

Heritage

*Newsletter of the Blue Mountains Association of Cultural
Heritage Organisations Inc*

January-February 2016

ISSUE 42

ISSN 2203-4366

The Zig Zag Brewery - Part One

Of all those great industries born in Lithgow's boom years of the 1870s and '80s, only very few survived the repeated shocks of the first half of the 20th Century. Under the economic changes brought about by Federation, the Great Depression and two World Wars, the coal mines and power station of the Farmers Creek valley were superseded by larger, more modern operations to the west; the iron and steel works had transferred to Port Kembla by 1930; and with it, associated industries like coke-making and engineering support all eventually closed.

In this context it is even more remarkable that Lithgow's Zig Zag Brewery (also primarily known as Terry's Brewery in its latter years) survived until as late as 1958. That made it the last country brewery left standing in NSW, and its lifespan of 70 years (with only two short periods of closure during the Depression) also gave it the title of the longest operating country brewery in NSW.

The tale of the brewery contains all the elements of a great story. There are heroes and villains, successes and failures, episodes of great hilarity and tragedies both personal and corporate.



Colburn & Goodacre Brewery

Late 1800s

The name associated with its founding is Henry 'Harry' Corbett, but behind him was the support of his wife Eliza and father-in-law, William Mills. It is clearly Mills who had the resources and expertise for this venture and the subsequent record shows that the brewery was a legacy for his daughter and grandchildren. Mills, at age 72, died unexpectedly just six days after the brewing licence was issued on the 25th July 1888.

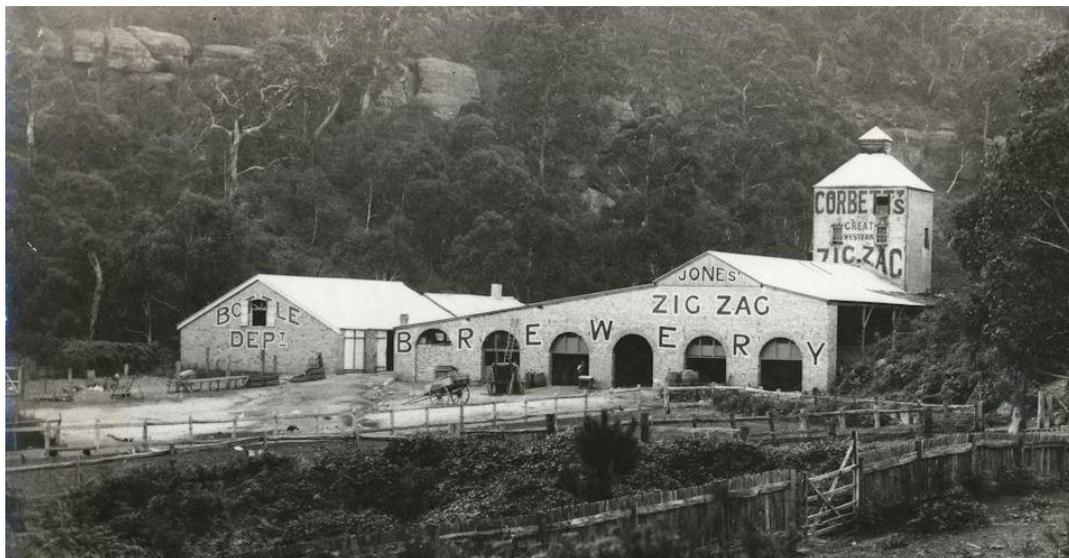
It came into being in a rush. Brewing began in temporary premises while the impressive (and still standing) brew tower was being built. The Mills family had been in the hotel keeping business in Lithgow for nearly a decade with several licences and their 'flagship' Imperial Hotel, strategically built opposite Eskbank Station (although this was almost immediately wrong-footed by the new Lithgow Station). But in early 1888 the town's brewer, Richard Inch, was in one of his periodic financial crises. He had always managed to overcome these, but this time it was different and his Eskbank Brewery was sold to a consortium of local hoteliers and businessmen in May.

Mills may have made an unsuccessful bid for Inch's brewery or have been in disagreement with his fellows or just thought he could do better; but in any event the race was on.

Immediately the site of the new brewery was purchased (in the name of Corbett (2/3) and Alfred Goodare (1/3) and second hand brewing equipment bought for an immediate start before the new plant could be delivered. (Goodare was the fiancé of Mills' grand-daughter, Sarah, and played no part in the subsequent history). Within 10 weeks of the sale of Inch's, beer was beginning to flow from Corbett's vats, two weeks ahead of the new opposition.

And so it began, brewing in a small way in a hastily built shed while the new brewery was built around it, showing from the start the remarkable vigour and intelligence that characterised the first half of the brewery's history and ensured its survival when so many others failed, especially after Federation and the introduction of a new Commonwealth Excise regime which saw hundreds of small local breweries unable to comply.

Right from the start, the 'heir apparent' was William Mills' grandson, James A. S. Jones.



Early 1900s

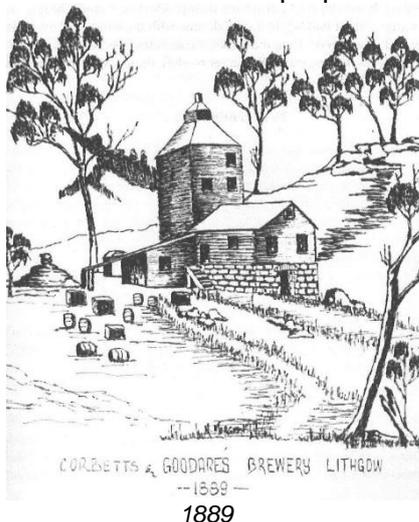
After he finished school at Coerwell Academy he was sent for an apprenticeship with Henry Burrows at his Surrey and/or Waverley Breweries in Sydney. Jones was clearly a man of great capacity and character and his years at Burrows' equipped him well in both practical brewing technology and business skills. On returning, he took over the active management from about 1891 and, in 1897 at just 26 years of age, the business was transferred to his name. Harry Corbett, having successfully established the brewery and 'kept the seat warm', was bought out and soon left Lithgow to lead a somewhat itinerant life for his remaining 18 years.

John A. S. (Jackass) Jones is by any measure the greatest of the heroes of this story. His life outside the business of the brewery was outstanding – a horseman of note, bicycle

racing champ, motor sportsman on two wheels and four, socialite and *bon viveur*, town councillor and mayor for a term, universally loved in his town of Lithgow. But of interest here is his drive and intelligence in building up a small-town brewery into a great success. At the end of his 33 years at the helm, the business comprised a network of about 15 hotels in the district (at least three of which were personally owned), had steadily and regularly upgraded its equipment and techniques and had achieved an output sufficient to supply the Central West with beer at a competitive price to the much larger Sydney breweries. In 1910, Jones married the charming and feisty Sydney socialite, Nina Harris, and after 1913 took a step back from the day-to-day running of the brewery although very much remaining in active control. As manager and head brewer he appointed Alex Laing whose long and faithful service to the brewery was to keep it running in the difficult years that were ahead. Without Alex Laing it is doubtful that the business would have survived the Great Depression of 1929-33, thus qualifying him as the second of the heroes.

All through the brewery's history, incidents of theft have occurred, but the one of 21st August 1926 had tragic consequences. Two men, Porter and Lyons, having stolen a week or so before, foolishly returned for another go. Sergeant Wallace and Trooper Bell had the scene under surveillance and arrested the pair red-handed. Porter submitted and was handcuffed, but Lyons attempted freedom by attacking the police. In the struggle, he was fatally wounded. The coroner attached no blame on Trooper Bell who was a young and well-regarded man, and the pistol discharge being in the heat of combat rather than premeditated. Still, for Lyons it was a high price for a petty theft. Trooper Bell was reported to have been distressed by the incident all his days.

In 1927, Jones decided to retire and cash in. A company, the Lithgow Brewing Co. Ltd., was floated with Jones retaining a minority share. As history records, this was lucky timing on his behalf. He had left the brewery in excellent shape and was justly remunerated for his nearly 40 years of good management. He was also wise to retain a share-holding because, two years later on the brink of Depression, the speculators moved in and paid almost three times the share price. Jones again received a dividend and severed his connection with the business he had built, although he retained all the property titles to both the brewery itself, three hotels and several properties in and around Lithgow.



Artefacts of the trade

The new company of October 1929, The Sydney Brewing Co. Ltd., was a speculative push out of the Richmond Brewing Co. of Melbourne to expand into NSW. The timing was disastrous. A purchase and capital raising float of £200,000 clearly failed and the new proprietors found themselves with embarrassing debt and falling sales as the Depression hit Lithgow and its industrial base particularly hard. One by one the shareholders bailed out, leaving a few to struggle on and try as best they could to keep the gates open while they waited for better times or a financial saviour. Neither appeared in time and the company was wound up and the receivers were appointed.

And so, in September 1932, when the next company, the Zig-Zag (Lithgow) Brewery Ltd., was floated its capital was a modest £ 10,000. But the low entry price was no help; it too failed, went into receivership again and this time the gates of the brewery were locked. At a Sheriff's sale in March 1934, the great Zig Zag Brewery was knocked down for a mere £ 1,400 and its darkest hour was nigh. The sale was made to one Valleck Cartwright Mallan, a native of Adelaide and member of a prestigious family with interests in brewing there. But Valleck was clearly skating on thin legal ice. As a string of court cases both before, during and well after his association with Lithgow would attest, he was a con-man, a spiv and a criminal. Mind you, he did get the brewery running again and so played a part. From his very first day in charge, with faithful Alex Laing back to do the actual work, Mallan decided that paying his excise duty was an option he would forgo. Within four months he was arrested and found himself in Court in what the Sydney Morning Herald reported as the largest-scale customs frauds since Federation. While it is not specifically recorded, there can be little doubt that Laing, disgusted by the turn of events, would have alerted the authorities. Found guilty, somehow Mallan evaded a gaol sentence but was heavily fined and stripped of his directorship and hence ownership. But that chapter was not quite closed. At the ensuing Sheriff's sale in August 1934 the business interests and plant were knocked down for the token amount of £ 500. To add insult to injury, the purchaser Hyman Wolfensohn, was a business associate of Mallan's and some of the proceeds of the floated Blue Mountains (Lithgow) Brewery Ltd. no doubt found their way back into Mallan's pockets. Wolfensohn himself had no interest in brewing, but one fortuitous event may have justified his otherwise useless ownership. He appointed (or perhaps re-appointed) Walter 'Fred' Lanfear as Head Brewer and Alfred 'Norm' Wyld as Manager. This was to replace Alex Laing who finally had had enough of seeing his life's work being the plaything of petty criminals and took up a well-deserved position with Tooth's Brewery in Sydney. Wolfensohn was the final chapter in the 8 dark years of the brewery's history and Lanfear and Wyld were the new brooms who would bring in the next 20 years of prosperity. *Vaughan Bryers*

References on request

Note: Stay tuned for Part 2 in this fascinating history in future issues of *Heritage*. The Brewery is open every Saturday from 10am to 4pm. www.zigzagbrewery.com.au
www.lithgowbrewery.com.au www.oakeyparkbrewery.com.au

Index

Zig Zag Brewery	1
The tool library	5
The Corduroy Road	7
Aldine Centennial History of NSW 1888	10
Bleitchert Ropeway	11
Archival Records of Blue Mountains Councils	13
Dry stone walls	16
GBM Heritage Trail	19
National Heritage Lottery	19
National Trust Heritage Festival 2016	20
Beyond the Blue Mountains Project	21
Rock Art Publication	22
Steam Rolling Stock Collection Listing	23
Liven up your presentations - equipment	24