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Wakefield goes pop: E P Shaw and the mineral water industry in Wakefield, by Peter Wood

Three developments lie behind the emergence of a pop-making industry in Wakefield: the growing popularity of bottled spa water for medicinal purposes, the discovery by the scientist and theologian Joseph Priestley (1733-1804) in 1767 of how to create aerated (carbonated) water and subsequently how to emulate the waters of different spas by adding minerals to water artificially, and the widening use of supposedly medicinal waters simply as soft drinks.

The first commercial producer of carbonated water in Europe was Jacob Schweppe who founded his company in Geneva in 1783. The term 'soda water' was used from 1798.

In Wakefield a variety of patent medicines, such as the cordial balm of Gilead, were sold via the offices of the Wakefield Journal by 1829. The balm, a mixture of brandy, lemon peel, tincture of cantharides, and Sicilian oregano, had been patented by Dr Samuel Solomon in 1796 and made his fortune. The Journal advertisements refer also to a Mr Nichols as a Wakefield agent for Solomon's product. This was possibly Thomas Nicols who advertised in 1833 that he had a variety of patent medicines available. On 2 July 1830 the Wakefield Journal carried a sizeable advertisement for S Paddison, Chemist, Wakefield, for a range of medicinal powders and for the fluid extract of Sarsaparilla. The same advertisement noted that the products were also available at the Journal office. Sarsaparilla was distilled from the root of a plant found primarily in central and South America; scientists distilled its chemicals and mixed them with sugar and water. Whilst supposedly having curative properties, it seems to have become popular as a recreational drink.

In the Wakefield Journal in 1835, George Gell advertised 'soda and magnesium waters and ginger beer'. Advertisement in 1853 show Joseph Mountain of 133 Kirkgate who had just formed a partnership with his nephew John Taylor, selling Schweppes' lemonade, Potass, and German seltzer water. The term 'seltzer' derived from mineral springs in Germany but was then applied to soda water more generally. In 1854 William Lockwood, chemist of 11 Wood Street, was also selling Schweppes' lemonade, soda water, and German seltzer water.

It was in 1854 that Edward Pearson Shaw came to Wakefield from his home town of Sheffield to take over the business of Samuel Sidney, sharebroker, chemist and druggist, in the Market Place. The premises had once been the Cross Keys and the Fleece. An early advertisement in the Wakefield Journal of 19 January 1855 focuses on the growing popularity of amateur photography: 'Pure chemicals and apparatus supplied for Photographic and Daguerrotype purposes by E P Shaw (late Sidney) Dispenser and Family Chemist and Druggist'.

Shaw was the first to manufacture mineral water in Wakefield itself. Initially he named his company the West Riding Soda Manufactory and in the late 1860s produced soda water, lemonade, and ginger beer whilst importing a long list of spa waters. In 1870 however his company was renamed the West Riding Mineral Water manufactory and an advertisement of 13 May showed him as preparing a range of mineral water products 'under personal supervision' including Vichy water and Lithia water. Acid tonic water and aromatic quinine water were also available.

In 1978 a glass bottle was unearthed in Zetland Street on what had been the site of the parish church schools. It bore the date 31 March 1868, the date when the foundation stone had been laid by the Bishop

of Ripon for the new schools designed by William Watson to accommodate 500 children – boys, girls and infants. The bottle contained details of the family and employees of E P Shaw, his wife, his seven children, his travellers and factory hands and the errand boy. There were 35 people named in all. It showed that Shaw lived then at Northgate House, was the vicar's churchwarden and was Master of the Masonic Lodge of Unanimity.

The company opened a branch in Fisher's Yard, Town End, Barnsley.

Shaw died in 1880 aged only 52. He had had a serious accident when out with the Badsworth Hunt some four years earlier. His funeral was described in *The Wakefield Express* of The cortege left the family house in Bond Street and went on through the town past shops which had drawn their blinds. Staff gathered on the pavements outside to salute this respected manufacturer while the bell of the parish church was tolled. Shaw's wife, Mary, died eight years later and was buried with her husband in the churchyard at St Helen's, Sandal.

Wakefield's second mineral water manufacturer, Ralph Bell, learned his skills whilst working for Shaw. It is said that he was in business by 1872. In 1885, described as an aerated water manufacturer, he acquired a substantial plot of land on the south side of George Street adjacent on its east side to a path running alongside Holy Trinity Church. Bell died on 4 October 1898. He left stables in Ingwell Street as well as the site of the business on George Street.

A later, but major mineral-water concern, was Crystal Springs, which moved to Calder Vale Road in 1930. It sold its 'pop' both wholesale and via its own retail premises, the principal one being in Westgate. The firm was taken over in the 1960s by British Foods.

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