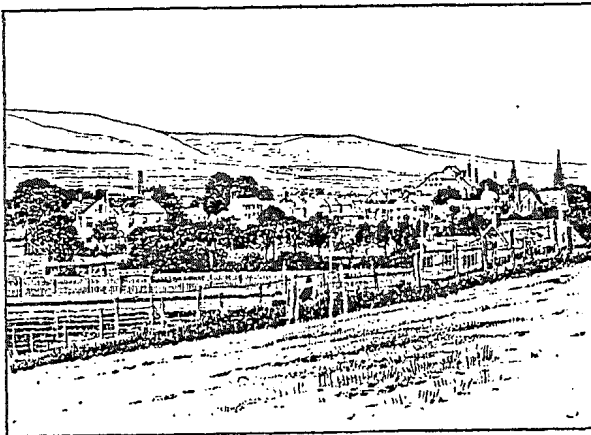


The Breweries of Blackford

Blackford is a small village in Perthshire, situated on the northern flank of the Ochil Hills, roughly half way between Stirling and Perth. The name of the village is said to derive from the site of an ancient tragedy, which occurred when the Scots Queen Helen was swept away and drowned while attempting to ford the flooded Allan Water close by the spot, and ever afterwards the scene of this melancholy event was dubbed the Black Ford.

Despite having a population at the turn of this century of barely one thousand souls, the village of Blackford could at this time boast of no less than three sizeable breweries, and Blackford Ale was noted and famed far and wide. In fact, the brewing tradition at Blackford was long and venerable, dating back to at least the fifteenth century, for it is known that in 1488, King James IV of Scotland, while journeying through Blackford on his way back from the scene of his coronation at Scone, stopped to purchase a barrel of Blackford Ale for twelve Scots shillings. It is thought that this is the earliest recorded example of a 'publick' brewery in Scotland, that is of a brewery brewing commercially for sale.

The secret of the success of the reputation of Blackford Ales was due in the main to the ready availability of an excellent supply of fine brewing water which came from a number of wells situated within the confines of the village itself. In addition the Blackford breweries, situated as they were in the midst of the fertile Vale of Strathallan, enjoyed a plentiful supply of good quality locally produced malting barley.



BLACKFORD FROM THE RAILWAY—BREWHOUSE IN THE DISTANCE.

It is thought that the oldest Blackford Brewery, the one dating back to the time of James IV, was that which came into the hands of the Sharp family in about 1790. The reputation of the brewery was greatly enhanced in the years after 1830 by the brothers Robert and Daniel Sharp, under whom the brewery greatly prospered. In 1884, by which time both brothers had passed away, the firm, still trading as R & D Sharp & Co (Ltd) was registered as a limited liability company, with a fairly modest authorised capital of £25,000. The major shareholders consisted of sundry members of the Sharp family, and John Stewart the erstwhile Head Brewer, who assumed the position of General Manager.

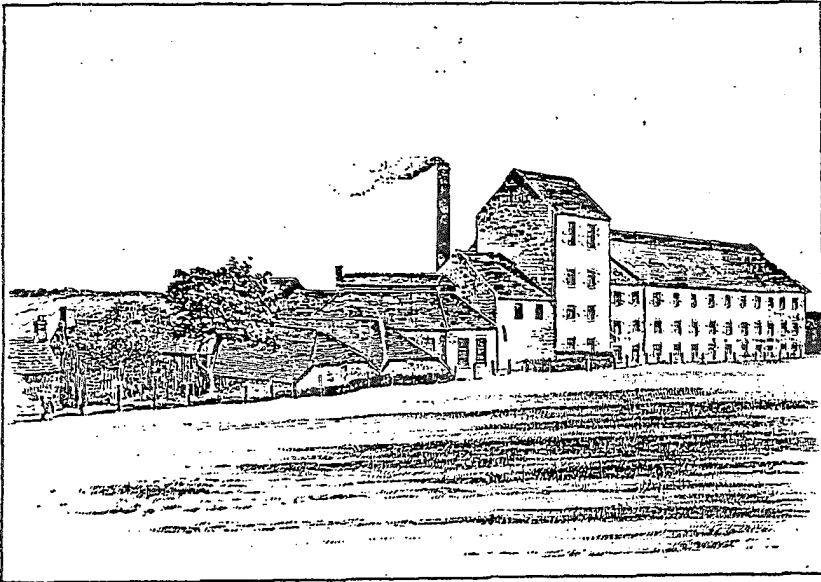
Under John Stewart's astute management, Sharp's Brewery expanded considerably. Public house property was acquired, not only in the immediate vicinity, but also as far as the North East of England, whilst the Brewery itself was extensively rebuilt in the late 1880's to the design of Russell & Spence, a firm of eminent Glasgow architects who did a great deal of brewery work. Under this reconstruction a new brewhouse was built, along with new maltings, whilst the entire brewery was re-equipped throughout with the latest equipment including Morton's horizontal refrigerators, Boby's self-acting screening machines, and Willison's washing machines.

Alfred Barnard visited Sharp's Brewery at the turn of the 1890's in the course of his celebrated tour of British breweries. He noted the handsome new red sandstone brewhouse, four storeys high and working on the gravitational principle, which contained an open-topped ale copper and a single domed porter copper; also the four storey malt-barns, containing two thirty-quarter steeples, and the adjoining double-floored malt-kiln. Barnard also noted the previous brewhouse, which by this time was only used as a store. This particular building was reputed to date back to the year 1620. There were also two wells on the premises, which were unusual inasmuch that despite being immediately adjacent to each other, they produced entirely different types of water, being suitable for ale and porter brewing respectively.

Following the 'brewery boom' of the 1890's, the capital of the firm was increased (in 1899) to £45,000, and at about this time the brewery adopted the name the Gleneagles Brewery, perhaps hoping to attract the patronage of the nearby exclusive establishment of that name.

Sharp's was the only one of the three Blackford breweries to survive the First World War, but the 1920's were not good years for the brewery business, and nemesis was not far away. John Stewart died in office in 1924, having completed forty years as General Manager of the concern, and having been Head Brewer before that. With his death, some of the vigour seemed to go out of the firm, for less than three years later, in March 1927, the firm of R & D Sharp went into liquidation, bringing to an end some five-and-a-half centuries of brewing on the site. By 1933 the brewery buildings had been

demolished and all the assets of the company disposed of with the exception of the ground on which the brewery stood. The handsome brewery offices, fronting Stirling Street were sold into private ownership and still survive.



BREWHOUSE FROM THE OCHILLS.

Although the longest lasting, Sharps was not the only brewery on which the reputation of Blackford Ale rested. William Eadie, who came from a noted Perthshire family of brewers and malsters, settled in Blackford in about 1809, where he established a posting hotel and livery stables on Moray Street, one of Blackford's main thoroughfares, to which he shortly added a small brewhouse. William Eadie had no less than fourteen children, most of the male members of which entered into brewing. One of his sons James Eadie, having learnt the trade under his father, went south in 1842, and after spending several years as a malster, opened his own brewery, the Cross Street Brewery in Burton-on-Trent, where he prospered exceedingly.

Meanwhile one of William Eadie's daughters had married into the Thomson family of Perth - William Burns Thomson owned a sizeable wine, spirit and bottling business, along with a bonded warehouse and an aerated water manufactory, situated at Canal Street, Perth, besides which a further aerated water manufactory was owned at Kirriemuir, and a hotel at Forteviot.

In 1896 William Thomson decided to erect a substantial new brewery

and maltings at Blackford, on a site to the north of Moray Street, adjacent to the by now disused brewhouse of the Eadie family. (This brewhouse was disused by 1890, it is listed in local directories as being under the ownership of James Eadie of Barrow Hall, Burton-on-trent, Derbyshire.) William Thomson died while the brewery was under construction, and the work was completed by his Trustees, who in July 1898 turned the business into a limited liability company under the name W B Thomson Ltd, with an authorised capital of £120,000. The new company also acquired the Blackford Hotel, and added to the brewery substantial maltings and an aerated water manufactory. The Secretary and later General Manager of the company was James Thomson Eadie, grandson of William Eadie. Later, in 1912, James Thomson Eadie moved to the Edinburgh brewing firm of William McEwan & Co Ltd, where he eventually became a director. Both James Eadie and his son Gregor Eadie became well known figures in the Edinburgh brewing scene.



Meanwhile, the firm of W B Thomson Ltd ran into financial trouble in the early 1900's, when there was a slump in the brewing industry and a number of firms faced difficulties. Thomson's had probably been over-capitalised from the outset, for in 1904 the authorised capital of the firm was reduced from £120,000 to £72,000 by the simple expedient of reducing the value of the 6,000 £10 Ordinary Shares to £2 each. At the same time the firm's aerated water and bottling interests were sloughed off as a separate company, merging with John Craik & Co of Perth to form Thomson Craik & Co Ltd. However, these moves failed to ensure the firm's stability and the advent of the First World War, with its accompanying restrictions, sounded the death knell of for W B Thomson Ltd. In March 1915 brewing ceased, and W B Thomson went into liquidation. The brewery was acquired in 1916 by J & A, Davidson & Co, brewers of Goldstream. Davidson's possibly only

wanted the brewery for its wartime raw material allocation, for, shortly after the end of the war, in 1920, the premises were resold to Calders of Alloa. It is not known what use, if any, Calders made of the premises, but in October 1931 the maltings and the brewhouse (but not the tun-rooms or the bottling store) were let on a twenty-one year lease, with option to purchase, to Gleneagles Maltings Ltd, an associate of Veda Ltd, a Perth-based company who owned the venerable Craigie Mill and Maltings in Perth, and who marketed 'Veda' bread, a very popular malted wheat product between the wars and after, which vied with the likes of 'Hovis', 'Turog', and 'Bermaline'.

Gleneagles Maltings Ltd only ever used the former brewhouse for storage. The four storey maltings consisted of two malt floors served by elevators and conveyors, one three thousand quarters grain loft, eighteen malt-bins of two hundred and fifty quarters each, two fifty quarter steepers, a double kiln with fifty quarters on each floor, and a barley drying kiln. There was a well on the premises, and the machinery was driven by an oil-engine manufactured by Shanks of Arbroath.

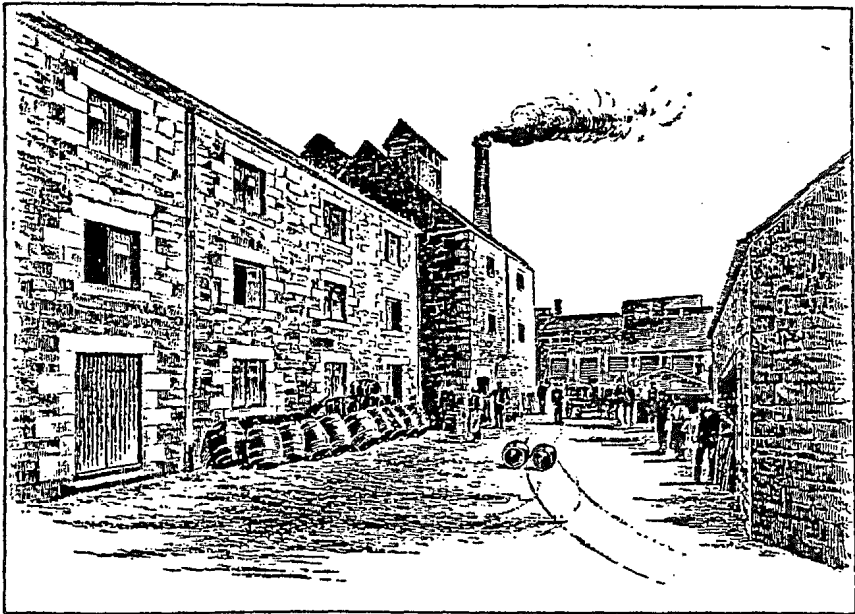
Gleneagles Maltings Ltd finally purchased the Blackford Maltings in about 1950. For a period during the war part of the site had been requisitioned by the Ministry of Supply. The maltings remain in the possession of Veda Ltd (Gleneagles' parent company) to this day, little changed, the last commercial traditional floors maltings remaining in Scotland (although Balvenie, Bowmore, Glendronach, Glengarioch, Highland Park, Longmorn-Glenlivet, and Springbank distilleries retain their floor maltings solely for their own purposes). The old brewhouse still stands as well, although all the brewing equipment has been long since removed, probably at the behest of John J Calder, who could never resist getting his hands on some second hand brewing equipment. The brewery and Gleneagles Maltings can be seen most impressively from trains hurrying northwards to Perth, still bearing the legend in faded white lettering after seventy years 'W B Thomson Ltd, Brewers and Maltsters'.

The Third Brewery in Blackford was, almost inevitably, linked with the Eadie family. This Brewery, situated on the south side of Stirling Street on the western edge of the village, was established by two of William Eadie's sons Robert and George Eadie, in about 1860. The brewery, latterly trading as Robt Eadie & Sons, closed in about 1910. However, this was not the end of the story, for, in 1949, after being used for many years by a local firm of potato merchants, the old brewery buildings were acquired by W Deime-Evans and C I Barrett for Tullibardine Distillery Ltd. In 1953 the Tullibardine Distillery was acquired by the Glasgow whisky brokers Brodie Hepburn Ltd, and in 1971 by Invergordon Distillers Ltd. The buildings were reconstructed again in 1973-74, when the capacity of the distillery was increased from two to four

stills.

The Tullibardine Distillery and the Gleneagles Distillery dominate the small village of Blackford to this day, but brewing has now died out altogether in the County of Perthshire, following the closure of John Wright's Perth Brewery some twenty years ago, a far cry from the time at the turn of the century when Blackford itself boasted three breweries.

Charles McMaster



MALTINGS.

The illustrations for this article are taken from Alfred Barnard's 'Noted Breweries of Great Britain', and show views of R & D Sharp's Blackford Brewery.