

**As a town which has historically been linked with the brewing trade, an oral history and photographic exhibition is timely.**

'Lewes is famous for having its own brewer, Harveys, which has been open since 1790 and still continues to make beer today. Still run by descendants of the Harvey family, the brewery is the last of the town's original 19th century breweries'. These breweries included Ballards, Beards Brewery, the Bear Brewery, Castle Brewery, Harveys, South Malling Brewery, the Southdown Brewery and Verralls.

Lewes to a great extent was built on a brewing heritage and made its fortune through the creation of ale. There is a rich and loyal ale drinking tradition in the town, to the extent that when a national brewery Greene King attempted to remove a local guest ale from one of its popular local hostelrys, the tavern was subject to a local boycott until it rescinded this rule.

Brewing originated as an everyday domestic activity needed to produce a liquid that was most people's staple drink 'small beer'. In the medieval era, brewing on the largest scale was carried out in monasteries such as in Lewes Priory. By the 18th century the more formal, purpose-built brewhouse had become an integral part of the offices typically found at the large country house. Country house breweries (such as Beards Brewery), were still being built in the mid 19th century, and this type of brewing carried on regularly until the early years of the 20th century.

This industry was created by a robust rural agricultural trade, that of growing hops, barley and brewing malt, locally in 'The Maltings' building. Lewes wasn't an important industrial centre, its inhabitants being largely concerned with agriculture. But the vogue of Lewes as a residential and marketing centre made brewing a profitable industry and led to the establishment of a good many breweries and inns.

Related industry resulting from this trade locally included Blacksmith trades, Coopers, Malthouse workers, coppersmiths, brewery engineers, brewery architects, and local agricultural workers. There is a strong affection for local brewing shown through CAMRA membership, regional beer and ale festivals and a side effect of membership of the towns many Bonfire societies who all have 'home' pubs for meetings and tradition's sake.

This is a subject rich in potential archive material which reflects national as well as local trends. It gives a profound insight to the changes in society from the time of the industrial revolution to the present day. The Ale and Hearty project supports and facilitates the archival and contextualisation of material related to the social history of brewing. These collected resources will eventually be housed in the East Sussex Records Office at The Keep, Brighton.

This exhibition is a taste of our project findings to date. By the end of 2013, twenty oral history interviews will have been collected and utilised alongside archival resources in order to produce the Ale and Hearty booklet and learning resource. An on-line exhibition will follow and will be presented on Strike a Light's website [www.strikealight.org](http://www.strikealight.org)

With thanks to: Access to Archives, the Ale and Hearty Steering Group and Volunteers, East Sussex Records Office, Harveys Brewery, Lewes History Group, Lewes Library and staff, Sussex Past and all of who have contributed their oral histories to this project.