

# THE EARLSDON 'POP' FACTORY

A gentleman went into the city Record Office a few days ago with a query – not usually an odd event, except that in this case the staff were unable to help him. He lived in Holbrooks and, digging in his back garden, he had unearthed an old glass bottle embossed with the words 'Sphinx Drinks, Earlsdon'. What information was in the archives about this firm? Nothing could be found, and the staff could tell him nothing. However, visiting the office at the same time was someone who could – and the following is the story, with some extra details, that she was able to tell him.

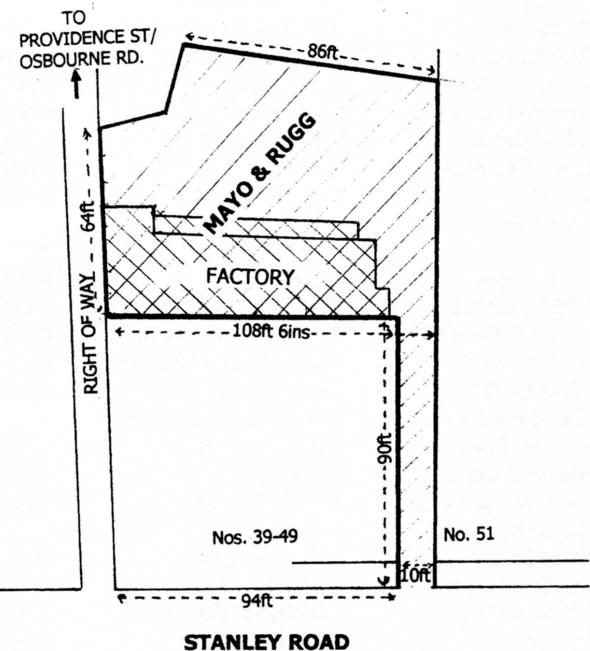
A Mr Edmund Mayo and Mr Edward Rugg had been producing high class mineral waters in the city for some years, even having the honour of supplying them for the Royal Luncheon at St. Thomas' Vicarage in 1898, when the Duchess of Albany paid her visit. But demand outgrew the capacity of their city premises, so when a small plot of land lying between Osborne Road and newly built Stanley Road, and adjoining the site of the future Rex Cycle Company, came on the market, they snapped it up. The factory they had built there was, according to an article in the Coventry Standard of 31 March 1898:

*'...carefully designed for a specialised manufacture, and built under the inspection of public health officials, it contains machinery that arouses the interest not only of the uninitiated, but of the mechanism, the arrangements for washing the bottles, preparing the syrups, mixing the aerating materials, cleansing the carbonic acid gas, charging the water, and automatically filling the bottles and stoppering them by the same operation, being well-nigh perfect.'*

*The capacity of the works at present is 2,000 dozens or 24,000 bottles of aerated water in an ordinary working day, (this must be an exaggeration, surely it was the output for a week) supplemented by arrangements for brewing and bottling a variety of other liquids – such as ginger beer, winter stout, hop bitters etc. Purity, extreme cleanliness and the utmost care are the watchwords of the Stanley Road factory. And, by the way, it may be mentioned, as one indication of the up-to-date methods of the firm, that corks, composition, or glass marbles to seal the bottles, are entirely tabooed, the stoppers being formed with a screw and made of hard wood, viz. lignum vitae ad vulcanite, thus ensuring almost perfect safety in opening ....'*

The name Mayo and Rugg on the sides of the horse-drawn drays used for delivery became well known, not only locally, but throughout the city. Crates of 'pop' were delivered to a few corner shops, but mainly the trade was with individual households, and their stoneware and glass bottles became a familiar and welcome sight to many families. Local children didn't need to wait for the weekly deliveries, but could run up the jetty from Stanley Road or Providence Street with a jug to fetch a pennyworth or two of 'pop' straight from the vat.

Mayo and Rugg sold out in the 1920s to a Mr Fuller of Styvechale Avenue, who appointed the uncle of Bill Edkins



Map showing location of the 'Pop' factory

Map courtesy of Mary Montes

of local cinema fame, as manager. Another of Bill's uncles and his father were the roundsmen, in the early days delivering the 'pop' by horse-drawn dray. Their work began early in the morning when they collected the horses from the field on Beechwood Avenue (then known as Whor Lane), where they had been stabled overnight, harnessed them up and trotted them to the factory to collect the deliveries for the day. In 1929, much to Mr Edkins' and his brother-in-law's relief, the drays were replaced by lorries.

On Mr Fuller's death the business was bought by a city firm, Sphinx Drinks, and the output of various types of fizzy drinks continued. Naturally the firm was badly affected by the war, but it struggled on until it was absorbed into the larger business of Lants. It soon became obvious that the old factory premises were no longer viable and business was transferred to Lants' main site on Bond Street in the city. The last bottle of orange squash, then the main product, was made in Earlsdon in 1961 – and 'pop' making became another of the many, many fascinating businesses which have come to Earlsdon – stayed a while, and have left.

The factory building then became a warehouse for a group of local grocers who had got together to form a consortium. This project, however didn't last long and after it had closed, the site was bought by George Hurley and became part of Alpha Engineering. In 1987 when the Alpha went into liquidation the whole site was put up for sale. To the relief of local residents, it was bought by the Coventry Churches Housing Association. All the factory buildings were demolished, to be replaced by a very welcome development, Aylesdene Court. Do any elderly residents perhaps still remember the old 'pop' factory, whose products quenched our thirst so pleasantly for so many years?

Mary Montes.