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INDUSTRY IN THE BOROUGH



Through the centuries Bermondsey's name has been linked with the production of leather and today the borough still possesses several tanneries and still produces quality leather for the country's markets. Brewing, too, is a very old industry that is still carried on at the large Courage Barclay brewery near Tower Bridge. Another well known Bermondsey name is that of Peak Frean and this firm, too, is a centenarian. This firm's biscuits are known the world over and are produced in modern conditions at the Bermondsey factory, a landmark to daily rail travellers to London Bridge Station.

These are but a few of Bermondsey's trades. For its size the borough has many varied industries that range from fur processing to printing and from tea blending to the manufacture of sauces and pickles. Wharfingering and cold storage are also important—as one would expect in a borough whose "front street" is the Pool of London.

In the pages that follow many of Bermondsey's industrial firms are detailed and something of their history and progress is told.

THE LONDON PROVISION EXCHANGE

Whilst it may be more accurate to say that Bermondsey feeds half the nation, it is true that a very great proportion of the imported basic food commodities such as Bacon, Butter, Cheese and Canned Meats arrives in the Port of London and is landed at the various wharves in the Bermondsey area.

Ships from Denmark, Holland and Poland arrive weekly with cargoes of bacon amounting to 6 to 7,000 tons, the bulk of which is from Denmark; with Butter, Cheese and Canned Meats also in substantial quantities from Denmark and Holland, and with Butter and Canned Meats from Poland.

Butter and Cheese from the Commonwealth countries—New Zealand and Australia—who are the main suppliers to the U.K., arrive in the lower docks and are brought up by barge and landed at the wharves for transfer to the Cold Stores and Cool Air Stores adjacent.

Because of this landing of commodities in the Bermondsey area, it has become over the years the centre of the Provision Importing Trade, with the London Provision Exchange at No. 1 London Bridge as the focal point, where Importers and the large Buyers, such as Wholesalers and Multiples, come together and do business in accordance with the London Provision Exchange Rules which embody the Trade Customs.

The business transacted by members of the Exchange results in the wide distribution of commodities such as those

mentioned. The first link in the chain of distribution is the Importer, whose premises are generally near the docks. The Importer, after making a sale, issues to the Buyer, that is to say, the Wholesaler or Multiple, a Delivery Order on the Wharf where the goods are lying, either in Store or on the quay, and the goods are collected by the Buyer's own transport or by public carrier on his behalf and taken to the Buyer's warehouse. From there the goods are distributed in small quantities to the Wholesaler's Retail customers, or in the case of Multiples to their Retail Branches in various parts of the country. Before distribution processing takes place in some cases, such as the smoking of bacon, and most Wholesalers and Multiples have facilities for carrying this out. Commodities generally are now strictly graded and selected and are bought on that basis, but inspections of goods are made at wharves where necessary and facilities for this are provided at the wharves. Both Sellers and Buyers are trained to judge the grades and qualities of the goods they handle and there are tools of the Trade of which most consumers are probably not aware. For instance, in the case of bacon, there is what is known as a "bacon trier". This is a sharp pointed instrument somewhat like a paper knife. This pierces a side of bacon and when extracted the experienced man can tell from it whether the side is tainted in any way for instance. There is also a measuring gauge which can be applied to a side of bacon to ascertain the fat measurements at certain points, and from those measurements it can be

seen whether a side is "A", "B" or "C" Selection. The conformation of the side and the butchering have also to be considered, and the experienced eye can tell whether the side is up to the standard required.

In the case of butter and cheese there are tools known as "irons". These are in the form of a gouge. The butter iron is a longer instrument than the cheese one, but both perform the same function of extracting neatly a piece of butter or a piece of cheese from the bulk in order that the sample may be tested for flavour, texture, etc. The skill to judge grades and qualities requires a considerable time to acquire and much training is given to those engaged in the selling and buying of commodities. In the ordinary way junior members of the Trade are given every facility to obtain experience in judging grades and qualities. It is interesting to recall, however, that when most imported commodities were under the control of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, and in some cases almost to the end of 1956, goods were not readily available for such training and in order that the skills of the Trade in judging could be encouraged and maintained, the London Provision Exchange organised a series of competitions in which the abilities of competitors to judge commodities were assessed and special arrangements were made by the Exchange with the Ministry to have quantities of the necessary commodities available for the purpose. These competitions were held on the Floor of the Exchange.

Recognition of the need for the maintenance of the traditional skills of the Trade was given by the Minister of Food himself and on more than one occasion the Minister of the day attended the competitions and presented the prizes.

To illustrate the bacon trier the photograph on the next page shows a former Minister of Food using this implement under the guidance of the judge.

As already stated, members of the Exchange trade according to the Rules of the Exchange embodying the Trade Customs, but it may be added that there is also a system of arbitration under these Rules. However, such is the good faith between Sellers and Buyers that thousands of transactions are completed daily and only on a rare occasion does a dispute arise that requires settlement by arbitration.

As in the case of many other important Trades of this country, the work of the Provision Trade is carried on steadily and quietly without the glare of publicity. Its members have to contend with the difficulties created by changeable conditions in the producing countries of the world, where there is sometimes a shortage and sometimes a glut, and rarely is there a nicely balanced position where supplies are exactly appropriate to the demand.

Representatives of Importers travel all over the world in connection with the procurement of commodities and with the experience of centuries behind the Trade and the skills in procuring and buying that have been fostered by generations, the process of feeding the nation is carried out unflinchingly, and only in time of war are the consumers left short of their main food requirements.

The importance of the wharves, warehouses and cold stores in the whole scheme of distribution of food cannot be too highly stressed. They have been developed and organised to meet the demands made upon them for the rapid unloading



Photo: The London Provision Exchange

of ships to enable a quick turnabout to be made, and the prompt delivery to Buyers' transport to ensure that perishable goods are kept as fresh as possible for distribution. The thousands of skilled men, such as dockers, crane drivers and warehousemen, employed, play a vital part in all

this. It might be said that Bermondsey is the "home" in London of the Provision Importing Trade and the way that "home" is run by the many workers engaged in the Trade directly or indirectly brings credit to Bermondsey and is something of which the Borough may be proud.

HAY'S WHARF

The story of the riverside wharves east of St. Paul's, is part of the wider story of the City of London, and that of Hay's Wharf, oldest and largest in the Port, is no exception. It began in Cromwell's day, in April 1651, when Alexander Hay took over a small wharf near London Bridge and there, in an Elizabethan building formerly used as a granary, set up as a brewer and wharfinger. The wharf and its buildings stood on the site of the Inn (or Town House) of the Abbots of Battle, one of the many monastic properties on the south bank of the Thames. Nearby were the Inns of the Priors of Lewes and of St. Augustine of Canterbury, all being surrendered to the Crown at the Reformation.

Hay quickly found that wharfing and warehousing was a much more profitable occupation than brewing, and he let the brewery and concentrated on the business of the wharf. At first no more than one coaster and two or three sailing barges berthed there each week, bringing tallow and fats from East Anglia for the soap-boiler and chandler, and hides and skins from the West Country and Southern Ireland for the Bermondsey tanners. In 1656 Hay let part of the wharf and buildings to the New River Company, which was to form the nucleus of what is today the Metropolitan Water Board. To accommodate the pipe-borers Hay also erected a lean-to building, paying to the City's Bridge-house Rental Committee "Six Pounds a year for the hanging shed". The wharf became known in official records as Pipe Borers' Wharf. Here elm trees, brought from Hertfordshire, were hollowed out by augers or giant gimlets to make London's first water mains. As recently as 1947 a section of one of these was dug up at Buckingham Palace.

At the beginning of the 17th century another interesting development occurred which is worth recording as an example of business acumen on the part of Alexander Hay's son Joseph, who had just succeeded his father. The riverside warehouses, largely wooden or timber-framed buildings, suffered badly from frequent fires, and Hay joined with neighbouring wharfingers Chamberlain and Beale in founding the first Fire Office in Britain. It had the engaging name of "Ye Amicable Contributors", altered later to the "Hand-in-Hand", after the emblem—two hands clasped—which the members had adopted. It is today incorporated in the Commercial Union Assurance Company Limited, and both Beale's and Chamberlain's wharves have for many years past been absorbed in the Hay's Wharf group.

Hay's Wharf itself showed no remarkable development until the end of the eighteenth century, although Francis Theodore Hay, a Master of the Watermen's Company and King's Waterman, was a pioneer in the lighterage system. This was made necessary when docks were built at Rotherhithe, ships being unloaded into barges and the produce brought to the London Bridge warehouses. The first real development began with the arrival of the Humphery family on the river. William Humphery, master of a vessel bringing tallows and fats to the wharf, rented a small warehouse from Hay in which to store his cargo. This began a close association between the two families, and when the last of the Hays died in 1838 Alderman Humphery, later Lord Mayor of London and M.P. for Southwark, took over Hay's Wharf. His family was already established as wharfingers to the west of London Bridge, where they had built ware-

houses on the site of Montague House and the historic Winchester Palace.

In 1851 a series of devastating fires did considerable damage to Hay's Wharf and adjoining property. As a result Humphery had recourse to his bankers, and as a result Hugh Colin Smith and Arthur Magniac joined Humphery in partnership, trading as "The Proprietors of Hay's Wharf". The business broadened from coastal to overseas trade, and an immediate result was the arrival at Hay's Dock of the famous tea clippers from China. The combination of proprietors was well equipped to embark on the expansion of the wharf which then began in earnest.

Their efforts were directed towards attracting the Provision Exchange from Lower Thames Street, on the north side of the River, with the result that the warehouses of Bermondsey's Tooley Street have long been regarded as London's larder. The proprietors pioneered in cold storage, and handled the first shipment of New Zealand butter and cheese as long ago as 1867. They acquired wharves and warehouses, rebuilding and equipping them to the highest standards. Today the Company handles well over 2,000,000 tons of foodstuffs at its wharves, which stretch almost continuously from London Bridge to Tower Bridge. The frontage bristles with huge electrically driven cranes and is claimed to be the most highly mechanised in the world.

Backed by many years of experience Hay's Wharf have become specialists in many commodities, their present-day prosperity having been largely based upon expert services given in the handling of tea and dairy produce from the Dominions. The latest techniques in refrigeration have been, and are still being, introduced and

the Company, with its eleven cold and cool air stores in the Upper Pool area, is able to meet the specialised storage requirements for all types of refrigerated cargo entering the Port. Many subsidiary companies provide the ancillary services of lighterage, barge building and repair, bottling of wines and spirits, transport and shipping and forwarding.

The nationalisation of road transport absorbed one section of the business, the well-known companies Hay's Wharf Cartage Ltd. and Pickfords Ltd., but it is interesting to recall that before the advent of the motor lorry a stud of no less than 3,000 horses was necessary to cope with the tremendous volume of trade in this sphere.

Hay's Wharf Head Offices

