

Billson Family Breweries

Joe Wooding

George Henry Billson (1844-1927) was born in Lancashire, England, eldest of five children of George Billson (1817-1886) and his wife Isabella. The family migrated to Adelaide in 1848, subsequently joining the 1850s California gold rush.

Returning to Australia in 1852, they opened a store in Bendigo before settling in Wooragee in 1856 where they built a 2-storey hotel. The family bought the Ovens Brewery in 1865. In 1879, George Henry moved to Albury, buying the former Colonial Porter Brewery near the Union Bridge from Richard O'Keeffe & Co. Billson immediately spent more than £3,000 on improvements.

Younger brother Alfred Arthur Billson (1858-1930) joined his father in the Beechworth operation in 1882. It became the Anglo-Australian Brewery Co Ltd, specialising in 'Anglo Australian Ale.'

In July 1888 the Albury Brewing and Malting Co Ltd formed when the Hume Brewery, run by Messrs Headley and Langhammer, combined with GH Billson Brewery. GHB became chairman, Headley general manager and Langhammer, brewer.



Travellers could not miss Billson's Brewery near the Union Bridge over the Murray.

GH Billson served as an alderman in Albury 1881-1896 and mayor 1885-1886 and again in 1893. He relocated to Melbourne in 1896, setting up a cordial and aerated water factory in Elsternwick. He was elected to St Kilda City Council (1901-1911) and mayor in 1909.

Alfred Arthur and the Albury operation amalgamated in 1911, becoming the Border United Co-op Breweries Ltd.



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Two years later the brewery was sold to Murray Breweries Pty Ltd. Another brother, Walter J Billson ran a brewery at 674 Dean Street from 1896. He was an Albury alderman 1896-1906 and mayor 1899-1900, again in 1902.

Border Morning Mail, July 19, 1922 reported "Old Landmark to Disappear." The house with nine rooms, cellar, and 32 acres was sold to E E Waite of Tumbarumba for dairying. He renamed it 'Courabyra.' The brewery and outbuildings were sold for demolition to F J McCann, Albury. Some of the bricks were used in the buttresses of the Albury War Memorial.

The house was the Bridge Inn, built by Daniel Driscoll in 1860. In a letter to Waite's widow in 1954, Frank Shepard recounted to her that he had worked at the brewery when the second Union Bridge opened, (1899) and took his bride to live in the Brewer's House, choosing to use the French derivative, naming it 'Brasseurville.' Albury Car Club bought the property in the 1960s. Bob Jane took over in the 1980s. The house now lies derelict.