

# **Breweries in Early Christchurch, New Zealand, 1853-1923**

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# Breweries in Early Christchurch, New Zealand

## 1853-1923

When the Canterbury settlement was being planned in 1848, brewing ale or cider was still a common household task in Britain, especially in large country houses. Ever since the Middle Ages domestic brewing had been regarded as women's work, but the growth of towns and cities during the industrial revolution created a growing market for bottled ale and porter, and breweries such as Guinness in Dublin or the Anchor in London became large commercial enterprises. Advertisements in the *Lyttelton Times* show that the Canterbury Pilgrims enjoyed both beer and spirits in large quantities from the start of the Canterbury settlement. The very first issue of the *Lyttelton Times* in 1851 carried an advertisement from storekeeper Richard Beamish for quantities of brandy, Old Scotch whisky, Geneva gin, port wine in casks, sherry, claret, golden sherry and 'very superior champagne'. Finally, he had 'Superior Colonial Ale', brewed in Wellington.<sup>1</sup> When the 'first four ships' arrived in December 1850, there were already two 'grog-shops' in Lyttelton, the older, the Mitre, established by Captain Hornbrook in October 1849. This was Canterbury's first proper pub.<sup>2</sup>

The Canterbury settlers came from a beer-drinking culture. For centuries the staple diet of the poor had been bread and beer, with whatever cheese, bacon or meat could be added. A 'Ploughman's lunch' still comprises beer, bread, cheese and onion. 'Small beer' was low in alcohol and high in nutrition and could be given to children. It was safer than most local water supplies in an era that predated bacteriology and an understanding of water-borne diseases. Historically the terms beer and ale respectively referred to drinks brewed with and without hops. Hops added a bitterness to balance the sweetness of the malt. Dark beers were developed in London from well-hopped brown malt brews and were known as porter or stout. The names originated in eighteenth century England from their popularity with street and river porters in London. Stronger porters were marketed according to their strength as 'Extra Porter', 'Double Porter' and 'Stout Porter'. The latter was then shortened to Stout. Guinness was originally called 'Extra Superior Porter' and gained the name Stout only in 1840.<sup>3</sup>

Beer can be brewed from almost any grain, but barley has long been the most popular. The first officially-measured grain crop in the Canterbury settlement was grown in 1853 by the chairman of the Society of Land Purchasers, William Guise Brittan, who was later appointed Commissioner of Crown Lands.<sup>4</sup> He brewed successfully from this first bumper crop on his farm 'Englefield' (at the corner of what is now Fitzgerald Avenue and Avonside Drive), and next year sowed barley with the intention of brewing again. As the son of a Plymouth brewer and gin distiller, Brittan knew what he was doing. He then leased his first sod farmhouse to Archer C. Croft and young John Hamilton Ward, who started brewing here in 1853, but they had to stop when the land was needed for a roadway. Ward then went off to become a farmer at Rangiora, and Croft moved his equipment to Whately Road (later Victoria Street) near the Market Place (now Victoria Square). In October 1853 he advertised '300 choice fruit trees, vines, etc' for sale 'at the Brewery, near the Market Place'.<sup>5</sup>

He may not have been the first, however. In October 1852 Longden and Le Cren advertised for sale 'A large copper Boiler, about 200 gallons, ordered expressly for a Brewery'.<sup>6</sup> Apparently someone else had planned to start a brewery but ran out of money.

Croft's Brewery on Whately Road near Peterborough Street appears to be the first commercial brewery in Christchurch, but he was probably under-capitalised, for within a year he had sold it to Richard Taylor, who renamed it the Avon Brewery.<sup>7</sup> Taylor then formed a partnership with a man called Crawford (who died in 1857) and the Avon Brewery was also known as Taylor and Crawford's brewery. Croft then rejoined the business as a partner. (He may have been there all along as the head brewer.) Water was always a problem for early breweries, and in February 1858 Taylor had a new well dug to 12 feet, then drove in a pole with an auger on the end and a spout of water rose several feet above ground.<sup>8</sup> This was one of the first artesian wells in Christchurch, and showed that ample supplies of exceptionally pure water existed not far below the surface.

Unfortunately in December 1858 the Avon Brewery was destroyed by fire.<sup>9</sup> The report described it as the Taylor and Croft Brewery. An inquiry established that a kiln had been allowed to overheat, and set fire to nearby timbers. This disastrous fire helped to prompt the formation of Christchurch's first fire brigade. However, Taylor appears to have been insured and was able to rebuild on the same site, naming his new premises (rather predictably) the Phoenix Brewery.<sup>10</sup>

A second brewery appeared in 1859, on Cashel Street, established by William Henry Packer, who was also a member of the Canterbury Provincial Council. It was named the Albion Brewery, but was also known simply as Packer's Brewery.<sup>11</sup> Packer also imported 'first-class wines and spirits' direct from England.<sup>12</sup> However, like Taylor's Brewery, the Albion suffered damage in a fire in 1861 and Packer had to sell off horses, sheet lead, and quantities of barley, beer, brandy and wine to cover his losses.<sup>13</sup> He then sold the business to G. Willmer, who in turn advertised it for sale in March 1862.<sup>14</sup> Thomas B. Craig then bought the business<sup>15</sup> and advertised for a new book-keeper in December 1862.<sup>16</sup>

There was no mention of the Albion in the papers for a year, until January 1864, when its new owner was named as H. S. Brown and Company. In July 1864 the company announced that it was erecting a new stone brewery on the South Belt (Moorhouse Avenue) near Lincoln Road, and they had sunk an artesian well on the site to 80 feet.<sup>17</sup> The 1863 Electoral Roll lists Horace Simpson Brown and John Thomas Brown as both being leaseholders of the Albion Brewery, Cashel Street.<sup>18</sup> After offering a £10 reward for information leading to the conviction of persons stealing posts and fence rails from their building site the Albion Brewery appears to have moved to its new building by the end of 1864, leaving an office in Hereford Street for the sale of yeast and the payment of accounts.<sup>19</sup>

Archer Croft then appealed to his former partner Hamilton Ward, who had done well as a farmer and land speculator at Rangiora, and with his capital they set up a new brewery in 1860 just across the road from the scene of their first attempts at brewing in 1853. This was on the corner of the East Belt (later Fitzgerald Avenue) and Chester Street East, with a northern frontage facing the Avon River. Archer Croft sold his share of the business in 1862 and it became known as Ward's Canterbury Brewery.

Ward's Brewery prided itself on its top-quality products, and the price charged for their best Double Diamond Ale, 3s 6d a gallon, reflected this. In 1861 their First Class Ale cost 3s a gallon, and Second Class 2s.<sup>20</sup> Hamilton Ward made a trip to England in 1864, and treated his workers to a celebratory farewell dinner. The newspaper report of this convivial occasion commented on the 'good and kindly feeling' which existed between management and workers at the brewery.<sup>21</sup> In 1869 the brewery employed 14 men and occupied a three-storey building, complete with furnace and boiler rooms. The malt was ground by horse-power. Three fermenting tuns held 1,500 gallons each. They made no porter, but

specialised in ale, and sold it only in Canterbury, though their malted barley was sold all over New Zealand. In 1869 they were malting 29,000 bushels of barley a year. Their ale won a special certificate at the Otago Exhibition of 1865.<sup>22</sup> Hamilton Ward sold the business to Henry Lee in 1881, but his name was retained, and by then it was one of the largest breweries in New Zealand. Its first brick building had been erected in 1881, when the company was incorporated as the Canterbury Brewery. More buildings were added in the 1890s. By 1903 it had taken over the City Brewery and maltings in South Colombo Street. The bottling department had capacity for 8,000 dozen of bottled beer. Ward's Brewery kept going for nearly 100 years, the name lasting until 1955. Ward's Beer then became known as Canterbury Draught. (The brick buildings were demolished after the 2011 earthquakes.)<sup>23</sup>

John May from Wellington announced in April 1857 that he intended moving to Christchurch to set up a brewery 'near the Windmill'.<sup>24</sup> In June 1859 he informed the inhabitants of Canterbury that he was now able to supply them with 'ALE OF GOOD QUALITY'. Fresh yeast and grain were also 'always on hand'.<sup>25</sup> The windmill was in Sydenham, but the brewery John May advertised for sale in 1863 was described as being at the corner of Antigua and St Asaph streets, near Christchurch Hospital and St Andrew's Presbyterian Church. He advertised a malthouse and brewery for sale, all in 'excellent working order', with two store-rooms.<sup>26</sup> This advertisement was repeated several times, but he apparently had no takers. John May is not mentioned again until 1866, when he is again advertising the brewery and its stock in trade for sale, with casks, tubs, sacks, a coffee roaster and household furniture. This suggests that he was selling up.<sup>27</sup> The likeliest purchaser, of the name if not the buildings, was Francis Innes, for he is recorded in May 1868 as the proprietor of the Victoria Brewery, Windmill Road.<sup>28</sup> But he appears to have relocated this brewery to Waltham Road by 1874.

William and Samuel Manning were two other notable early brewers in Christchurch, arriving in December 1856 on the *Egmont*. They lived at first on Lincoln Road and started brewing in 1858 as Manning and Company's Suffolk Brewery, but in 1860 William branched out on his own, moving to new premises at the corner of Barbadoes Street and the South Belt (now Moorhouse Avenue). He carried on here as Manning and Company until 1867, when Francis Innes joined him and the company was renamed Innes, Manning and Company.<sup>29</sup> This did not last long, however, and Innes took over the Victoria Brewery in Antigua Street, later moving the name and the plant to new buildings at the lower end of

Waltham Road, near Wilson's Bridge. Innes was also an hotelier, and had the lease of the Club Hotel in Rangiora. But he was often in trouble with the magistrates for after-hours sale of liquor, or failing to keep a light burning outside his pubs. In 1880 he was caught labelling his own ale as imported London ales with counterfeit labels.<sup>30</sup>

However, the Waltham Brewery was destroyed by fire in November 1883. Only the brick malthouse survived. The office safe was saved, and 15 hogsheads of beer, but 180 dozen bottles of beer and 150 hogsheads were lost. The Fire Brigade had no assistance from the neighbours, 'who were singularly apathetic under the circumstances'. Damage was estimated at £3,000 but insurance policies amounted to £2,400 and it was soon rebuilt.<sup>31</sup> Innes also owned the Standard Brewery on the South Belt (Moorhouse Avenue), where he was badly scalded in 1884 when a tap on a boiler burst.<sup>32</sup> Innes died in 1888 and the brewery with all its equipment, and 'sundries too numerous to mention', was sold at auction.<sup>33</sup> By 1909 it was owned by W. Morrison, and was known as the Waltham Road Brewery.<sup>34</sup>

Manning's original Suffolk Brewery changed hands several times in the 1860s and 1870s: owners included Pitt & Harris, Disher, and McIvey & Baird. The latter formed a limited liability company, but kept the name Suffolk Brewery. By 1885, when the brewery was leased by Scarlett and Company, the plant was capable of producing 2,000 hogsheads a year, and malted 500 bushels a week. The firm had a bottling plant in Bath Street, and also imported a considerable quantity of English and Australian ale and stout.<sup>35</sup>

Meanwhile, Samuel Manning had moved in 1860 to Lower High Street (now part of Ferry Road) and named his new business the Christchurch Brewery.<sup>36</sup> It stood on the south side, near Fitzgerald Avenue. At that time his staff comprised two men and a boy. He became the leading brewer of porter or dark ale in the Canterbury district. By 1869 the business was thriving, with a new brick building (1868) and two large cellars. The malthouse stood across the yard, opposite the brewery, and malted up to 6,000 bushels of barley a year. The fermenting tuns each held 500 gallons. Manning now had six permanent hands on an average of 45 shillings a week.<sup>37</sup> The company was incorporated in 1881, with capital of £120,000. By 1885, his premises covered 2 acres and employed 24 men.<sup>38</sup> Samuel Manning was now one of the city's leading businessmen, and he served as mayor in 1890. By 1903, the brewery and maltworks covered 9 acres and employed 32 men. Andersons built the boiler which worked the large mashing

tuns and coppers. An underground water tank held 4,000 gallons, which could be pumped at a moment's notice for fire suppression. The Christchurch Brewery had won many prizes and awards by then, and was one of the three largest breweries in the city, equal in staff numbers to the Crown Brewery.<sup>39</sup>

Travers and Oldham had started the Reliance Brewery on Ferry Road, date not known, but were bought out by Richard Taylor of the Phoenix Brewery in February 1861.<sup>40</sup> He reopened the Reliance in June 1861, advertising ale and porter for sale. He also had to ask that people should return Travers and Oldham casks to him.<sup>41</sup> Richard Taylor was dogged by bad luck. His Phoenix Brewery was seriously damaged by fire in February 1865 (it started in a cabinet maker's workshop next door) and as he was under-insured he sold the business to A. Moore and Company, who retained the name. Ironically, they then received a medal for one of Taylor's 'Canterbury XXX Ales' that had been sent to the Melbourne Intercolonial Exhibition.<sup>42</sup>

The City Brewery was started in the latter part of 1862 by Messrs R. Deacon and W. Vincent, on a site in Sydenham. They also built a separate stone malthouse beside the Heathcote River, on Colombo Street South, three stories high with concrete floors and foundations. (This solid building survived the 2011 earthquake.) They invested £2,000 in the latest brewing equipment from England, and used an American patent ram to distribute water from three artesian wells to all parts of the brewery. Deacon and Vincent specialised in pale ale, and refused to make any porter. By 1869 they employed 9 men and made 115,000 gallons of ale a year.<sup>43</sup> By 1890 the malthouse had been taken over by the Canterbury Brewery. In 1914 the maltsters were James Bennett and James Dawson.<sup>44</sup>

By 1865 there were five major breweries in Christchurch: the Albion (H. S. Brown and Co.), the City Brewery (Deacon & Vincent), the Phoenix (A. Moore and Co.), the Christchurch Brewery (S. Manning and Co.), and the Canterbury brewery (J. Hamilton Ward and Co.) and we know this from an advertisement in the *Lyttelton Times* setting a standard price of £5. 15s per hogshead for ale and porter, or 2s 6d per gallon. Public houses that dealt with the one brewery for more than three months could expect a discount of 10s per hogshead.<sup>45</sup>

By 1869 there were breweries established at Kaiapoi and Rangiora. H. Jaggar started the one in Kaiapoi in 1859, but it was taken over by the Rickman brothers in 1861. By 1869 it was employing about four men and was owned by Mrs



Davies. Howard's Brewery at Rangiora was also 'pretty extensive' and had a reputation for 'very good quality beer'.<sup>46</sup>

The old Victoria Brewery buildings in Antigua Street brewery may have stood empty and idle for a few years. The next mention of this brewery occurs in July 1875, when it was taken over by W. White and Company and renamed the Crown Brewery.<sup>47</sup> In January 1876 White advertised to farmers that he could supply them with harvest ale in hogsheads or barrels. He described himself as a brewer and maltster, and supplier of ale and stout, pure malt and hops.<sup>48</sup> The company's first annual meeting of shareholders declared a 'satisfactory' surplus to be carried forward. Among new shareholders in 1876 were the Louisson brothers, who then acquired most of the shares. Charles Louisson was mayor of Christchurch 1888-9 and a member of the Legislative Council. The Louissons were shrewd businessmen, and they proceeded to expand and develop the business year on year, buying their hops from Nelson and their barley from Canterbury. New brick buildings were erected in 1898 to replace the original wooden buildings. By 1903, when the Crown Brewery was the subject of a glowing entry in the *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, it was a large enterprise employing 32 hands. Its ales had won medals and certificates at successive A & P Shows, and its bulk ale was known throughout New Zealand for its consistently high quality.<sup>49</sup> Christchurch in 1918 had no fewer than 35 licensed hotels, so the breweries had an ample distribution network for their products.<sup>50</sup>

In 1923 the three big Christchurch breweries – Crown, Manning's and Ward's – were merged and taken over by New Zealand Breweries. Production was steadily concentrated at the Crown site in Antigua Street. In 1955 Ward's brewery was closed and its Canterbury Draught label was made at Antigua Street. Manning's Christchurch Brewery in Ferry Road was also shut down, and the buildings were briefly used to house the Industries Fair in the late 1950s, before being demolished. The site then became a bus depot. The Canterbury Brewery was by then the largest in Christchurch, rivalled only by Ballins Brewery. The label's black and red colours were those of the province and the Crusaders rugby team. The tall Canterbury Draught sign was a city landmark for many years at the end of St Asaph Street. By then Lion Breweries had acquired the business. But the 2011 earthquake badly damaged the old brick buildings, which were all condemned, and Lion Breweries decided to close the plant and cease brewing in Christchurch. Over 60 jobs were lost. The buildings were demolished in 2013 and the site was designated for the city's new Metro Sports Facility.

Bernhard Ballin had started an aerated waters factory in Byron Street, Sydenham, in 1878. In 1936 his two sons bought the old Victoria Brewery in Waltham Road, and entered the beer-brewing trade, in defiance of the big North Island companies, NZ Breweries (1923) and Dominion Breweries (1930). NZ Breweries responded by buying Timaru Breweries and opening a branch in Victoria Street, but Ballins prospered (they already owned 81 hotels) and by 1944 they were the sixth largest brewery in NZ, making 42,000 barrels of beer a year. But the beer side of Ballins was taken over by NZ Breweries in 1959, in a lucrative deal which guaranteed they would not compete with Ballins' aerated waters.<sup>51</sup> The Waltham Road brewery was closed down in the 1960s, having been used only as a maltworks. These tall pale-green buildings survived for another fifty years, used by a variety of tenants, until they were demolished in 2015 to make way for a new housing development.

Finally, mention should be made of the Heathcote Maltworks, started by Henry Wigram in 1886 opposite the railway station in Heathcote Valley.<sup>52</sup> This became a large enterprise, exporting to Australia as well as supplying many New Zealand breweries. Wigram also built a brick kiln next to the malting works, and this supplied thousands of bricks for the expansion of Christchurch in the 1890s and early 1900s. Henry Wigram was one of the city's most popular and successful businessmen, and was elected Mayor in 1903-4. His generosity enabled the government to acquire the Sockburn aerodrome which became the birthplace of the Royal New Zealand Air Force, and the airfield was renamed Wigram Aerodrome in 1923. As with most of Christchurch's brewery buildings, the Heathcote maltworks and their tall concrete silos have now disappeared, the site being redeveloped for housing.

The hotels of Christchurch deserve a history of their own.

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## SOURCES

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- <sup>4</sup> Geoffrey W. Rice, with Frances Ryman, *Cricketing Colonists: the Brittan Brothers in early Canterbury* (Christchurch, Canterbury University Press, pp.153-5.
- <sup>5</sup> *LT*, 1 October 1853, p.2.
- <sup>6</sup> *LT*, 30 October 1852, p.3.
- <sup>7</sup> *LT*, 29 October 1854, p.1.
- <sup>8</sup> *LT*, 13 February 1858, p.5.
- <sup>9</sup> *LT*, 8 December 1858, p.4.
- <sup>10</sup> *LT*, 1 March 1869, p.3.
- <sup>11</sup> *LT*, 3 December 1859, p.5.
- <sup>12</sup> *LT*, 7 April 1860, p.5.
- <sup>13</sup> *LT*, 29 May 1861, p. 8 and 1 June 1861, p.4.
- <sup>14</sup> *LT*, 8 March 1862, p. 7, often repeated into April.
- <sup>15</sup> *LT*, 19 November 1862, p. 5.
- <sup>16</sup> *LT*, 10 December 1862, p.1.
- <sup>17</sup> *LT*, 5 July 1864, p.3.
- <sup>18</sup> *LT*, 15 April 1863, p. 2.
- <sup>19</sup> *LT*, 18 August 1864, p. 3.
- <sup>20</sup> *LT*, 16 January 1861, p. 6.
- <sup>21</sup> *LT*, 26 May 1864, p. 5.
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- <sup>23</sup> Anna Bulovic, 'The Ward Brothers', website *Discover the Delights of Peeling Back History*, [www.peelingbackhistory.co.nz](http://www.peelingbackhistory.co.nz).
- <sup>24</sup> *LT*, 22 April 1857, p.6.
- <sup>25</sup> *LT*, 25 June 1859, p.5.
- <sup>26</sup> *LT*, 10 October 1863, p.7.
- <sup>27</sup> *LT*, 20 September 1866, p. 4.
- <sup>28</sup> *LT*, 13 May 1868, p.3.
- <sup>29</sup> *LT*, 5 October 1867, p.3.
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- <sup>32</sup> *Press*, 24 April 1884, p.2.
- <sup>33</sup> *Press*, 13 March 1888, p.8.
- <sup>34</sup> *Star*, 21 August 1909, p.7.
- <sup>35</sup> *Mosley's Illustrated Guide to Christchurch* (1885), p.207.
- <sup>36</sup> *LT*, 1 March 1869, p.3.
- <sup>37</sup> *LT*, 1 March 1869, p.3.
- <sup>38</sup> *Mosley's Illustrated Guide to Christchurch* (1885), pp. 203-7.
- <sup>39</sup> *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, III, Canterbury (Christchurch, 1903), pp.291-2.
- <sup>40</sup> *LT*, 23 February 1861, p. 4.
- <sup>41</sup> *LT*, 19 June 1861, p. 6.
- <sup>42</sup> *LT*, 9 March 1865, p. 2.
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- <sup>46</sup> *LT*, 1 March 1869, p.3.
- <sup>47</sup> *Press*, 22 July 1875, p. 1.

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<sup>48</sup> *Press*, 10 January 1875, p.4.

<sup>49</sup> *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, III, Canterbury (Christchurch, 1903), pp.290-1.

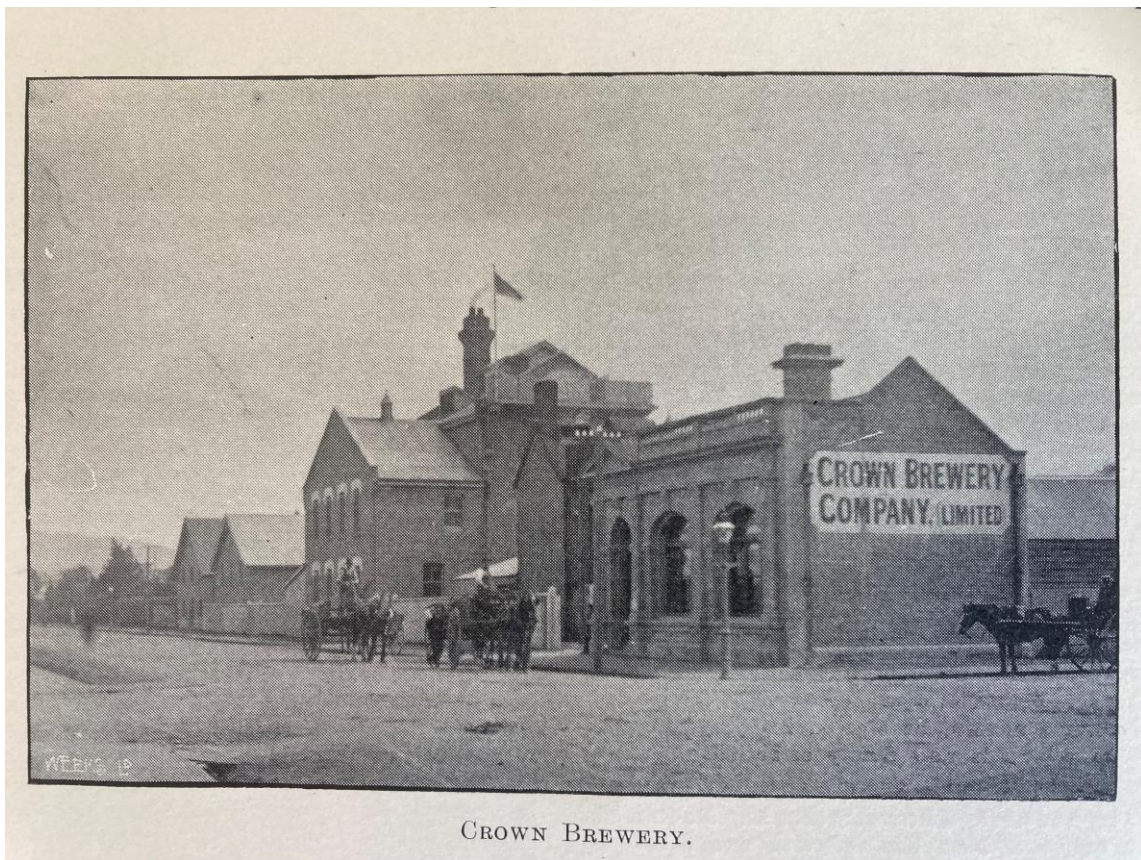
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Ward's original Malthouse and Brewery, Fitzgerald Avenue, viewed from the north, c.1863.  
W. T. L. Travers photo. Christchurch City Libraries CD1 IMG0036



CROWN BREWERY.

*Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, III Canterbury (1903), p. 291.

BREWERS, ETC.



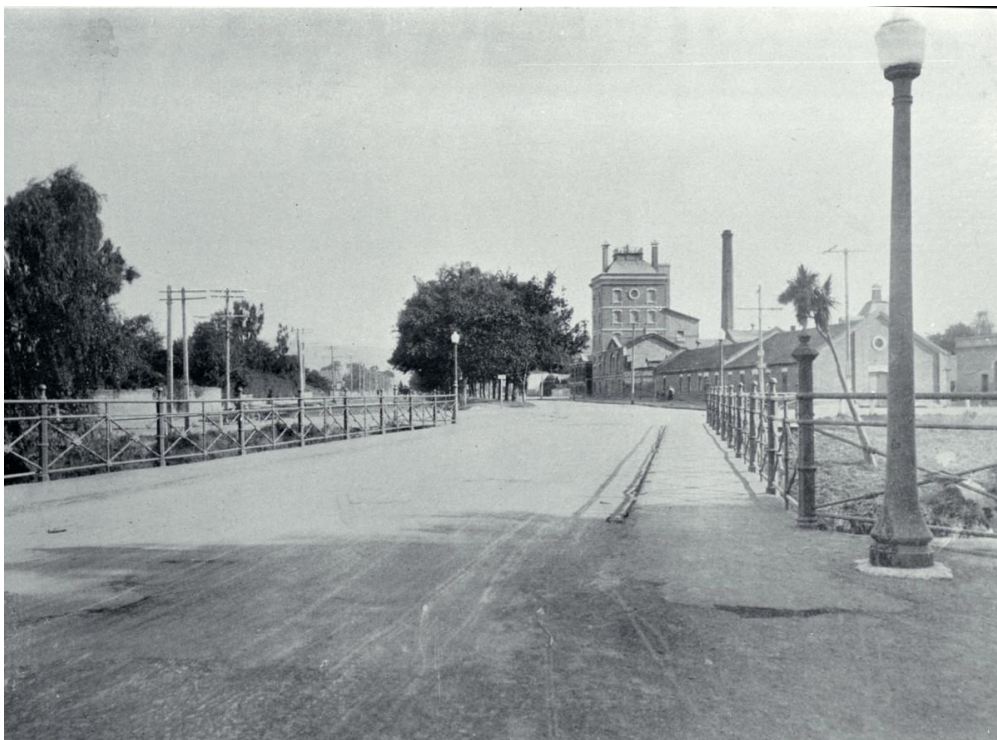
BOTTLING STORE, CROWN BREWERY.



Ward's Malthouse and Brewery, 1890s, from the north.



Ward's Branch Brewery, Canterbury Brewery, Kilmore Street, c. 1920s; now Pomeroy's Inn.



Ward's Brewery, from the north, c. 1910



Ballins Brewery, Waltham Road, 1951.  
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