

# FROM BEER TO BOMBS: WETHERED'S BREWERY, MARLOW DURING THE FIRST WORLD WAR

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*The Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies holds an impressive collection of the archives of the former Wethered's Brewery that operated in Marlow between 1758 and 1993.<sup>1</sup> Within that collection are documents relating to the brewery during the First World War. Combined with other contemporary primary source material, these provide a fascinating insight into the impact of the conflict on the brewery and its role in munitions production. A detailed examination of the company during the period 1914–1918 both highlights and informs areas of historical interest, in particular the impact of the war on industry, armaments production and the role of women.*

## WETHERED'S BREWERY AT THE OUTBREAK OF THE WAR

In 1914 Wethered's was a medium-sized brewery that largely sold its beer through its owned public houses in Marlow and the Thames Valley. It also bottled and sold spirits. With a monthly average of 122 employees in 1914, it was the largest employer in Marlow.<sup>2</sup>

The report to the Annual General Meeting in December 1913 records a relatively healthy financial position for the company. A dividend was agreed of 8% for the year on Ordinary Share Capital of £60,000. Over the preceding twelve months, the brewery had acquired Messrs Henry Bird and Son's Brewery in Reading and nine accompanying licensed houses, and had seen sales increase by 5% on the preceding year. Before the outbreak of the war, it also won a number of prestigious awards for the quality of its beer.<sup>3</sup>

## SALES OF ALCOHOL DURING THE WAR

The outbreak of the war brought about what the report to the 1914 Annual General Meeting described as 'difficult circumstances' for the brewery. Although it was able to declare a dividend for the year of 10% on Ordinary Share Capital, sales grew by only 2% compared with the previous twelve months. That growth occurred before the outbreak of the war in the summer 1914 which

resulted almost immediately in a decline in sales volumes. Indeed, the annual report highlighted a loss of over 900 worth of barrel sales between August and October.<sup>4</sup>

It was not solely in relation to beer sales that the brewery felt the impact of the outbreak of war. In its annual report in October 1914, it reported that it had sold one of its best horses to the War Department, albeit at a profit of £5 over what it had paid to acquire the horse three years earlier. Additionally, one of its petrol lorries was acquired by the War Department for £90 over and above the value recorded in the brewery's books of approximately £362.<sup>5</sup>

It was however in terms of falling sales that the impact of the war was most pronounced and prolonged. As Figure 1 shows, the volume of beer sales overall fell by 52% during the period of the war. In addition, the sales of spirits fell by 60% between 1914 and 1918.<sup>6</sup>

Changes in both demand and supply contributed to these significant declines in volume. On the demand side, the increasing absence of local men through military service deprived the brewery of its natural base of customers both in pubs and through private sales. Both voluntary and conscription recruitment rates were high in Marlow.<sup>7</sup> As well as the loss of revenue from a diminishing resident population, the brewery suffered as a result of the cancellation of events that would normally have been expected to have generated revenue

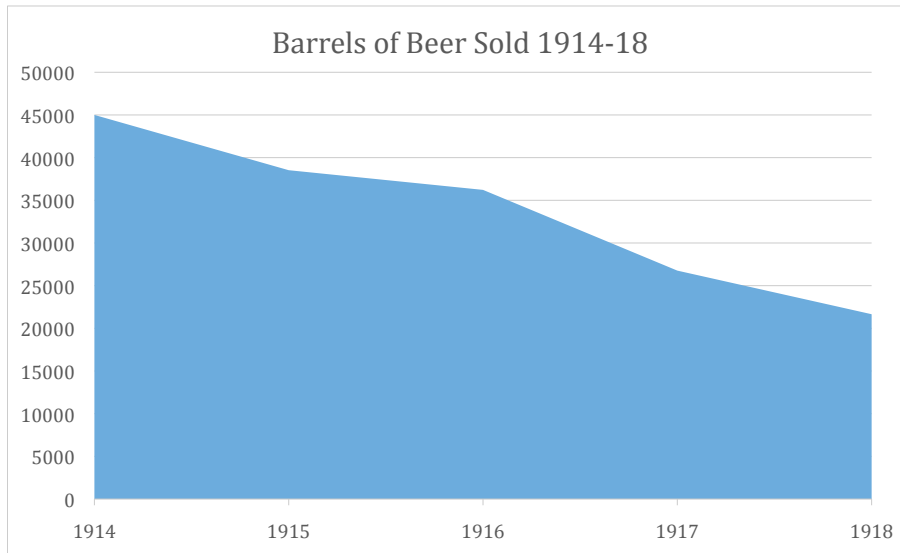


FIGURE 1 Wethered's Beer Sales 1914–1918

from a broader population. Its annual report from October 1914 highlighted these concerns when it commented that 'the war has put an end to pleasures on the river, regattas [have been] abandoned and the river deserted. Football matches which generally bring in people of the beer drinking class are also being abandoned.'<sup>8</sup> In addition, the annual summer training camp for territorial soldiers that was held at nearby Bovingdon Green was cancelled in August 1914 due to the outbreak of war, 'so that instead of being a source of profit the transaction turned out to be a loss as we had to pay for the hire of the marquees.'<sup>9</sup>

This concern about the falling volume of sales was to continue throughout the war period. In a return to the Government in January 1917, the brewery stated that 'so far as the ordinary business of the company prospects are not good. There is no accumulation of private orders unexecuted.'<sup>10</sup>

Much of the decline in sales can be attributed to Government intervention that impacted upon both demand and supply. Part of that intervention was due to the reduction in raw material supplies to Britain from 1915 as a result of the effective German submarine campaign against merchant shipping. The Government responded by restricting both the volumes of beer production and its strength.<sup>11</sup> These restrictions were reflected in the minutes of the brewery directors' meeting

of 13 June 1916 which noted that brewing 'restrictions came into force on 1 April and will amount to a reduction of 15% on last year's trace.'<sup>12</sup> In light of the restrictions on output, the directors resolved in June 1917 to limit the types of beer produced throughout the remainder of the war and to reduce the gravities of them.<sup>13</sup>

Government intervention was undertaken increasingly in the context of a hostile political environment, driven by prominent temperance supporters such as David Lloyd George. As early as February 1915, he declared that 'drink is doing us more damage in the war than all the German submarines put together... We are fighting Germany, Austria and Drink; and as far as I can see the greatest of these three deadly foes is Drink.'<sup>14</sup> In an attempt to reduce demand for alcohol, the Government therefore also applied price controls, reduced licensing hours and introduced regulations to limit practices such as 'treating'.<sup>15</sup>

At the local level, the Wethered's brewery's Managing Director reported in February 1917 'that the Aldershot Military Authorities were demanding that 50% of the licences in that division should not be renewed', presumably because of concerns about alcohol consumption amongst recruits based there.<sup>16</sup> This generated concern for the future of the brewery's licences in nearby Wokingham, although the Managing Director was

able to report later that month 'that all licences were renewed on 20th instant, but a number of licences were cautioned by the bench and amongst them our tenants of two pubs.'<sup>17</sup> Overall, it was clear that, as the brewery noted rather tersely in one of its regular returns to the Government in October 1917, 'beer sales [are] very much restricted by legislation.'<sup>18</sup>

Demand was further dampened as the price of beer rose sharply during the war, both because of inflation caused by the scarcity of raw materials and because of increased alcohol duties.<sup>19</sup> The company's annual accounts show that the sales value of a barrel of beer rose from £1.95 (in decimal currency) in 1914 to £4.37 in 1918, an increase of almost 125%.<sup>20</sup>

While a marked increase in wages during the war will have helped to cushion the impact for beer drinkers of increased prices, and there may have been some compensating benefit for the brewery resulting from what one contemporary newspaper described as the 'marked and deplorable increase in drinking amongst women', it is clear that overall sales fell markedly during the period 1914–1918.<sup>21</sup>

This decline in sales was inevitably reflected in reduced volumes sold in the brewery's licensed premises, a feature that was common to all parts of the country.<sup>22</sup> For example, the number of gallons of spirit sold at the *George and Dragon*, Marlow fell from 249 in 1914 to 92 in 1918.<sup>23</sup> During the same period, the number of barrels of draught beer sold at the *Duke of Cambridge* fell from 337 to 139.<sup>24</sup>

It is not clear whether it was precipitated by the decline in the sales of beer and spirits, but in 1916 the brewery also began to produce and sell bottles of aerated water. However, the revenue generated by 1918 from this source of £3,809 is small in comparison to beer sales that produced net revenue of almost £95,000 in the same period and made no significant contribution to the company's profits.<sup>25</sup>

### MUNITIONS CONTRACTS, 1915–1918

By May 1915, the failure of British assaults against German forces on the Western Front was being attributed to deficiencies in the number of shells and the quality of their production. The establishment of the Ministry of Munitions as a result of this 'shells-crisis' represented a step-change in arrangements for the production of shells in Britain

which required the involvement of a larger number of companies.<sup>26</sup>

The reasons for the brewery's involvement in munitions production are not explicitly stated in the available records, but it is reasonable to assume that it was in part driven by falling revenues from its core business and the existence of spare capacity that prompted it to respond to the national crisis. Additionally, having converted an old cask washing building into an engineering shop in 1907, it also had the facility within which to undertake munitions production.<sup>27</sup>

The first reference to the company being involved in munitions production is in the minutes of the Ordinary General Meeting of 14 December 1915 when it was stated that 'the Company has been able to give assistance to the manufacture of munitions and at the present time is successfully executing a considerable order for shells. This work is being carried out under the supervision of the Company's Engineer Mr. V.B. Butt.'<sup>28</sup>

Whether driven by patriotic commitment or the prospect of an attractive commercial return, or some combination of the two, the brewery decided to invest in the development of its munitions production facilities and in March 1916, the directors 'resolved to sanction the expenditure of a sum not exceeding £200 on the purchase of machine tools for making munitions and also to authorise the MD to enter into further contracts for the manufacture of shells.'<sup>29</sup>

In June 1916 the Managing Director reported that 'our contract for 3" Stokes Trench Bombs has been extended for a further quantity of 2,500 more or less at the rate of 250 per week at 9/6 [9 shillings and 6 pence] each (as against 13/3) to be delivered by 30 June 1916. Economies in manufacture had been effected since the first contract.'<sup>30</sup> In August 1916, the Directors noted that 'it was agreed... dated 26 June 1916 to accept the offer of extension of contract for 250 3" Trench Bombs per week from 1 July to 30 September 1916, making a total of 3,250 at the reduced price of 8/9 [8 shillings and 9 pence] per bomb.'<sup>31</sup>

At some point during 1916, the brewery also began to produce high explosive shells. In July 1916 a return to the Ministry of Munitions records the brewery as contractors for 18 pounder high explosive shells,<sup>32</sup> while in December, it was 'resolved to accept a contract for 18 pounder shells at a minimum of 250 per week for 6 months from 1

January 1917. It was further resolved to acquire the necessary plant for carrying out the new contract at a cost of £300.<sup>33</sup>

The production of high explosive shells increased significantly during 1917 as the brewery won further Government contracts. In June, 'it was agreed...dated 19 April 1917 to accept the offer of extension of contract for 18 pounder HE shells to 30 September 1917 and to increase the weekly output from 250 to 500 from 1 July 1917 or earlier if possible.' This contract was then extended further to the end of December, with an increase in the number of shells per week to 600 and then from January 1918 with an output of 1,000 shells per week.<sup>34</sup>

This ramping up of production necessitated further investment in the purchase of 'additional second-hand tools to the value of £275 to enable the Company to increase materially the output of munitions.'<sup>35</sup> It was also reported in October that 'we are working day and night shifts on 18pdr H.E. shells.'<sup>36</sup>

The final year of the war at first saw a scaling back in the intensity of munitions production at the brewery. HE shell production was initially reduced to 750 shells per week and, in April, to 400 shells per week. However, in June, 'it was resolved to authorise the MD to sign a contract for 800 shells per week from 1 to 30 June 1918 and then 1200 shells per week subject to 6 weeks' notice at the reduced price of 11s 5d (in lieu of 11s 10d).'<sup>37</sup> This period also saw some challenges in production as the brewery reported in May that 'plant [was] occasionally idle in consequence of delay of delivery of steel and copper bands.'<sup>38</sup>

In October, 'the MD reported that the Company have received instructions from the Ministry of Munitions to change over from 1,200 18 pound HE shells (11/2 net) per week to 2,000 3 inch target smoke shells per week at 8 shillings nett per shell. This was agreed to.' However, this final phase of munitions production was short-lived because, as the Managing Director reported in November, 'in consequence of the Armistice having been signed



FIGURE 2 Wethered's Munitions Workers c. December 1918. Photo courtesy of Michael Eagleton

he has received from the Ministry of Munitions a letter thanking the Company and the employees for their services and giving 6 weeks' notice to terminate the contract.<sup>39</sup> In its annual report presented in January 1919, the brewery recorded that 'it will be a matter of interest to the shareholders to know that, up to the time when the last contract for shells was terminated, shortly before Xmas, 7,021 3 inch Stokes Bombs and 60,793 shells of various calibres had been turned out from the Engineering Department of the Brewery.'<sup>40</sup> Pride in its contribution to the war effort is clear from the photograph of munitions workers taken at the end of the war. In its annual report from January 1919, the brewery gave credit for its performance on the munitions contracts 'mainly to Mr. V.B. Butt, the Company's engineer and also his staff and to the zealous co-operation of the "munition girls" who were trained on the premises.'<sup>41</sup>

Although the brewery's documents refer to shell production, it more precisely manufactured shell cases. It is extremely unlikely that any filling of cases with explosives took place in the centre of Marlow. In the absence of any supporting details, it is reasonable to assume the output was empty shell cases that were then sent to an ordnance factory for filling with propellant and the fitting of the explosive shell. This is consistent with the oral testimony

of local residents who participated in a community history project organized by the Marlow Society in the late 1980s.<sup>42</sup>

It is therefore likely that the brewery formed part of an increasingly sophisticated supply chain initiated by the Ministry of Munitions and managed through the South Midlands Munitions Committee.<sup>43</sup> While the brewery's documents suggest that its contracts were negotiated and concluded directly with the Ministry, it is quite possible that it was a sub-contractor to a more established armaments firm, particularly in the early stages of munitions production as this was the practice elsewhere. Due to the inability of the Royal Ordnance Factories (ROFs) staff to manage sub-contracting, it was decided to adopt the policy of utilising the resources and knowledge of the armament firms themselves to the utmost, and to rely upon them to arrange for the allocation of work among inexperienced firms, and for the consequent co-ordination in the flow of the products of manufacture, and thus to decentralise a task which threatened to overwhelm the capacity of the War Office or the ROF.

The manufacturing of shell cases required the use of special presses and dies to shape the cases. Additionally, to prevent internal stresses cracking in the brass, the heating process of annealing was



FIGURE 3 Photo of shell cases, courtesy of <http://cartridgecollectors.org/?page=introduction-to-artillery-shells-and-shell-casings>; accessed online August 2016

TABLE 1 Profitability of munitions contracts

<i>Date of report</i>	<i>Munitions contract</i>	<i>Reported profit £ (approximate)</i>
August 1917	4	776
October 1917	5	1,628
January 1918	6	1,982
April 1918	7	1,861
June 1918	8	2,251
October 1919	Final winding up	168

required, as was turning. It is quite possible that the specialist equipment required for these processes was the subject of the capital purchases referred to in the Board minutes.

While the production of munitions represented a significant diversification from the brewery's core business, its financial value should not be overstated. The accounts show that beer and spirit production remained by far the predominant element of the brewery's turnover during the war. For example, income in 1918 from munitions contracts was £12,510, representing just 13% of the value of beer sales which totaled over £94,500.<sup>44</sup>

The brewery's records do assiduously record the financial return from each of its main munitions contracts, as set out in Table 1.<sup>45</sup>

#### EMPLOYMENT AT THE BREWERY DURING THE WAR

Large-scale recruitment into the army presented a problem for the brewery, not only in terms of reduction in domestic demand for alcohol but also in terms of labour supply. A large number of its male employees responded positively in the early stages of the war to calls for men to enlist. In addition, many brewery workers were members of territorial and reserve units, making them liable to be called up. By November 1914, 21 men had joined the colours and by December 1915 this number had risen to 44. At that time, another 21 employees had been attested under the Derby scheme, making them eligible for service while four had been found medically unfit.<sup>46</sup> At the end of the war the brewery produced a roll of honour which is now located in the Royal British Legion Hall in Marlow. It records the names of 80 men and one woman from the company who served during the conflict.

The strains placed upon the brewery's operations by this significant attrition of its workforce became apparent with the introduction of conscription in 1916. In March that year, the brewery appealed to the local conscription appeals tribunal for temporary exemption from conscription for two of its foremen, Herbert Swadling and Albert Lloyd. The brewery argued that these experienced employees were critical to the effective and safe operation of its core brewing business and that it would take time to find and train appropriate replacements. The tribunal accepted the appeal and granted a three-month exemption, with the chairman Jack Langley noting that 'the brewery had a splendid record for men on service, and they appreciated that fact.'<sup>47</sup> In July, the brewery sought to have the exemption for Lloyd extended on the grounds that it had not been able to find an appropriate replacement for him. It argued that his conscription would require the brewery to divert resources from munitions production. On this occasion, the tribunal rejected the appeal but requested the military authorities not to call Lloyd up before 30 September.<sup>48</sup> In the end, Lloyd's military career was to prove short-lived as he was invalided out of the army in the autumn of 1917 as a result of illness.<sup>49</sup>

In general, the brewery's response to the attrition of its skilled male workforce appears to have been remarkably stoical. Its appeals for Swadling and Lloyd were purely for temporary rather than absolute exemption. In making those appeals in March 1916, it stressed that they were the only ones that were proposed. The brewery was good to its word in that respect and made no further appeals until August 1917 when it successfully appealed against the conscription of A.S. Seaton on the grounds that he was the last skilled cooper in the company, that

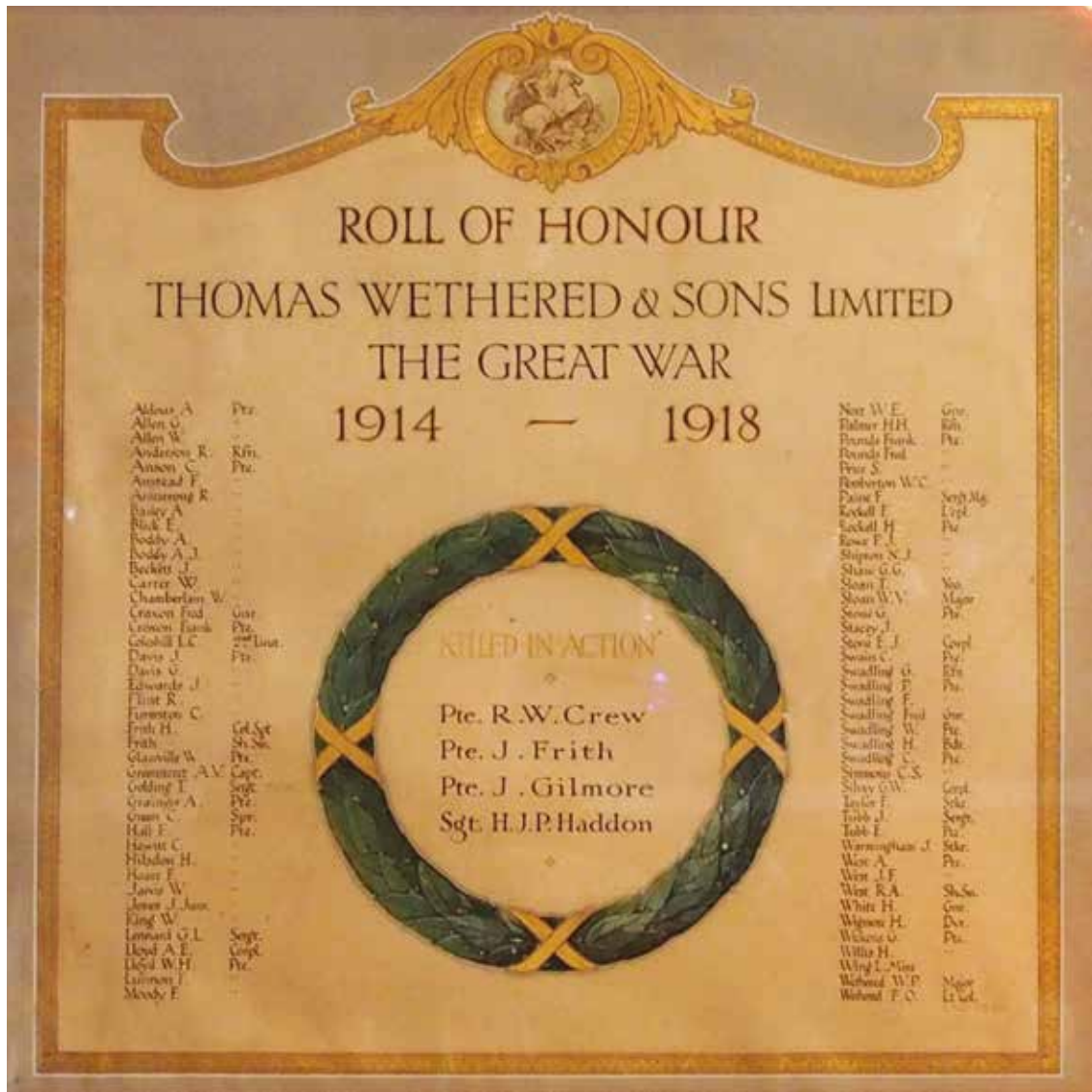


FIGURE 4 Wethered Brewery Roll of Honour. Photo courtesy of Shaun Murphy

there was sufficient work for two coopers and that no replacement could be found.<sup>50</sup>

The brewery's stoicism may have been partly attributable to the fact that the small number of remaining men working in munitions production were exempt from conscription.<sup>51</sup> It was probably also due to the fact that, in employing local women in both the brewing and munitions parts of its businesses, it found a ready source of alternative labour to replace the men who enlisted.

The brewery had begun to employ women in 1913, noting in its annual report for that year

'We have replaced a number of the boys by women and we are very satisfied with the change. We have now 13 women and 8 boys. The women are more careful in handling the bottles and consequently breakages are less...The conduct of the women is quite satisfactory whereas the boys were always troublesome.'<sup>52</sup>

As the war continued and increasing numbers of



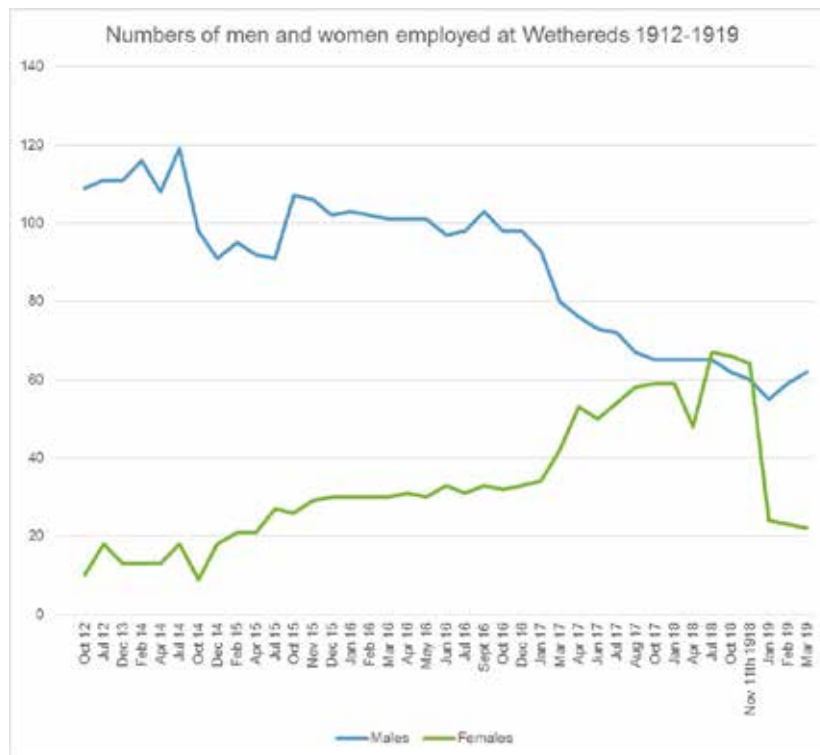


FIGURE 5 Employment of men and women, 1912–1919

men enlisted, so the brewery now employed more and more women. Between February 1914 and the end of 1916, the number of women employed grew from 13 to 33, while the number of adult male employees fell from 116 to 98. In addition, at the end of 1916 it employed approximately 20 boys and girls. With the combined impact of increased munitions work and military conscription, these trends accelerated. In May 1917 brewery records list 16 women and 8 men working on munitions contracts. By the end of 1918 that number had grown to 41 women and only 3 men. By July 1918, the brewery was employing more women (67) than men (65). By the following January when the war had ceased, the munitions contracts had come to an abrupt end and soldiers were beginning to return to England and the number of women employed had fallen to just 24. At that point there were only 55 men working in the company, and although that figure rose slowly over the next few months, the workforce did not return to its pre-war strength of about 130 people for some time.<sup>53</sup>

The munitions work was well-remunerated compared with other employment options at the time. In 1917–18 agricultural workers in Buckinghamshire could expect to earn around 20 shillings a week in winter, rising to 30 shillings in summer.<sup>54</sup> The munitions workers at the brewery could expect to earn 25 shillings a week for the day shift and 28 for the night shift. By the end of the war that had risen to 33 shillings and 9 pence for the day shift and 42 shillings and 2 pence for the night shift.<sup>55</sup>

These wages were not strictly market rates. Wages in the Government-run national factories were set by the Department of Munitions. Although munitions contractors were not strictly obliged to match government-set wage rates, most felt that they had little choice but to offer the government rate, simply to be sure of attracting enough workers to fulfil their contracts.<sup>56</sup>

Women benefited both from the higher wages on offer and from the insistence, in a series of special government regulations issued to regu-



late women's wages in munitions work, that they should be paid the same rate as skilled men for the same work. For example, in the order of October 1915, employers were instructed that, 'Women employed on work customarily done by fully skilled men...shall be paid the time rates of the tradesmen whose work they undertake... Where women are employed on piece work, they shall be paid the same piece-work prices as are customarily paid to men for the job.'<sup>57</sup> There was certainly a flexibility in the rates that the brewery paid its women employees, as in August 1916 the Directors agreed 'to increase the women's wages by 1/- per week from 1 July 1916.'<sup>58</sup>

If weekly wage rates were high, actual earnings were generally higher still. Pay packets were frequently boosted by war bonuses, and overtime was readily available. A typical worker would expect to earn double time on Sundays and public holidays. After 9 hours on any ordinary day and 5 hours on Saturday they would be paid time and a quarter for the first 2 hours and time and a half thereafter.<sup>59</sup>

But these were long shifts. In 1916 the normal working week was 53 hours, and although this was later reduced to 48 hours, it is clear from brewery records that from the beginning of 1917 onwards people were also working large amounts of overtime. In January 1917, for example, 50 people each worked an average of 11.5 hours overtime in the week. For the rest of that year and into 1918, the total amount of overtime worked varied between 450 and 550 hours per month.<sup>60</sup>

In the late 1980s, the Marlow Society conducted an oral history exercise to capture people's memories of life in the town during the First World War. Lily Tucker participated in this exercise and recalled her time as a munitions worker at the brewery, commenting that 'I used to go in at six o'clock in the morning and come home at five in the afternoon. I went every day, all but Saturdays. I used to come home at eleven then and have a good clear up and do my washing.'<sup>61</sup>

The remuneration of the munitions workers needs to be seen in the context of national changes in pay. Wage rates throughout the country broadly doubled between 1914 and 1918.<sup>62</sup> Earnings rose by even more, driven up by a longer working day and a marked increase in productivity as machinery improved and war demands forced businesses to become more efficient.

This in turn partly reflected high inflation during the war period. As the war progressed, food became scarce and prices rose rapidly. From 1914 to 1918 prices broadly doubled, and although wages generally kept pace (and in some cases rose faster), people struggled to maintain their pre-war standards of living as food became hard to find.<sup>63</sup>

The brewery documents record regular additional payments to employees, in part reflecting inflationary pressures in the broader economy and in part the importance of the munitions work. One noted beneficiary was the Chief Engineer, Victor Butt, who had joined the brewery in 1903 and whose services were highly valued by the company. Butt had already demonstrated his success in negotiating increases in his remuneration linked to developments in the technology of the brewery and, with the move into munitions production, he demonstrated the same degree of financial acumen.<sup>64</sup> In August 1916 he was awarded a bonus of £100 in relation to the completion of the second munitions contract, followed by a similar amount for the third contract in December that year. Thereafter, Butt received 20% of the profit secured by the brewery on its munitions contracts. In January 1918, this arrangement was amended so that the rate would be at 20% or a total sum of £500 over a twelve-month period, whichever was the smaller.<sup>65</sup> Between August 1916 and October 1919, Butt received bonuses relating to completed munitions contracts of an estimated total of £2,028.

Other employees involved in munitions work were also rewarded through bonuses. Those working on the second and third munitions contracts were awarded a bonus of £40 in August 1916 and again in December 1916. Thereafter, select employees shared 10% of the profits on the fourth contract. By the time the profits of the fifth contract had been calculated in October 1917, the distribution arrangements had become more complex. The seven male employees engaged in the contract earned bonuses of between £3 and £50 while the women working on the contract were awarded 'one week's wages to those who have served over 3 months, half week's wages to those who have served one and less than 3 months.' A more select list of 16 employees, including some of the women, were awarded bonuses ranging from £1 to £50 for their contribution to the later contracts.<sup>66</sup>

In addition to bonuses linked to the muni-

tions contracts, the brewery awarded regular war bonuses to its employees. In March 1915, the Directors agreed 'to make an allowance towards the increased cost of living of 1/- per week to all employees who had put in full time. This allowance commencing on 20 February 1915 to cease with the termination of the war or sooner if the cost of living should again become as it was before the war.' In October that year it was resolved 'to increase the war allowance by 1 shilling per week in order to meet the extra expense of the winter months, the additional allowance to cease on March 31 1916.'<sup>67</sup>

This set the pattern for a regular flow of one-off payments. These seemed to consist of three elements. Firstly, there were additional payments that broadly reflected the increased cost of living for employees. Secondly, there were additional war bonuses paid to a select group of doubtless highly valued employees, many linked to the munitions contracts, and that were additional to other bonuses they received. Finally, and potentially to address any fears of creating a two-tier workforce between those employed on munitions work and those employed within the brewery, there were occasional payments made to the broader workforce. Thus in October 1915 'it was resolved that the clerical staff shall be paid a further gratuity of £2.10.0 each' while in December that year the brewery paid a war bonus of 10 shillings to each man, 5 shillings to each woman and 2/6 shillings [2 shillings and 6 pence] to each boy, other than those employees who were in receipt of special bonuses. Similar payments were made in December 1916, October 1917 and October 1918.<sup>68</sup>

The brewery also made payments of allowances to its employees who were serving or their families. An initial list of allowances to be paid was approved by the Directors in September 1914. Throughout the war, it also sent a Christmas present of cigarettes to each employee serving in the forces. It was also ready to consider exceptional appeals, for example in granting in March 1917 an allowance of £2 10 shillings per month to W.P.J. Rowe while he was serving, presumably on the grounds of hardship. Additionally, in August 1916 it was resolved to continue the payment until December to the mother of Henry Haddon whose death at Gallipoli had been confirmed in July.<sup>69</sup>

The impression from the minutes of the Directors' meeting – perhaps deliberate – was of a

company that was keen to demonstrate its broader commitment to supporting the national war effort. In September 1914, it agreed to make a donation of £105 to a number of war relief funds and in November agreed to donate 36 pints of beer per week for the benefit of Belgian refugees living in the town. The following month, 'it was resolved that a cheque for one guinea should be sent to Lt Col Wethered towards the expenses of a Christmas dinner for the Bucks Battalion.' In February 1917, the brewery 'resolved to grant facilities to brewery employees to take up War Savings Certificates up to a sum not exceeding £5 for any one employee, the company agreeing to pay the last shilling on the first certificate and 6d on the remainder...It was resolved to grant facilities to the staff and to a few selected employees to take up War Loans from £5 to £20.' Finally, in November 1918 the Directors agreed to give 100 guineas to support the creation of a war memorial in Marlow and in July 1919 it made a donation of £25 and gave 2.5 barrels of beer and 4 firkins of ginger beer to a peace collection in the town.<sup>70</sup>

The brewery also demonstrated its commitment to its broader civic responsibilities by providing the services of its head brewer, John Holland, to serve on the tribunal that considered appeals by local men against their conscription. Holland attended 34 of the 39 meetings of the tribunal between February 1916 and the end of the war, ensuring that he was excluded from considerations of cases of brewery employees for fear of a perceived conflict of interest.<sup>71</sup> In general, the broader contribution of the brewery during the period of the war is consistent with the commonly held view that 'a brewer had an obligation to his community.'<sup>72</sup>

#### BREWERY PROFITABILITY DURING THE WAR

As noted earlier, the brewery reported profits on each of its munitions contracts and paid bonuses to relevant staff out of these. The financial accounts for 1918 report a healthy profit from munitions production of £4,384 on a turnover of £12,510. However, the significance of the contribution of the munitions contracts to the financial health of the brewery should not be overstated. Healthy as the margin on munitions work was in 1918, it accounted for only 12% of overall operating profits for the year. The key contribution to profitability

TABLE 2 Profitability of beer during the war<sup>74</sup>

Year	Profit (£) from beer	Year on year % change	Unit sales value £ per barrel (decimalised)
1914	19,037	N/A	1.95
1915	21,358	12.19	2.73
1916	16,977	(20.51)	2.94
1917	30,444	79.32	3.87
1918	27,816	(8.63)	4.37

came from within the brewery's core business.

While beer and spirits sales fell over the course of the war, operating profitability improved. Table 2 records the net profits from beer sales during the course of the war. A significant contribution to this improved profitability came from the increase in the unit sales value, representing a combination of inflation and additional duties. It would also seem, however, that the brewery benefited from the astute practice of building up its supply of key raw materials at the outbreak of the war and therefore limiting its exposure to inflation in a core part of its cost base.<sup>73</sup>

The war brought with it some exceptional expenditure items, for example the purchase in October 1915 of war risk insurance against the threat of enemy aircraft bombing. Notwithstanding the foresight it showed in building up its stocks of raw materials in 1914, the brewery did complain of increased costs in production.<sup>75</sup>

More generally, the reports to the annual general meetings throughout the war period repeatedly refer to the considerable challenges faced by the brewery. Dividends were postponed or were generally lower than in the pre-war period. This was a source of tension between the directors that culminated in the resignation of one of their number, John Power.<sup>76</sup> The main contributory factor appears to have been the heavy taxation demands upon the brewery that severely impacted upon the profits available for distribution. Each year it reported 'the proportion of nett earnings of the company taken by the state by means of duties on beer and spirits, income tax, inhabited house duty, and licence duty.' Compared with a pre-war figure of approximately 55%, this rose to 66.67% in 1915 and 71.75% in 1916. In its report for the year ending October 1917, it highlighted the need to pay Excess

Profits Duty on its retained sums.

While many breweries recorded improved profitability during the war years,<sup>77</sup> the fortunes of the Wethered Brewery were accurately summarised in a report in *The Investors' Guardian* from January 1921 that commented 'the war years were not so prosperous for Thomas Wethered and Sons Ltd. Of Marlow, as they were for most brewery undertakings. The engineering department of the business engaged in munitions work and contributed to profits, but taxation took a very heavy toll. Indeed, such substantial provision had to be made for taxes that it is a moot point whether the company did much better than in pre-war years.'<sup>78</sup>

#### ROLL OF HONOUR

Of the 80 men and one woman from the brewery who served during the war, four were killed in action. The circumstances of their deaths will by now be familiar to anyone who has studied the battles of the First World War, but are no less poignant for that.

The first casualty was Sergeant Henry Haddon of the Royal Bucks Hussars who was killed in Gallipoli on 21 August 1915 in the unsuccessful assault against Ottoman forces on Scimitar Hill.<sup>79</sup> He had been employed before the war as a clerk by the brewery and had earned the misfortune of a rather public rebuke in the annual report of 1914 for deficiencies in the performance of his duties.<sup>80</sup> Nevertheless, once he had been called up in September 1914, the brewery 'resolved to pay towards the support of his mother 15/- per week from 10th this month until the December meeting'. Following Haddon's death it was resolved to continue the allowance until the end of December 1916.<sup>81</sup>

The youngest casualty was eighteen-year old Private James Frith of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Bucks. Battalion, who had previously been employed in the brewery's engineering shop and was killed on the Western Front on 18 July 1916, one of 78 men to die 'owing to a short shell from one of our own guns falling on a gas cylinder and bursting it in the trench.'<sup>82</sup> In a letter to his mother subsequently printed in the *South Bucks Free Press*, the chaplain wrote, 'Your son was brought into No.7 Casualty Clearing Station yesterday afternoon, having been badly gassed. Everything possible was done for him but there was little hope, and he passed away two hours after admission...You must think of him as being at rest.'<sup>83</sup>

Private Robert Crew served in the same battalion as James Frith and was killed in France on 22 August 1917, alongside his brother in an assault on German

positions that resulted in casualties of almost 350 men out of the 650 who went into action.<sup>84</sup> The fourth casualty in action was Private Joseph Gilmore who served in the Lincolnshire Regiment and was killed in France on 22 September 1918. Both Haddon and Crew have no known grave. Four other brewery employees died of sickness while on service either during or after the war.<sup>85</sup> A plaque has recently been unveiled at the former brewery site in Marlow in commemoration of the four employees who were killed in action.

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FIGURE 6 Wethered Memorial Plaque

Ford, Mike Hyde, Gareth Roblin and Jeff Wagland. We would like to extend our appreciation for the support that we have received from Jan Caddie, Michael Eagleton, Ray Evans, Shaun Murphy and Geoff Wood. We would like to express our gratitude in particular to all the staff at the Centre for Bucks Studies who provided tireless advice and support to assist in this research.

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