

Mortlake Brewery

Two small breweries, adjacent but separately owned, are mentioned in the manor court rolls for 1765. They were on either side of a cartway, later Thames Street, leading to the town dock.

In 1807 Weatherstone and Halford extended the northern brewery by acquiring land on the riverside, described as "an excellent situation for a brewery, maltings or any other building requiring river transport". In 1811 they took over the southern brewery, then owned by James Prior, and the two small breweries became one. The business passed through various hands until 1852 when the land was sold to Charles John Phillips who, in partnership with 21-year-old James Wigan, bought out the whole business. At that time the brewery was relatively small, using around 5,000 quarters of malt per annum as against 108,000 quarters in London's largest brewery.

The next ten years were spent buying up property on adjacent sites – Phillips also bought two local inns, the Ship and the Bull. Prosperity came to the firm via lucrative government contracts for supplying India Pale Ale to the British army. By then the brewery was the largest employer in the district, but it lacked space. A major drawback was that Thames Street ran through the heart of it: the street was the only public cartway to the river, with cottages and businesses on either side of it. In 1865 Phillips acquired the freehold of all the land on the riverside and he proceeded to close off the smaller rights of way to the towpath. The initial attempts to close Thames Street were met by loud public protests. A prolonged and bitter battle with the people of Mortlake ended in victory for the brewers. Phillips' promise to widen Bull's Alley into a cartway (and to contribute £200 to the parish poor fund) swayed Mortlake Vestry in his favour.

The medieval tithe barn, a docking house, a shop with stable, a slaughterhouse and a blacksmith's workshop were bought by the partners and demolished. The new brewery included a long, high brick wall fronting Mortlake High Street on which the initials P & W were carved into stone roundels beside the sign *Mortlake Brewery 1869*. The Phillips and Wigan partnership ended in 1877. Phillips became the sole owner, though Wigan continued to live in Mortlake. Phillips' sons joined the family business, and when their father retired in 1889 they sold the business to Watney's, staying on as directors. Acquisitions by Watney's in 1898 resulted in the firm becoming Watney, Combe, Reid and Co.

Since the turn of the 20th century the expansion of the brewery has had a dramatic impact on Mortlake's landscape. In 1903 an eight-storey maltings was erected by the riverside on the corner of Ship Lane. The firm maintained its role as leading local employer with 1,400 on the payroll in the 1960s. Further expansion in the early 1970s took the brewery west of Ship Lane destroying West Road, other streets and alleyways, and a paddock. However, expansion did not mean more jobs – the use of modern technology brought a steady decline in the workforce, so that by 1986 the total number of employees was around 400.

In 1995 Watney's sold all their breweries to Courage, which then became part of Scottish and Newcastle, who later leased the brewery to Anheuser-Busch for brewing Budweiser lager. The brewery closed in 2015.

