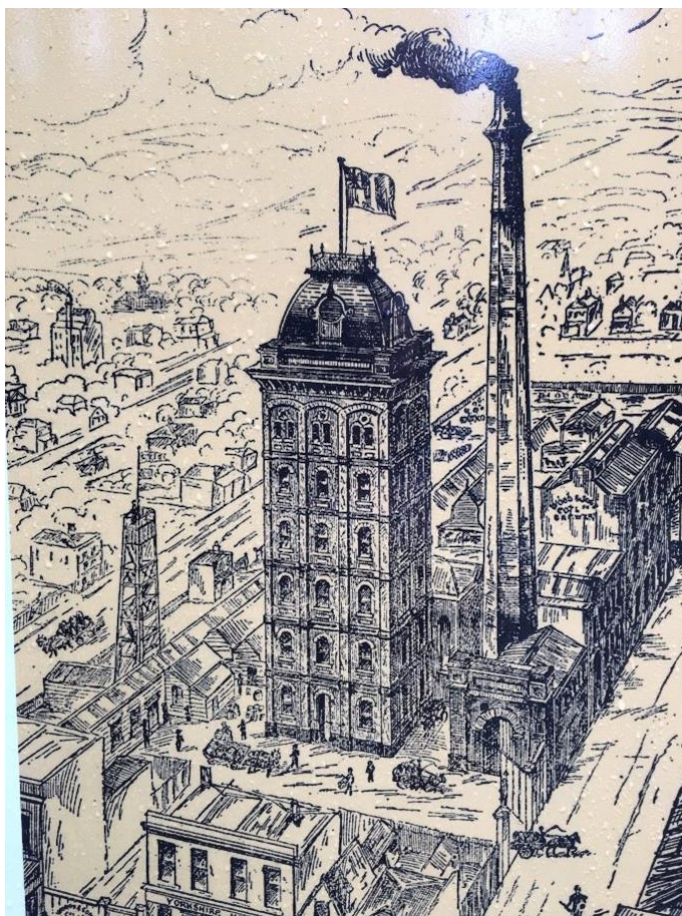# Collingwood Breweries: a brief introduction and overview

Brewing was one of Collingwood's first and fastest-growing industries. In the 1850s George Coppin, usually better known as a theatrical entrepreneur, established a brewery at the end of Victoria Street near the river. By the end of the 1850s there were at least four breweries plus the Victoria Brewery in Victoria Parade located just outside the Collingwood boundary.

By 1863 there were six breweries and two distilleries. At first entrepreneurs lived locally, made their own liquor and were personally known to their drinkers. They were not without their critics, though less so than other noxious trades such as woolwashing and brickmaking. The main complaint apart from air pollution was refuse water from the washing of casks, either running directly into the Yarra or oozing its way downhill across street channels.

John Wood opened the **Yorkshire Hotel** in Wellington Street in 1853, then in 1858 set up a small brewery behind it, soon handing over the reins of the pub in order to concentrate on brewing. The business prospered and in 1876 Wood began the construction of a fine new building, designed by his architect son James. The spectacular Yorkshire brew tower was described as 'the most prominent feature of the Collingwood streetscape, and a conspicuous object for many miles around.' The viewing platform on the mansard roof offered a 'splendid view of the surrounding suburbs … the Plenty Ranges, Mount Macedon, and the Bay clearly discernible.' The tower was the tallest building in Melbourne until 1888 and remained a prominent Collingwood landmark until obscured by the recent twenty-first century over-development of the site.

Thomas Aitken established the **Victoria Brewery** (just outside the Collingwood boundary) in 1854 and in 1862 added a distillery in Northumberland Street Collingwood. His son Archibald, a Collingwood councillor and mayor, joined him in the business. The five storied brick tower distillery still stands as another attractive example of an industrial building but is also being rapidly eclipsed by twenty-first century development.

In the 1860s Thomas Graham moved into the old ferryman's house in Victoria Street (then known as Simpson's Road) and noticed a disused brewery next door. Here he set up the **Simpson's Road Brewery**, delightfully pictured in an 1868 advertising poster. The portly figure holding the reins and wearing a top hat is Graham himself, an adventurous and entrepreneurial fellow who died in 1871 leaving a substantial fortune. The brewery was taken over by Messrs Boyd and Head, renamed the Shamrock Brewery and expanded. Henry Tolhurst designed a new bi-chrome brick brew tower whose striking appearance probably once rivalled the Yorkshire Brewery. In 1909 it became a vinegar factory and was the site of the famous Audrey Skipping Girl until the building was demolished.

The **Crown Brewery** was located in Clarke Street Abbotsford in the late 1860s, just behind the Early Bird Hotel. Brewer Henry Selwood Austin became insolvent in 1869 and both businesses were acquired by hotelier and wine merchant Charles Lister. It was re-named the Excelsior Brewery but in April 1878 all the plant and building materials were auctioned. https://www.picturevictoria.vic.gov.au/site/yarra_melbourne/Collingwood/9407.html

Edward Crisp established a brewery in Cambridge Street in the 1860s, soon taken over by Oscar Gruenert and George Ball. Named the **Burton Brewery**, it continued until the early 1880s.

The number of breweries in Collingwood did not increase during the 1870s but significant additions were made to brewery buildings and equipment so the value of buildings and machinery, and the quantity of beer produced, did increase.

Foster Lager Brewery was built in Rokeby St in 1888 by the American Foster brothers and went on to almost gain a monopoly of Melbourne's bottled beer trade. Until this time beer was generally ale, but the Fosters introduced the German style lager beer, and supplied ice to hotels so the beer could be drunk cold. They were met with competition from importers lowering their prices for lager, but were saved by George Langridge, MLA for Collingwood, who ensured that an extra import duty was imposed.

The general view that Foster's introduced lager to Melbourne might not be strictly true. The German firm of Reune, Friedrich and Co set up what was claimed to be the first Australian Steam Lager Beer Brewery in Duke Street Abbotsford in 1885, employing a dozen German workmen. They set up a company called **Gambrinus Lager Beer Brewery Company** and their bottled bock and lager beer was stocked in some wine and spirit merchants. The company soon ran into financial difficulties and auctioned off the premises and equipment in 1886. Mr Curry took over and established the **Queen's Brewery**, but was bankrupt by early 1887. This is probably the shortest-lived Collingwood brewery!

A not very well-known brewery was in Hoddle Street Clifton Hill between Noone Street and South Terrace, established in 1881 as the **Clifton Hill Brewery**, run by James and Dominic Daly. Its name changed to the London Brewery in 1895, the Cascade Brewery in 1899, and the Crystal Malt Ale Brewery in 1901. The last-named also made a non-alcoholic temperance ale until finally closing in 1905.

Breweries thrived in the 1880s. Although they decreased in number, they increased in size and output. Not counting the Victoria Brewery, Collingwood in 1871 had five breweries with 83 employees; in 1893 there were four breweries with 157 employees.

Gradually they increased their premises, staff, output and fortunes, while the businesses became more mechanised and more metropolitan in scope. Collingwood in 1891 was Victoria's biggest brewing centre outside the City of Melbourne. Breweries were by now advancing on the technological front, especially in overcoming spoilage problems.

In the 1880s control had begun gradually passing from master brewers to private companies set up by the family. Later still family firms passed into the hands of public companies whose directors usually lived elsewhere. Thus Collingwood drinkers became less likely to be personally acquainted with the manufacturers of their beer. In 1883 John Wood died, then the business was carried on by his sons, while in 1887 a company was formed to take it over. In 1888 control of the Shamrock Brewery moved from Boyd and Head to a public company. The Foster brothers sold out to a local syndicate.

Breweries were badly affected by the 1890s depression, and this accelerated a tendency for brewery mergers. Shamrock and Foster's amalgamated with Carlton to form **Carlton and United Breweries**.

Hotel keepers rebelled against the leading breweries raising beer prices and in 1904 formed the **Melbourne Co-operative Brewery Company**. They built a brewery in Church Street Abbotsford and were soon realising a tidy profit. They introduced Abbotts Lager in 1914 and in 1915 added a new lager beer brewery designed by architects Sydney Smith and Ogg, also known for hotel designs in Collingwood.

After years of intense competition this independent company finally relented, despite opposition from some shareholders, and joined forces with Carlton and United Breweries.

For many years CUB brewed at Carlton, Victoria Brewery and at Abbotsford, where they built a massive, but not very attractive, new complex in the 1970s. Ironically Abbotsford is the only one of their brewing locales to survive. The Carlton and United Brewery was an important part of the social fabric providing entertainment and also employment. Many Collingwood football players were employed there. According to Keith Stackpole:

Leo Morgan, Jackie Ross, Jack Carmody and Marcus Whelan all got jobs on the one day and the other clubs went crook. They said, "How come they all get jobs with the brewery and the other clubs can't?" Of course, Jock McHale, coach of Collingwood was foreman there, worked there all his life.

Non-alcoholic drinks

By 1888 Henry Rowland had established the Victorian Dandelion ale Factory in Duke Street Abbotsford where he brewed non-alcoholic dandelion ale and hop champagne. Jacob Schweppe & Co (later Schweppes Ltd) operated in Lithgow Street Abbotsford while Dyason & Son produced lime juice and raspberry vinegar in their decorative factory fronting Cambridge and Oxford Streets.

The Twenty-first Century

In recent years a number of boutique brewers have started operations in the district. Including Bodriggy and Stomping Ground, these have quickly become popular.

https://www.stompingground.beer/collingwood-beer-trail-info