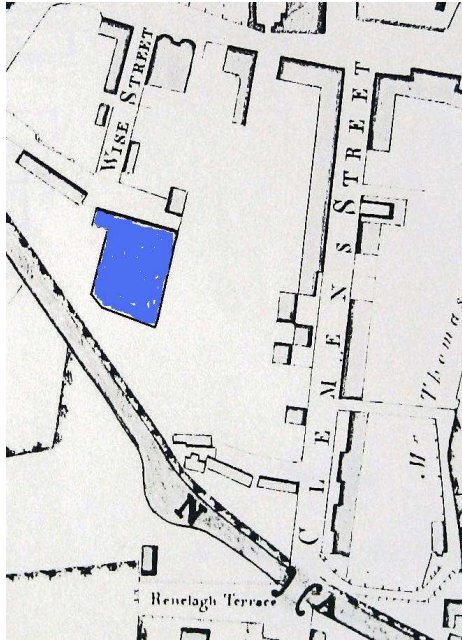


## Leamington Spa Ale & Porter Brewery [AKA: Public Brewery, Regent Brewery, Leamington Brewery] Wise Street



In his account of the 'History of Royal Leamington Spa' – compiled for the Leamington Spa Courier [1887-89] – George Morley tells us that Leamington's first brewery was built in 1812 and located at the top of Wise Street, close to the Warwick & Napton canal [now part of the Grand Union canal]. It is also evident that the site extended through to Clemens Street, a fact borne out by a few early directories that list it as "Public Brewery – Clemens Street", and a Leamington Spa Courier article dated July 1913 that states, "A public brewery was also erected in Clemens Street, and extended its buildings to Wise Street". The descriptive 'public' may have been applied because it had a tap-house [pub] on the premises, this being the Birmingham Tavern from circa 1815.

*Wise Street circa 1820 – Courtesy of Leamington Library.  
[I have extended – and shaded - an existing building to show the likely positioning of the brewery's site, which totalled approx 2,600 square yards of ground; unfortunately the map is both skeletal and 'not to scale'.*

The brewery's first proprietor was William Fowler but the business venture proved unsuccessful – and his tenure of short duration – when it was auctioned at Leamington's Copps' Royal Hotel in August 1814 ["under a Commission of Bankrupt"] with immediate possession. The auction notice described the 'Lot' as: -

*"All that new erected brick and slated messuage [dwelling house], with the yard, garden, brew-house, out-offices, premises, brewing utensils, fixtures and appurtenances [fittings] thereunto belonging, consisting of two furnaces; a capital 40 strike mash tub, large vats, cooler tubs, kivers, spouts, mash rules and ladder'. [The premises are] very conveniently situated for any person who wishes to carry on the lucrative business of a brewer, being contiguous to a Canal – by means whereof, malt, hops, &c, may be received, and the produce thereof sent to any part of the United Kingdom, at a moderate expense, and with great facility. For the convenience of the purchaser, immediate possession may be had on giving security to the satisfaction of the assignees appointed under the said commission". [The stock of ale, table beer and brewing utensils, vessels, etc, had already been auctioned on 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> June, under Executions from the Sheriff of Warwickshire].*

Following the auction, ownership passed to Thomas Paris. T. B. Dudley wrote in his 1896 book, 'A Complete History of Royal Leamington Spa' that the Leamington Spa Ale & Porter Brewery was offered for sale in 1819, and again in 1823 as the renamed Regent Brewery. However, it didn't sell on either occasion and Thomas Paris retained the 'freehold' until 1829, when he is still listed as owner in the church rate book. Edward Woodfield, a maltster – and previously the tenant – acquired the brewery that same year.

On 9<sup>th</sup> April, 1831 the Courier published the following account of a fire on the brewery premises: -

*"Yesterday afternoon about four o'clock, a fire broke out in the brewery of Mr. Woodfield, at the back of the Birmingham Tavern in Wise-street, which originated from the over-heating of a kiln while drying a quantity of malt. A great concourse of people was soon attracted to the spot who, with, commendable promptitude and activity, assisted in extinguishing the flames. Some mounted the thatched roof which was partly in flames and, by pulling off a small portion of the thatch and judiciously directing the pipes of the engine, very fortunately succeeded in stopping the progress of the devouring element. Other persons arranged themselves into lines extending from the premises to the canal, and by handing buckets from one another amply supplied the engines with water. The fire was entirely subdued by six o'clock and we are happy to add that no other injury, beyond the destruction of the roof of the kiln, part of the thatch of the adjoining building and 6 quarters of malt, was sustained by Mr. Woodfield, who must be highly grateful to his neighbours and friends for the effectual assistance they so kindly afforded him on this alarming occasion."*

Edward Woodfield retired from the business in October/November 1835 and “disposed of the concern” to Messrs. Thomas and John Norris, while retaining ownership of the premises. Meanwhile the new partnership renamed the business ‘Leamington Brewery’ – not to be confused with the Leamington Brewery [Lillington Avenue] that would be founded in 1839. [\[See separate history\]](#)

Following the 1830 Beerhouse Act approximately 50 ‘beer houses’ opened in the town during the period 1830-35 and by 1840 the cumulative total had exceeded 75, with 30% being south of the River Leam. Although many of these ‘beer houses’ also brewed their own ales the quality was often questionable. Until the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century most pubs were still ‘free-houses’ – so called because they were not owned by, or ‘tied’ to, a particular brewery and consequently could source their products from wherever they chose. In 1835, the Wise Street brewery was the only wholesaling brewery in Leamington, as the much more substantial Leamington Brewery [Lillington Avenue] would not be founded until 1839 and the smaller Castle Brewery [Brunswick Street] would not commence wholesale brewing until the mid 1840s – both events being after the Wise Street brewery had closed. Furthermore, competition from regional breweries, such as Ansell’s, Mitchells & Butlers [M&B], Flowers and Hunt Edmunds was still in the future and the Warwick & Leamington Brewery Co. [Saltisford, Warwick] – which commenced operations in 1833 – never got a distribution foothold in Leamington. Couple this with the fact that Leamington’s population had increased from 2,183 in 1821 to 6,269 in 1831 [+187%] and would double to 12,800 by 1841, it was theoretically an opportune time for an entrepreneurial brewer to capitalise on the fast growing market right on its doorstep.

However, it was not to be and one can only speculate on the reasons why – maybe it was unable to compete with the ‘home brewing’ of the beer houses or the local retail brewers – or maybe it was simply poor business management [I have not found any evidence of the brewery advertising its products during its 27 years of operation]. Irrespective, something was obviously amiss because barely 12 months had elapsed since Messrs. Thomas and John Norris took over the brewery when, in October 1836, it was advertised, *“To Be Let [with immediate possession] – the brewing utensils, stock and other effects, to be taken at a fair valuation”*.

Following the postponement of a December 1836 auction, and second a month later, the Leamington ‘Courier’ ran the following advertisement on 18<sup>th</sup> March, 1837: -

*“TO BE SOLD BY AUCTION, by George Carter, on April 10 & 11, 1837 [unless previously disposed of by private contract, of which due notice will be given], under an assignment for the benefit of the creditors of Messrs. Thomas and John Norris – All the stock-in-trade, and other effects, at the LEAMINGTON BREWERY, WISE STREET, Leamington Spa, comprising a quantity of ale and porter, malt and hops, a large assortment of capital well-seasoned sweet casks of various sizes, containing from 1248 down to 9 gallons; two brewers drays, a cart, a lot of gearing, a capital double-bodied phaeton, a strong useful gig, in good condition; a large deal framed hop sieve, with sheet iron bottom; a jigger pump, two capital malt mills, a malt screen, a set of patent steelyards, a bushel measure, 22 feet of leather hose, several stillion troughs, spouts, mash rules, tubs, buckets, copper and tin cans, thrales and a variety of other brewing utensils; a lot of lead piping, iron hoops, old iron, a quantity of quart and pint bottles, &c, &c, &c.”*

Then on 8<sup>th</sup> April, 1837 – just two days before the auction – its cancellation was announced in the local press, this time due to, “An arrangement having been entered into by the proprietor [Edward Woodfield] to take the casks, brewing utensils and other effects at a valuation, for the purposes of converting the concern into a company, to be called the Leamington Priors Brewery Company”.

An accompanying prospectus stated that, “It is proposed to take on the lease of the old established brewery in Wise Street, Leamington Priors, belonging to Mr. [Edward] Woodfield, who is willing to grant a lease of the same”. The premises consisted of a brewery, capable of brewing seven quarters at a time; a malt house to wet six quarters of malt; excellent cellaring; a good public house with a victualler’s licence [Birmingham Tavern]; stabling, three small houses, a yard and a large quantity of spare ground, at present occupied as a garden adjoining, but which could be made available for brewery expansion – making a total of 3,000\* square yards of ground [\*This area is 400 square yards larger than that listed in the November 1839 ‘auction notice’].

The proposal was to form a company in Leamington Priors named ‘The Leamington Priors Brewery Company’; the capital of the company would be £3,000 [300 shares of £10 each] and it would be considered formed when two thirds of the shares were subscribed to – at which time a general meeting would be held to appoint the directors. In the interim, a provisional committee comprising, Messrs. George Jull, William Holmes, John Fairfax and George Carter would allot the shares and transact the business of the company – to subsequently be transacted by five directors and a manager.

I have not been able to establish the developments [or lack of] that occurred in the interim but a little over twelve months later Edward Woodfield announced that he had re-opened the 'Regent Brewery'!

*"REGENT BREWERY, WISE STREET, LEAMINGTON SPA – EDWARD WOODFIELD, in re-opening the above establishment, begs leave to inform the nobility, gentry, and inhabitants generally of Leamington and vicinity, that he will have constantly on sale PORTER, ALE, and TABLE BEER of the first quality and on the most reasonable terms; and all who may be disposed to favour him with their orders, may rely on being supplied with the best article of their respective qualities. Leamington, May 26, 1838."*

What followed was not only one of the shortest chapters in its history but also its last as an operational brewery when, on 26<sup>th</sup> October 1839 – and already closed – the 'Courier' posted the following auction notice: -

*"TO BE SOLD BY AUCTION, by George Carter, upon the premises, on Thursday November 7, 1839 – At half-past twelve o'clock precisely, under conditions to be then produced – All that valuable Freehold Property, called the LEAMINGTON BREWERY, eligibly situated in Wise Street, Royal Leamington Spa, close to the Warwick & Napton Canal.*

*The premises comprise the substantial erection of the brewery, including the plant, which consists of one copper furnace, capable of containing 675 gallons, and another of 350 gallons or thereabout, a seven-and-a-half quarter mash tub, with an underback of adequate dimensions, four coolers, three working squares, a wort pump, water tanks, &c; with excellent and extensive cellaring in the basement; a malt-house adjoining, to wet upwards of six quarters, having one floor of 56 feet by 14-feet-6, and another of 35 feet by 11 feet; a large grain or store room above, 53-feet-3 by 14-feet-5; a kiln and malt room; a good public house, known by the sign of the Birmingham Tavern, let to a respectable tenant; and two messuages or tenements adjoining; a large yard with folding gates, an office, stabling for 4 horses, piggeries, a small shop fronting the street, and a large garden enclosed by a substantial brick wall, which might be made available for increasing the size of the brewery, as it became necessary. The above property which occupies a site of 2601 square yards of ground, or thereabout, presents an excellent opportunity for any person of capital, spirit and industry to realise a rapid fortune – the premises being extremely well adapted for carrying on a most extensive trade in ale, porter and malt, and the great and continual extension of Leamington affording a prospect of an increasing trade in those necessary articles of consumption. The brewing utensils, casks, and other implements may be taken at a fair valuation, and immediate possession may be had of all the premises except the public house."*

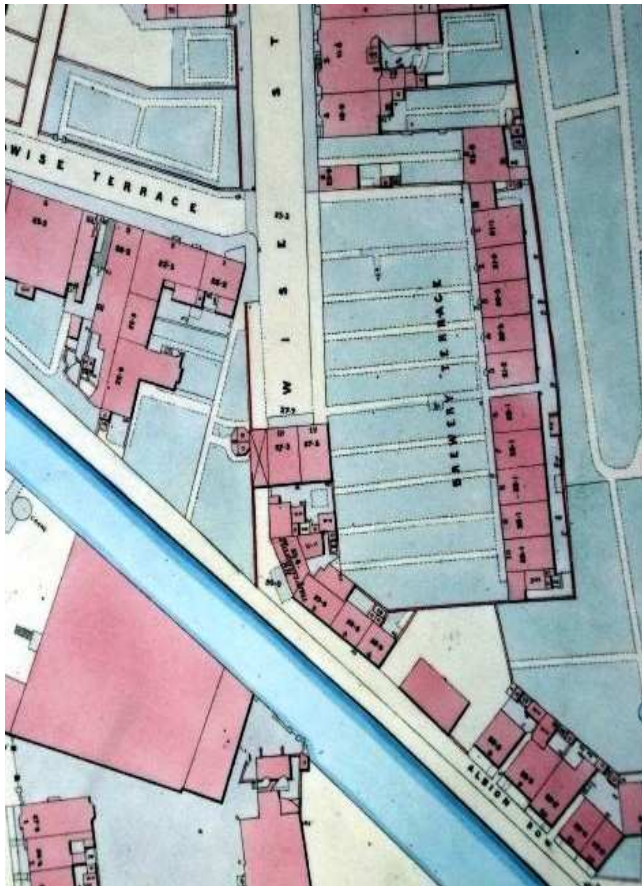
NB: I am unable to explain the transition of names from the 'Leamington Priors Brewery Company' [1837 prospectus], to its brief re-opening as the 'Regent Brewery' [1838] and its auctioning as the 'Leamington Brewery' in 1839.

Two days after the auctioning of the brewery premises, the following was advertised: -

*"TO BE SOLD BY AUCTION, by George Carter, on Monday and Tuesday, the 25th and 26th days of November, 1839 – All the stock-in-trade and other effects, at the LEAMINGTON BREWERY, Royal Leamington Spa, comprising: - Several hundred gallons of ale; about half a pocket of hops; a large assortment of well-seasoned sweet casks; two brewers' drays; a cart and a lot of gearing; a large deal-framed hop sieve, with sheet iron bottom; a capital malt mill; a malt screen; a set of patent steelyards; a saccharometer; a bushel measure; 22 feet of leather hose; several stillion troughs, spouts, mash rules, tubs, buckets, copper and tin cans, thralls and a variety of other brewing utensils; lead piping and iron hoops; a quantity of quart and pint bottles, &c, &c. Particulars will appear in catalogues, to be had in due time at the offices of the auctioneer, 42, High Street, Leamington."*

*In April 1843, the following auction notice appeared in the Courier – TO BE SOLD BY AUCTION, by George Carter – On Wednesday, the 19<sup>th</sup> day of April, 1843 – upon the premises called the LEAMINGTON BREWERY, WISE STREET, LEAMINGTON SPA: - Several large, iron bound ale casks; a large four wheeled brewer's dray, and a smaller one; a hand truck and various other articles. [Assumedly the 'leftovers' from the auction held in November 1839.]*

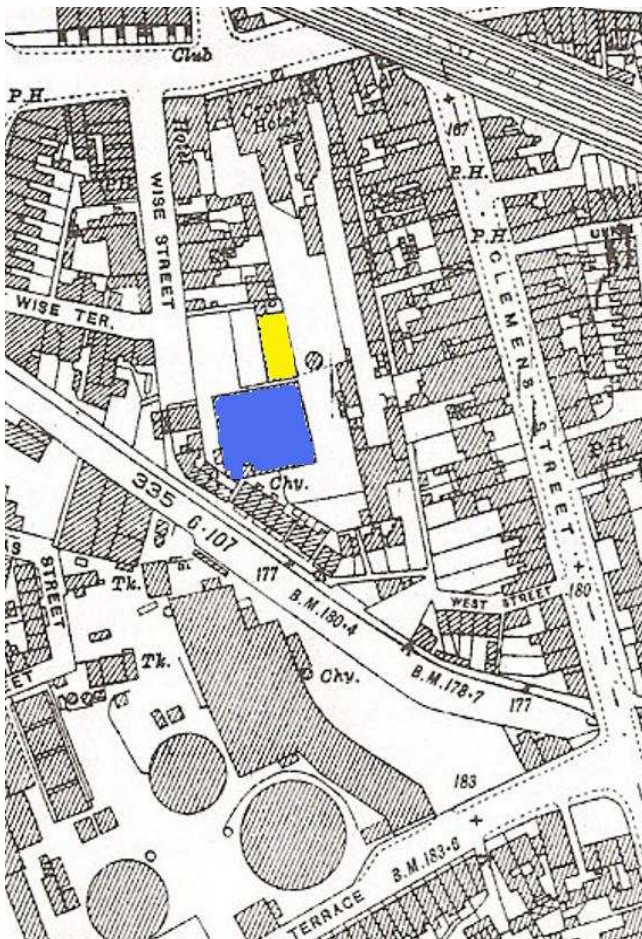
This auction notice – and its naming of the auction's venue – confirms that the brewery was still standing in April 1843, thereby narrowing the time of its demolition to the period 1843-49.



Following the brewery's demolition, Brewery Terrace – a residential development comprising ten cottages – was built over approximately 75% of the 2,600 square yards of ground that had comprised the original brewery site; it is clearly visible on the adjacent 1852 map showing Wise Street, Wise Terrace and Albion Row.

Ten years later, on 22<sup>nd</sup> July, 1862, the ten cottages were sold at auction, all continually let and yielding a gross annual rental of £103 15s 8d. Each residence comprised: - sitting room and kitchen with two bedrooms over, a garden in front and there were wash-houses and closets having a good supply of hard and soft water; numbers 1- 5 also included arched brick cellars and the whole was fenced in with a strong brick wall fronting Wise Street and bounding the footpaths. On the 5<sup>th</sup> August, 1879, Brewery Terrace was again auctioned in its entirety with all buildings just repaired and inclusive of the landlord's fixtures [all cottages continually let, but now yielding a reduced annual ground rent of £94 18s].

*1852 Board of Health map – Courtesy, Leamington Library*



It was an electric lighting company [later to become the Midland Electric Light & Power Co.] that purchased Brewery Terrace at the 1879 auction, considering it an ideal site for its proposed 'power station' – it also purchased the premises in nearby Albion Row.

In 1887 the company announced that it was not contemplating the demolition of all houses acquired in Brewery Terrace [and Albion Row], only those sufficient to provide a site of necessary dimensions to accommodate its machinery. This claim is borne out by the adjacent 1923 *Ordnance Survey map [extract]* that shows the 'power station' footprint [blue], the five cottages remaining in Brewery Terrace [yellow] and an intact Albion Row – the latter two of which were demolished circa 1957.

Martin Ellis – September, 2016

**Acknowledgements:**

Leamington Spa Courier [1828-47]  
 British Newspaper Archive  
[www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk](http://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk)  
 Annual directories: 1816-39 [Bisset, Fairfax, Moncrieff, Sharpe & Pigot]  
 Additional research: Allan Jennings, Mick Jeffs