 5000 people. I left the company on 19th June 1981 having taken early retirement.

L. J. Tuffley

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Les, who worked at RXMP for 40 years, also had a long record of service in union matters and in the community. He was a district councillor for 30 years and until last year was chairman of Mitcheldean parish council. Active in local sports in the past, he still organises the annual charity raft race on the River Wye