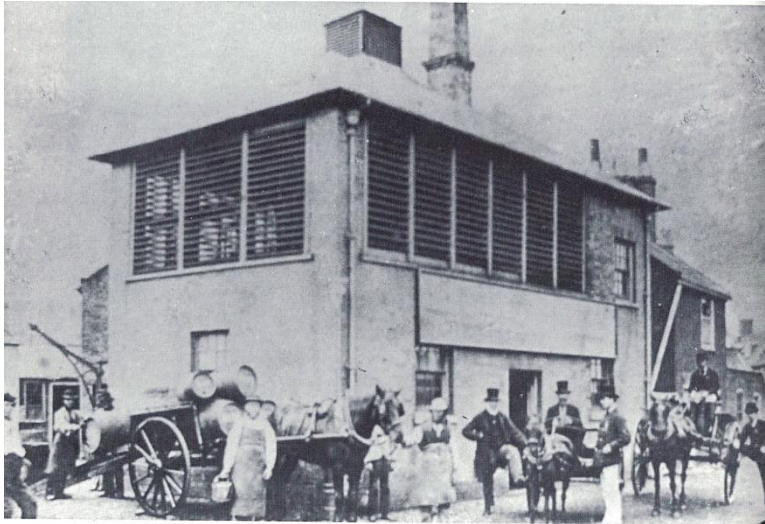


# CORPORATE MEMBER PROFILE

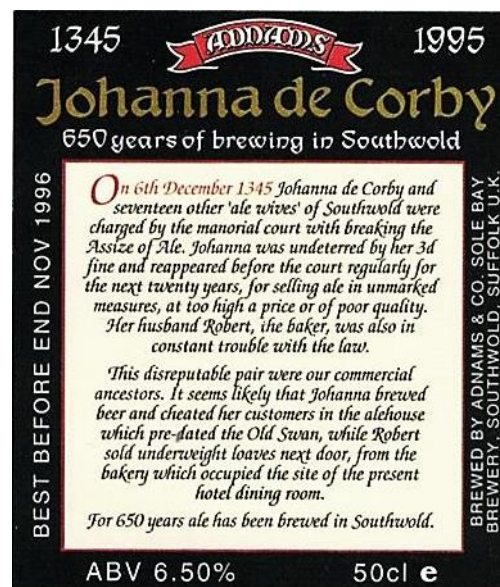
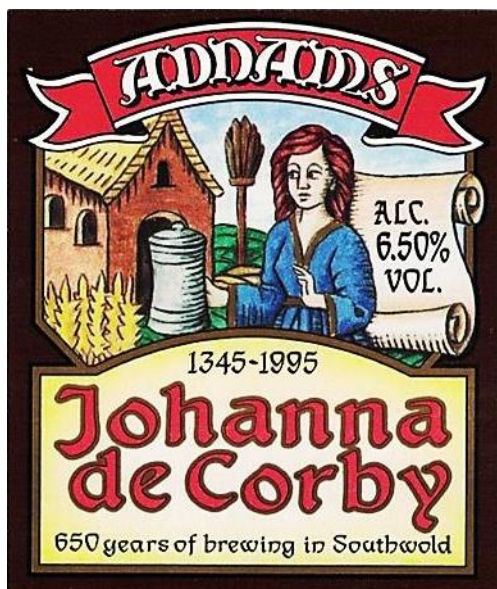
## FROM JOHANNA DE CORBY TO THE ADNAMS FAMILY A SHORT HISTORY OF BREWING AT THE SOLE BAY BREWERY AND IN SOUTHWOLD 1345 TO 2019



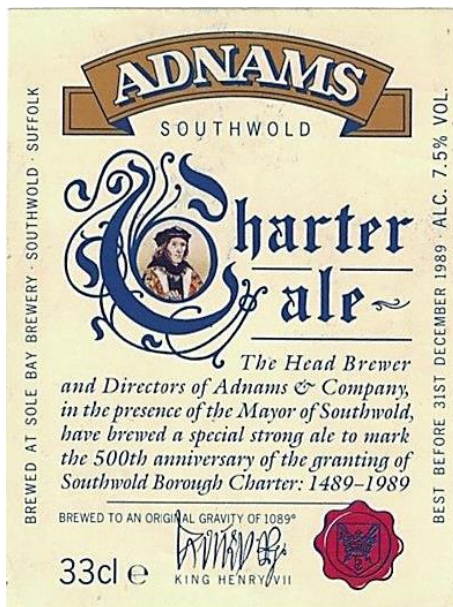
*Sole Bay Brewery pictured probably just before 1872 when George and Ernest Adnams entered into a lease to run the brewery. Source – Adnams plc*

The first recorded reference to brewing in Southwold is attributed to Johanna de Corby. She was one of a group of ale wives brewing in Southwold and on 6<sup>th</sup> December 1345 she (together with 17 other ale wives) was charged before the manorial court and fined 3d for breaking the assize of ale. Undeterred, she kept brewing and for the next 20 years she was regularly before the court for selling ale in unmarked measures, at too high a price or

of poor quality. Her husband, Robert the baker, was also in trouble with the law on a regular basis! But she was not forgotten because in 1995 Adnams brewed a special beer to recognise the 650<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the infamous court case!



The largest number of ale wives recorded as brewing in Southwold was 47 in 1456 when they were all fined for breaking the assize. In 1489, Southwold obtained its royal charter from Henry VII and the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary was recognised by Adnams who brewed Charter Ale in 1989

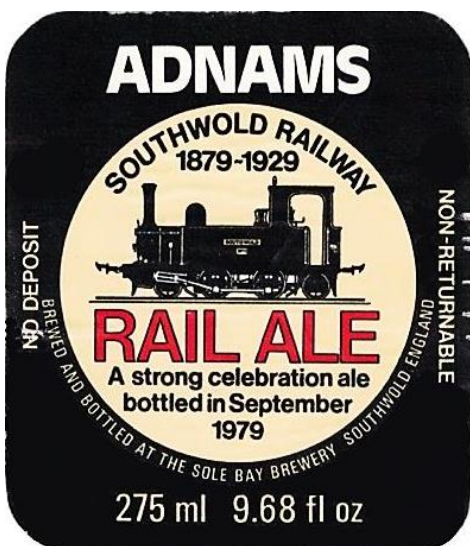


Brewing became increasingly the prerogative of a more limited group of people, normally men, who were usually also merchants dealing also in various other commodities. In 1586, the bailiffs and Assembly of Southwold instigated the system of licensing victuallers and forbade any victualler to trade without a license.

The first six men named as licensed victuallers in 1586 were, as might be expected, all influential members of the Assembly who were intent on preserving their monopoly. As a result, brewing became associated with reasonably established inns with smaller ale houses buying from their larger neighbours.

Southwold was virtually burnt to the ground in the Great Fire of 1659 and when rebuilding started a group of merchants and traders saw an opportunity to get involved. One of the families was the Thompson family who bought out a small brewery in the High Street, owned by the Warrens, and also bought the Old Swan Inn which had been rebuilt and was the centre of Southwold life. It is believed that the Old Swan had a small brewhouse and Robert Thompson built up a small group of pubs and therefore a business which resembled, on a small scale, a modern brewing company. The Thompsons sold out in 1806 and after various changes of ownership, the brewhouse was sold as a separate entity in 1825 to a local maltster, William Crisp, for £350. This was the start of the Sole Bay Brewery.

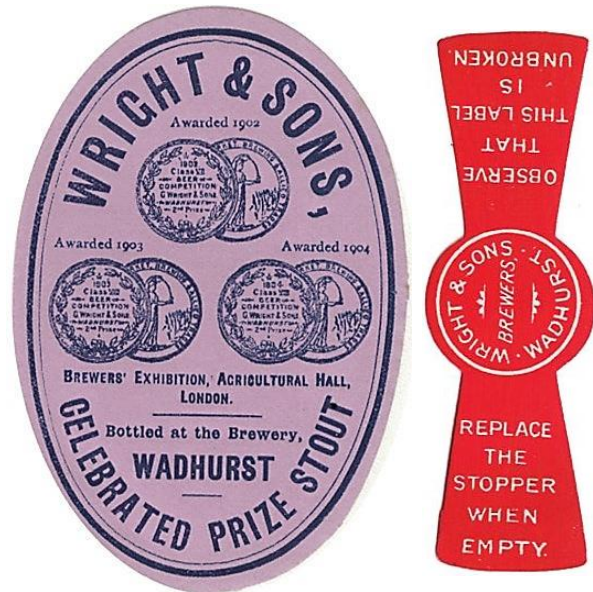
William died in 1844 (aged 59 and virtually bankrupt) and after a succession of owners (and a period of inactivity) George and Ernest Adnams arrived from Berkshire (via Witham in Essex) by the end of 1871 and, with the help of their father, leased the brewery from 1872. But the quiet respectable country life was not for George who sought excitement elsewhere so he departed for Africa where, legend has it, he was eaten by a crocodile. If you come to the Label of the Year meeting at Adnams in October we are arranging a short talk on the history of the brewery where you will learn more about this gruesome event!



Ernest then formed a new partnership with his brewer, Thomas Sergeant. Southwold was thriving and the narrow gauge Southwold Railway opened in 1879. The 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of this was again recognised by Adnams when in 1979 they brewed Rail Ale. Visitors poured into the town from coastal steamers arriving at the newly built pier and the fishing industry was also flourishing. Adnams felt encouraged to expand and the partnership of Adnams & Sergeant was transferred to a limited company.

On 22 March 1890, Ernest Adnams and Thomas Sergeant together with other members of the Adnams family and local solicitor John Fry signed the Memorandum and Articles of Association thus establishing Adnams & Company Ltd. However, more difficult times were ahead as the business ran into financial problems and in 1902 the Loftus family bought into the company and helped re-finance it. It is said that Pierson (known as P.C.) Loftus kept everybody on their toes and the company recovered. They made 3 acquisitions in quick succession. In 1903 they acquired the small brewery of C J Fisher & Co of Eye, in 1922 Rope & Sons in Orford was taken over and then in 1924 it was the turn of Flintham Hall & Co of Aldeburgh.

The acquisition of Flintham Hall & Co brought the remarkable Greg Wright into the company as an under brewer in 1924 where his infamous and long running feud with Percy Coveney started and never finished! Coveney was head brewer from 1928 until 1953 but Greg had the last word because he did not retire until 1966 at the age of 77. Before the move to Suffolk, Greg Wright was the last brewer at Gregory Wright & Sons of Wadhurst in East Sussex. He claimed to be the 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> generation named Gregory Wright and died in 1985



Adnams survived the takeover madness of the 1960s and on various occasions starting in the 1970s the brewery was substantially modernised and expanded. A public limited company was formed in 1981, Adnams and Co PLC. Today, in 2019, in addition to excellent quality beer, the company distils gin, whisky and vodka. They also produce their own cider.

Necessarily, this article is just a snapshot of the history of Adnams but if you attend the Society's Label of the Year meeting on 12 October 2019 in Southwold you would be invited to hear a short talk which would communicate more information. It is also hoped that a new book on the subject will be available by then (if so, copies will be available to those attending the talk) which again will record many different aspects of the Adnams story including the complex history of the period 1818 – 1872 as well as the truth about George and the crocodile. Not to be confused with George and the dragon!! But you will only find out by coming to LOTY, attending the talk and then discussing it all with others helped by a generous helping of Adnams beers. A bit of a chore but someone has to do it!

See you there!

*Rev'd Eric Doré*