

ALBURY BREWERIES & BREWERS

An edited version of an article by John Lynch, (originally published in Albury & District Historical Society in Bulletin 246, February 1987) with additional material from the Trove website.

ALBURY'S first brewery was established in 1856, near the Shoe Liquidation Centre in Dean St, opposite Townsend St [1987]. It was built by Davison and Co, a partnership of Robert Davison, brewer, and John Kaleski, merchant. The *Empire* (Sydney), reported on February 19, 1858:

(From the Border Post, February 13.) ALBURY BREWERY.—We inspected yesterday the operations in progress at the Albury Brewery for producing a capital glass of beer. We can safely pronounce the quality at present made excellent; and have no doubt, when all the improvements contemplated are completed, the brewers will be able to supply a first-rate article, and equal to any made in Beechworth.

<http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/60428688>

John Dickson took over in August, 1860, coming from Woomargama Station, or Dickson's Swamp. Dickson advertised "first-class xxx ales and porter brewed from the finest malt and hops, entirely free from sugar and other substances." He was certainly a good advertisement for his product, with a red nose and large pot-belly. He died in early 1861. The *Empire* reported on February 5, 1861:

SUDDEN DEATH.—A correspondent to the Goulburn Chronicle says:—It is my painful duty to record the death of Mr John Dickson, proprietor of the Albury Brewery. The deceased was found dead in his bed on Saturday morning last. It is to be feared that his death may have been accelerated by his habits, being rather given to intemperance. The deceased was formerly owner of the station of Woomargama, better known to your readers as Dixon's Swamp.

<http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/60491817>

When offering the brewery for sale in 1861 after the death of Dickson, auctioneer John Solomon described the brewery as: "In Dean St, immediately opposite Mr McLaurin's [Fanny Ceres Mill] and containing one acre upon which is erected the brewery, also a dwelling house, servants' rooms, kitchen, outhouses, store, stabling, etc." It was sold with all fittings and machinery for carrying on a retail and wholesale brewery. Solomon also offered an American wagon, four heavy grey horses and one bay mare and said he was confident "the bare announcement of this team being for sale will be a sufficient stimulus, without the aid of any puffing from him."

At this time, Richard Kelly, of the Hume Inn, was advertising wine and spirits at sixpence a glass, ale and porter at two shillings a bottle and Colonial port at one shilling and sixpence a quart. By the mid-1860's, the brewery, owned by Thomas Bullock, was also selling hay, corn, chaff and vinegar, as well as repairing and selling wine casks. Bullock sold out to James Liddle in 1866.

Bullock took it over again by November, 1870 and Liddle built his own brewery on the side of Western Hill. A local correspondent wrote: "A good glass of ale is not to be sneezed at, but many a hogshead has been imbibed of Albury brew merely because nothing better in the shape of malt liquor was procurable." Bullock died in 1871 and soon both breweries closed. Shops were built on the Dean St site.

Two other breweries had started by 1872, the Hume Brewery in Wilson St and the Colonial Porter Brewery in Wodonga Place, next to the Union Bridge. Wodonga also had a brewery.

In January, 1873, Kenneth McLennan advertised his "Albury and Wodonga Breweries, in Dean St, Albury and Sydney St, Wodonga." The *Border Post Albury Almanac* of 1878 listed R O'Keeffe & Co at the Albury Brewery, near the Union Bridge. George Billson Jnr took this over in May, 1879. Billson's parents were early pioneers, migrating to Adelaide before the Californian gold rush, going to California and then to Bendigo in 1852, where they opened a store. The Billsons

settled at Beechworth in 1856, later buying the Ovens Brewery. George Billson was Mayor of Beechworth 1869-71 and served in the Victorian Legislative Assembly from 1877 to his death in 1886. A son, Alfred Arthur Billson, took over the Beechworth brewery in 1882, trading as A A Billson and Co and specialising in "Anglo-Australian Ale." He was a Beechworth councillor for 24 years and the member for Ovens for 23 years.

Another son, George Henry Billson, took over at Albury in 1879 and spent more than £3000 on improvements. He built a four-storey brewery, a chimney stack 15 metres high, engine house and boiler. The brewery had a capacity of 300 quarter-casks of beer and a bottling department for 1000 dozen bottles. The *Ovens and Murray Advertiser* (Beechworth) reported on September 20, 1881:

Mr Billson has made a specialty of bottled ales and porter, as the large stock on hand attests, and has introduced the industry of malting on a large scale, having erected one of the finest malthouses out of Sydney or Melbourne, where, under the able supervision of Mr J Postlethwaite (formerly of Beechworth), a large percentage of malt of the finest quality is annually produced. Altogether, Mr Billson has been the right man in the right place.

<http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/199459440>

Luke Gulson built a malthouse for Billson in Olive St. Headley and Langhammer took over the Hume Brewery in 1882. The former was a rector's son who had come to Australia at 18. He spent six years in Queensland in jobs ranging from droving to escorting gold, and came to NSW as a mounted trooper - he helped capture the Captain Moonlight bushrangers. Headley married Alice Eaton, whose father had a brewery at Wagga. The couple and Langhammer took over the old Hume Brewery (on the site of the old Hume Inn, corner of Townsend and Hume streets).

In July 1888, the two breweries combined as the Albury Brewing and Malting Company Ltd. G H Billson was chairman of the directors, Headley was general manager and Langhammer, brewer. The *Ovens and Murray Advertiser* of June 23, 1888 reported:

A New Company.—The success that has attended the floating of commercial undertakings, which in the capital cities has almost become a rage, has induced Mr G H Billson and Messrs Headley and Langhammer, the respective owners of two Albury breweries, to offer to the public their businesses on terms that are regarded as most favourable. The prospectus has not yet been issued, but the *Border Post* is in a position to state that the company will in a few days be floated, in 25,000 shares at £1 each.



Albury Brewing & Malting Company - early 1900s

<http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/198928354>

The third Billson brother, Walter, started his own brewing business in Dean St in March, 1894. Soon afterwards, G H Billson moved to St Kilda and became a noted cordial-maker and St Kilda councillor.

In his history of Albury, Dr Andrews wrote of the Albury Brewing and Malting Company: "For many years a profitable business was carried on, but lately, in common with all small concerns in the same line, troubled times have been experienced and [in 1911] a new company was

formed." A A Billson's company amalgamated with the Albury operation, becoming the Border United Co-operative Breweries Ltd. The *Border Morning Mail* reported the sale on July 7, 1911:

After protracted negotiations, a co-operative company has been formed, under the title of the "Border United Co-operative Breweries Ltd," to take over the Albury brewery and the Anglo-Australian brewery, Beechworth. The capital is said to be £21,500 in £1 shares. £1000 deposit has been paid on the purchase of the Albury brewery, and the new company is already in possession. The Albury hotelkeepers are taking shares, 22 already having put their names down. The directors are the Hon A A Billson, MLA, Beechworth; Mr G H Billson, Elsternwick; and Mr A B Menzell, Melbourne. We are told that an Albury director will also be appointed.

<http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/109037355>

On July 14, 1911, the *Albury Banner* reported:

The Albury and Beechworth Breweries.—in connection with the purchase of the Albury and Beechworth breweries by the Border United Co-operative Breweries Ltd, a Melbourne expert has inspected the Albury Brewery and Malting Co's plant, and his report was of a most, satisfactory character. He was surprised to find such a splendidly equipped brewery in the district. A few minor alterations were recommended, and the new company are putting those in hand at once. It is expected to have everything in readiness to meet local orders in about a month's time. On Thursday night a meeting of Albury hotelkeepers was held at the Globe Hotel, when the question of taking shares and supporting the new company was discussed. Those present, numbering 22, representing a majority of the licensed victuallers in the town and district, agreed to further the interests of the company, applied for shares, and promised their hearty support to the new business.

<http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/101164289>

The new plant was under way by August 31, 1911 as the *Border Morning Mail* reported:

The new plant at the brewery of Border United Co-operative Breweries Company Ltd, Union Bridge, is now putting through its first brew which will be on tap at the local hotels on Friday next.

<http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/109038781>

The quality of the beer was endorsed by the *Freeman's Journal* (Sydney), on February 29, 1912:

Visitors to Albury should not fail to sample the local-made beer, and they will acknowledge they never tasted better. It has a beautiful rich golden colour, and exceedingly bright and sparkling, with mellow flavour, so very different from the average country beers. The flavour reminds one of the famous old English Burton ale. The success of the Albury beer is due to the fact that the manager, Mr Farmer, is one of the most practical experts, and spares no expense to turn out a first-class article.

<http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/111090597>

Murray Breweries Pty Ltd formed in November 1914 and in December they purchased Border United Co-operative Breweries Ltd. The *Ovens & Murray Advertiser* reported:

The spirit merchant's license held by the Border United Breweries Co-operative Company Ltd, was transferred to the Murray River Proprietary Company, which was represented by Mr H H Guy, joint liquidator of the first-named company and secretary to the second.

<http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/92069851>

By 1920 production at the Albury Brewery had ceased and a failed attempt was made to sell the site. The *Albury Banner* of December 17, 1920 reported:

ALBURY BREWERY "PASSED IN" Messrs Moore and Davis submitted for sale the old brewery building, near the Union Bridge, Albury. Mr W Moore, who acted as salesman, pointed out that the premises were being offered for sale owing to the impossibility of reviving the brewing industry through the unsuitability of the water for beer. An offer of £1500 was received, but this did not meet the owners' reserve and the property was passed in for private sale. Mr Zwar, for the owners, intimated that the owners would be prepared to deal liberally with any prospective purchaser.

<http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/102237280>

In July 1922, the site was sold as reported in the *Albury Banner* of July 21, 1922:

ALBURY BREWERY SOLD. Messrs Moore and Davis report having sold, on account of the Murray Breweries Proprietary Limited, by private treaty, the Albury Brewery to Mr E E Waite, manager of "Willigobung" Station, Tumbarumba. The property comprises the old brewery buildings, residence, and about 32 acres of land. The same firm also report having sold, on account of Mr Waite, by private treaty, the brewery buildings (for removal) to Mr F J McCann, of Crisp-street, Albury. The price paid for the property by Mr Waite has not been disclosed, but is believed to be in the vicinity of £3000. It is believed that Mr Waite's intention is to run a dairy on the brewery property, and that he will carry out buildings and other extensive improvements. It is said to be Mr McCann's intention to utilise the material of the brewery building, which he has purchased, in the erection of several cottages on his land adjoining "Karoola."

<http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/102314584>