

Lewes Breweries: The Golden Age

Over the first half of the 19th century the agricultural and riverside locality of Lewes quickly established its development into a small market town. To serve the local rural workforce at least seven new breweries quickly emerged along with an abundance of ale houses, many of which also brewed on the premises.

John Davey (local historian)

Before the major breweries took place there were countless small breweries in Lewes because each little ale house had its own brewery and the small beer that was produced was the standard drink for men, women and children in the town. Before it was safe to drink the water, beer was the better drink. The brewing process must kill off some of the bacteria and other nasties that you found in well water. Most streets would have at least one brewery where they could send, usually a lad, along to the ale house to collect the beer and bring it back. The cattle market used to take place in the High Street in Lewes and the Crown was always the main inn for the farmers on that day and at twelve noon on market days the proprietor would ring a bell to summon the farmers in for their lunchtime ale and food. The market proceedings would come to a stop at that time, so you had horses and cattle on the north side of the High Street and sheep and goats and pigs on the south side of the High Street.

Rev. Godfrey Broster (Rectory Ales)

In days gone by, a lot of the ale houses were owned by women because they were the brewers anyway. The sign of a good ale house with good beer was a broom attached to outside the door and they had somebody going round testing all this ale that was brewed. Certainly in the late 17th or 18th century most of the domestic brewers were women. Even when you have a look at Lewes today, there are a large number of lady publicans who run very good houses.