

## **THE FORRES BREWERY**

The property which became the Forres brewery began life as a Lint Mill, spinning being a flourishing industry in the Forres of the past. The mill, having its own mill-lade taking water from the Mosset Burn, was ideally situated for use as a brewery, having the possibility of a direct outlet for waste back into the burn.

The building was owned by the Fraser Tytler family, and lately by Captain Fraser Tytler. The original road entrance to the lint mill would have been near the foot of the Castle Hill at Castle Bridge, and then run alongside the Mosset Burn. There is later evidence that this entrance road was in continued use as a footpath. Once the building was converted to a brewery the entrance near Castle Hill would have been inconvenient for the large number of wagons needing access, and the building of the new “Brewery Bridge” in 1834 gave easier access to the site. The mill cottages which had been built nearby in about 1828 would have provided useful accommodation for the brewery workers.

In 1834 the lint mill was converted and equipped as a brewery by Mr MacDonald and Mr George Urquhart. Although they were named as the tenants of the property the “delicious Forres beverages” were actually brewed by Donald Munro, who lived in one of the former mill cottages.<sup>1</sup>

By the time of the Forres Electoral Roll of 1851<sup>2</sup> the brewer is named as John Hossack, the son of a Forres innkeeper. On the 20<sup>th</sup> May 1852 he married Christina Morrison, the daughter of Alexander Morrison, a quite successful tenant farmer from Allanaha, on the Geddes estate near Nairn. George Urquhart was one of the witnesses at the wedding.<sup>3</sup> Christina had five sisters and two brothers, and one of her brothers features later in the story of the brewery.<sup>4</sup>

John Hossack and his new wife Christina took up residence at the brewery, and it was here that their four children were born. Jane Eliza was born on the 27<sup>th</sup> September 1853, followed on 11<sup>th</sup> December 1854 by Thomas. Alexander was born on the 15<sup>th</sup> July 1856, but only survived about five weeks due to intestinal problems. The fourth child, Isabella, born on the 17<sup>th</sup> August 1858, fared little better, dying at the age of 15 months from “hoopincough” The second child Thomas died on 9<sup>th</sup> April 1864 of typhus, leaving Jane Eliza as the sole surviving child of John and Christina.

In 1855 John Hossack went into partnership with George Urquhart, the reasons for Mr MacDonald leaving the business not being clear. The brewery now operated under the name

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<sup>1</sup> Forres Gazette 9<sup>th</sup> July 1947, in Moray District Archives

<sup>2</sup> Forres Electoral Roll 1851 in Moray District Archives

<sup>3</sup> Forres OPR 134/4/1852

<sup>4</sup> The Morrison Family, unpublished study by Bruce B Bishop for the University of Stirling, 1999, copy in Moray Heritage Centre, Elgin Library

of Messrs Urquhart and Hossack, but two years later, although George Urquhart was still living at Castlehill, he seems to have become little more than a sleeping partner, now describing himself as a ‘farmer’, leaving John Hossack as the sole brewer in the establishment. At about this time, according to the Valuation Rolls, the brewery was paying an annual rental of £16/10/0d to Captain Fraser Tytler.<sup>5</sup>

A small town brewery at this time was capable of being housed in relatively small premises, with almost every operation being carried out under the one roof. Obviously John Hossack would have needed workers, as the brewery would have been too large to be operated by one man, and would probably also have needed delivery men to transport the finished product to his customers, maybe among the eight or nine hotels and drinking establishments which existed in Forres at the time. There were also retail sales direct from the brewery.

There was little change in the situation for the next decade or so, the deaths of the Hossack children would obviously have led to some darker moments, but in general the business seems to have continued quite successfully. The development of the railways meant that it was now easier to obtain the English hops which were required in the brewing process, these previously having been brought in by sea to Burghead or Lossiemouth. There was also a readily available supply of local grain.

In 1868 a description of the brewery reads:

*“Opposite the south end of the market green a road branches off to the left and crosses the burn by a stone bridge of two low-set arches, immediately after crossing which is the Forres Brewery, a number of small dingy-looking erections, the sombre appearance of which is greatly relieved by the neat dwelling-house and beautiful parterre of the tenant of the brewery, Mr. Hossack”.*<sup>6</sup>

Mr Hossack, his wife and their sole surviving child Jane Eliza continued to live at Burdshaugh, as this area of Forres was called.

Chritina, John’s wife, was not in the best of health, and at half past six on the morning of the 18<sup>th</sup> June 1874 she died from disease of the heart, liver and kidneys, at the age of 48.<sup>7</sup> John Hossack and his daughter continued to operate the brewery, now with the assistance of another brewer, John Ross, who was living at Number 10 Burdshaugh, the cottages now having been given numbers.

In the spring of 1878 John Hossack was afflicted with “apoplexy of the brain” and eighteen months later he died, a lunatic, at The Grove, Elgin, which appears to have been at that time a private mental institution.<sup>8</sup> He died intestate but in a Confirmation of 10<sup>th</sup> February 1880 his

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<sup>5</sup> Valuation Rolls, Forres, 1855 – 1858, in Moray District Archives.

<sup>6</sup> Watson. J & W. Morayshire Described. Russell and Watson, Elgin, 1868

<sup>7</sup> NRH Death Certificate 137/61 1874 Forres

<sup>8</sup> NRH Death Certificate 135/148 1879 Elgin

daughter Jane Eliza was declared executrix of his estate valued at £921/6/4d.<sup>9</sup> Just two months later she married Robert McKenzie, a wine merchant living at The Cottage, Buletloan, Forres, and she left the brewery at this time.<sup>10</sup>

The events of the last few years had left the management of the brewery in a difficult position. George Urquhart seems by this time to have totally given up his interest in the brewery to concentrate on his farm, John Hossack had gone to that great brewery in the sky, and Jane Eliza had left to get married. John Ross continued to be the brewer, and probably acted also as manager during these years. Christina Hossack, the deceased wife of John, had a brother William Morrison, a farmer and cattle dealer at Allanaha on the Geddes estate near Nairn. Research into the Morrison family has shown that they were always eager to snap up any seemingly profitable business enterprise which came their way, and by the time of the 1881 census William Morrison was living in the “*neat dwelling-house and beautiful parterre*” together with his sister Eliza and a servant girl Jane MacKenzie.<sup>11</sup>

The brewery was still a very small local concern, brewing probably not more than 500 – 600 gallons of beer a week, but this would have been sufficient to supply the local trade and retail sales. The brewery owned two spring carts which would have been used to transport the casks. The expansion of the railways, which had earlier seemed to be so useful in the delivery of hops and such like, was now beginning to sound the death-knell of the small local breweries, by making it very easy for the large brewery companies of the central belt to sell their much wider choice of beers and ales to the general public.

William Morrison had very quickly described himself as a “Master Brewer”<sup>12</sup>, and despite being well into his forties he very soon found himself a lady friend whom he married on 12<sup>th</sup> January 1882. Maybe she liked his “*beautiful parterre*”. His wife was Isabella Mavor, the daughter of a farmer at Marcassie in Rafford, only a couple of miles south of the brewery.<sup>13</sup> Their only child, Alexander James Morrison, was born at the brewery on 9<sup>th</sup> March 1883.<sup>14</sup>

The brewing business by this time was in great decline, and William’s investment may have been sadly misjudged. Although John Ross continued there as the brewer, the lease of the building was advertised in November 1883, with William Morrison and family already having left Forres to take up tenancy of the farm at Hillhead, Birnie, near Elgin. The Forres Gazette of 7<sup>th</sup> November 1883 carried the advertisement for the lease:

*“To let. The Forres Brewery*

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<sup>9</sup> National Archives of Scotland. Confirmations. 1880

<sup>10</sup> NRH Marriage Certificate 7<sup>th</sup> April 1880, Forres

<sup>11</sup> 1881 Census Forres

<sup>12</sup> On Birth Certificate of his child, see footnote 36

<sup>13</sup> NRH Marriage Certificate 129/1/1882 Dallas

<sup>14</sup> NRH Birth Certificate 137/30/1883 Forres

*The Forres Brewery and Dwelling House adjoining will be let on lease for such a number of years as may be agreed upon. Entry at Whitsunday 1884. Applications to be made to Mackenzie and Grant, Solicitors, Forres Forres 6<sup>th</sup> November 1883”.*<sup>15</sup>

The prospective tenant was Robert Bingham, the butler at Brodie Castle, who had applied for a transfer of the retail license (apparently retail sales now formed a large part of the brewery's business), which was refused, as reported on by the Forres Gazette of 7<sup>th</sup> May 1884. He then appealed against this refusal. At the appeal against the refusal of the retail license a petition against the granting of the license, signed by 300 inhabitants of Forres, was handed in by the town clerk.

At Forres Brewery a large trade was done with farmers and country people and the beer was also bought in small quantities by people in the town. “If the license were refused it would be a hardship and an inconvenience” (*lawyer for the applicant*). The lawyer for the licensing board, speaking of Mr Morrison, said that “with regard to the sales of beer in casks the proportion of quarter casks to those of larger capacity was 6000 to 2000.... A respectable farmer in the vicinity of Forres is reported having said that very often the horses went out (from the brewery) in the charge of the men, but that they generally returned with their positions reversed....”

The magistrates rejected the application by a vote of 11 – 10, with two abstentions. They suggested that the brewery had been “a running sore for many years. The undertaking not to sell small quantities of beer had been given before, and the plan had been found to be an utter failure. The class of people against whom they had to complain were poachers and drunkards who could afford a license for their dog but neglected their wives and families”. The owners of the licensed premises in Forres must have taken great satisfaction in these findings of the licensing court.

Obviously after this the brewery was no longer a viable business, although John Ross seems to have continued brewing there right up until the spring of 1884, but finally, in the Forres Gazette of 28<sup>th</sup> May 1884 the plant was advertised for sale:

*“Sale of Brewery Plant*

*There will be sold, by public rroup, on Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> June, the whole BREWING PLANT in the FORRES BREWERY, consisting of two coppers, two fermenting tuns, each holding about 700 gallons, Mash Tun, Malt Mill, Pumps, Metal Steep, 500 casks of all sizes, 2 Spring Carts, set of Gig Harness, Set of Cart do., Coopers tools, lead pipes, Hurley, Barrows, two Packets of East Kent Hops, etc., etc., also the Kiln. Sale to begin at two o'clock in the afternoon, David Ross, Auctioneer. Forres Brewery, Forres, May 1884”.*

After half a century, the Forres Brewery was no more. The final heartbreak to any hardened drinking man was the news, in the same edition of the newspaper which had advertised the sale of the brewery plant, that:

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<sup>15</sup> Forres Gazette 7<sup>th</sup> November 1883 in Moray District Archives

*“Mr A J Taylor, baker, has taken a lease of the Forres Brewery, lately occupied by Mr W Morrison, and for which a retail license was refused at the last licensing court. The new tenant contemplates using the building for the manufacture of...*

***AERATED WATER !!!***

By the early 20<sup>th</sup> century the premises were being used as part of Burdshaugh Farm, and were later demolished to make way for road improvements and the Orchard Road Council Housing scheme.