



The University of
Nottingham

Knowledge
Transfer
Partnerships



Nottingham
City Council

JOHN PLAYER

Specials



A project exploring the John Player's
Advertising Archive with former employees

A BRIEF HISTORY OF JOHN PLAYER & SONS

- 1877: John Player takes over the Broad Marsh tobacco factory.
- 1877: The Nottingham Castle trademark is registered.
- 1883: The most familiar of all Player's trademarks, the Sailor's Head, is registered.
- 1884: John Player purchases a site in Radford and builds the No.1 factory.
- 1898: There are 1000 workers in the Player's factory. A 200-strong female workforce of 'Player's Angels' make up to 2000 cigarettes per person per day.
- 1900: Player's Medium Navy Cut Cigarettes are introduced.
- 1901: The Imperial Tobacco Company of Great Britain and Ireland Limited is formed. This is in response to attempts by American tobacco manufacturers to purchase British firms and control the international market.
- 1906: Player's recreation ground is opened.
- 1924: The famous slogan 'Player's Please' is introduced, originally as 'Player's Will Please You'.
- 1932: A new factory is built to cope with the company's growth. This is named No.2 Factory and is used solely for the manufacture of cigarettes.
- 1939: A new Bonded Warehouse is built at Triumph Road and the No. 3 Factory is completed. These buildings help to accommodate a total Nottingham workforce of 7,500.
- 1965: Player's No. 6 brand is launched. This was the most successful cigarette of the time and by the end of the decade had captured 18% of the UK market.
- 1971: John Player Special brand is launched. Promotion of this brand, along with others, helped John Player's become synonymous with sporting events such as motor racing and cricket.
- 1972: Imperial Tobacco opens the £14 million Horizon factory on Lenton Industrial Estate. Horizon attracted international interest and won architectural awards.
- 1986: The Hanson Trust complete a takeover of the Imperial Group.
- 1987: Two out of the three original Player's factories in Radford are demolished, the other stands empty and is later sold.
- 1996: The Imperial Tobacco Group regains its corporate independence.

Player's Advertising Archive Project

Nottingham City Museums and Galleries are working in partnership with The University of Nottingham to improve access to the John Player's advertising archive. As participants of the Knowledge Transfer Partnership scheme we will spend 21 months developing a magnificent collection that tells the history of an important local firm.

The main aims of the project are to catalogue the collection and develop it as a resource for all to explore. Over the next few years we will concentrate on making objects available online, exhibiting material in our museums and giving you the opportunity to engage with the collection through a programme of events.

Tailor-Made Sessions

Former employees who worked in various departments at Players from 1953 to 2005, talked to us about their work.

Over a series of sessions the group helped us research the archive and learn more about life working for the company. They have talked to us about topics including their recruitment, their daily routines and the friendships they formed. As well as working together each member has been interviewed on audio tape, leaving us with a record that we can add to the collection.

This booklet is made up of their stories using their words. We are extremely grateful to them all for their time and contributions.



Group Session, with Former Employees

Images of John Player's are reproduced by the kind permission of Imperial Tobacco Limited, England.

For further information please contact Maria Erskine, Keeper of Community History, Museum of Nottingham Life

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THE JOHN PLAYER'S SPECIALS

Paul Bloomer was PR photographer in the John Player's Public Relations department between 1963 and 1989. Paul was responsible for photographing Player's events and his photographs were used in the employee magazines Navy Cuttings and Player's Post.

Phil Bradley worked as a mate and a driver all over the country for John Player and Sons. Phil was based at the Leenside garage for the Traffic and Despatch departments during his employment from 1961 until 1987.

Carole Dowsing began as a laboratory assistant in the laboratories at John Player and Sons, Nottingham, in 1963. Her journey through the company took her to Churchman's, Ipswich, and back to Nottingham again to become Senior Scientist for Quality Assurance until 1996.

David Dowsing began working part-time in the lifts and stores at Churchman's, Ipswich in 1967. He took full-time employment soon after and worked in the Packing and Making departments there until he moved to the stores at Player's, Nottingham, in 1990 where he worked until 2005.

Janette Haigh began working for John Player and Sons as a messenger girl delivering mail throughout all of the Radford factories in 1953. She then moved to

work as a typist in the Sales Offices until she left the company in 1960.

Graham Hall was a member of the John Player and Sons sales force from 1967 until 2004. Graham worked across the whole country from West Cornwall to Northern Scotland as he progressed through the company to become National Account Manager.

Les Revill travelled the UK as a mate and a driver for John Player's between 1955 and 1990. Les was based in the Radford and Leenside garages during his time in the Transport department.

Meryl Richardson worked as a secretary and receptionist in the Marketing and Public Relations head offices at John Player and Sons between 1964 and 1970.

Roy Walker worked as a Commercial Artist, Design Artist, Designer, Assistant Design Manager and finally Design and Exhibitions Manager for the in-house design studio at John Player's between 1953 and 1978.

Elaine Stenson's role was to facilitate the Tailor-Made reminiscence workshops. Elaine welcomed the opportunity to work with a group of people with such a diversity of roles and responsibilities. Her favourite part of the project was when the group brought in their own treasured objects and photographs and shared their special memories.



Clockwise from left to right (back row): Roy Walker, Elaine Stenson, Paul Bloomer, David Dowsing, Les Revill, Carole Dowsing, Phil Bradley, Janette Haigh, Meryl Richardson and Graham Hall.

The Collection

The archive was preserved by Imperial Tobacco as it forms a continuous history of the firm and its activities. The company used material from it to mount displays, assist research and supply material to the media. In 1973 they appointed the company's first archivist, gathered all their material together and stored it on the top floor of the Sherwood Rise depot.

When this building was to be demolished the firm approached the City and County councils to see if it could be transferred. It was agreed the business records would be maintained by Nottinghamshire Archives and the rest of the material would come to the Museum Service. Originally the collection was on loan but in 2001, to celebrate the company's centenary, it was donated to the museum.

The collection is made up of a wide range of material. Some of the highlights are listed here.

Photographs



We estimate there to be at least 2,000 photographs in the collection. These include images of the factory floor, exteriors of buildings, publicity events,

employee portraits and images of production overseas.

Show Cards and Counter Cards

These were used as advertising material in shops and at promotional events. The earliest we have is pictured here and is from the 1880s. Our collection runs up until the 1970s and contains many unique images.



3d Signs and Display Aids

These include glass, plastic and metal signs that were used outside shops. We also have display stands, vending machines and cigarette dispensers.



Packaging

This is one of the largest areas of the collection. We have examples of many of the cigarette packets and tobacco tins that were designed and went into production. We even have examples of the foils that were used to line the interiors.



Original Artwork

This section consists of hand drawn examples that illustrate the creative work undertaken by the design department. We have drafts of early adverts, storyboards and designs for the livery of vehicles.



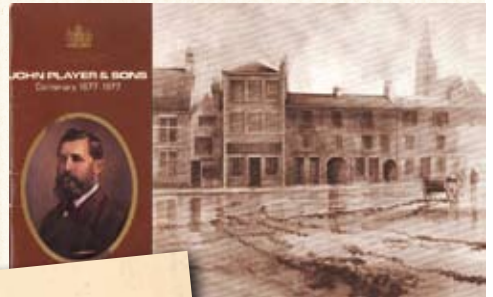
Promotional Items

There is a range of objects that promote different brands. Among this collection are ashtrays, books and ceramic jugs. Some of these were given away as prizes or gifts.



Publications

There is a full set of Navy Cuttings, along with copies of its replacement Player's Post. Other publications in the collection include tobacco trade journals and company histories.



Player's Please

by Carole Dowsing

What would I have done in life
If back in '63
I had not decided to
Be a Player's employee

They need people in the lab
My friend, Sue told me
I applied and got the job
In the Laboratory

A friendly group, in the Lab
The social life was great
Birthdays, weddings, births
We would all celebrate

Lab tests were varied
Precision every day
A good day's work
For a good day's pay

The Athletic Club was great
Hockey was my passion
I also played tennis
After a fashion

During the summer
It was athletics for me
Running, jumping, throwing
A good opportunity

Several years later
I took career chances
Into Quality Assurance
Travelling round the Branches

The Lab gang were always
Going out and about
Pub Olympics, skating
And it's a knockout

Real Ale trips and skiing
Bowling and walks
One big happy family
Friendly meals and talks

I spent 3 years in Ipswich
In the cigar laboratory
I met a man named David
He worked in the factory

We returned to Notts
And the social connection
We enjoyed life and
Joined the Bowls section

Working Life at John Player's



I went to the studio for a test, a drawing test, and I remember it very, very vividly. It was a Friday at about five o'clock and Player's at that time were using a slogan, "Player's Please", which was a script, and Bill Grout asked me if I could draw this. I said "yes" with some trepidation. Anyway, I started and I'd just done the first curve of the capital P of Player's, which was about twenty past five. He came over and said "You'll do", because obviously it was knocking off time. So they asked me to present myself again for work on the 3rd November 1953.

Roy

After being introduced to other people in the department, I was exposed to some of the basic tests. 'Cuts per inch', measuring tobacco strands under the microscope, pressure drop of cigarettes to measure how tightly packed filter rods were. Number of pinholes in foil samples in a dark room on a light cabinet – that was fun. I met more people at the breaks and over lunch played cards. I loved that first day and knew I was going to feel at home with laboratory work.

Carole



left: Design Studio.
right: Laboratories

Gradually, they cut out the public relations agency who were based at Loughborough and did all the work internally, and John Player's PR people said to me 'Will you come and work for us direct?' and I didn't need asking twice. That would be in the early 70s when the Horizon factory was up and running and in full production.

Paul

I was so happy there, I loved it right from day one, I soon had very good role models in my life and saw people in the offices who I admired.

Janette

I moved on to the transport department, and that was very interesting. That was where I wanted to be on the transport – I really enjoyed being out on the road, up and down around the country, I enjoyed it on the local vehicles, inter-

factory work. Very nice in the summer time, not so good in the wintertime.

Phil

Despatch Department



Canteen



Office Work



I went to work on the bus, all the buses were crammed with Player's employees, they all hurried towards the various factories. On arrival in the lab we would all chat in the cloakroom, then don our lab coats and check the rota. Some tests were carried out by one person, in which case you would organise your own work; other tests were done in pairs so you had to be a team player.

Carole

It was very noticeable that we were part of a team, and everyone was so friendly but we were there, all there to promote the name of John Player and Sons. It was more like a family, we saw each other outside of work, and when you went to the canteen you knew practically everyone who was there.

Meryl

It was wonderful to have an in-house training school facility in the 1950s, it was very forward thinking in terms of staff training.

Janette

When we saw each other in the working environment at John Player's, it was a raise of the hand, "Good morning", "How are you?", "What you been doing today?", sort of thing. I'd even meet them in supermarkets and things and I remember my youngest daughter would often say to me when we were going round doing the shopping on Friday and someone says "Oh, hello Paul" and my daughter would mumble at the side of her face - "Oh, I bet they work at John Player's as well!".

Paul



Packing orders

It was the people, it was like one happy family. We all worked, no one skived or anything, you all had to put your ALL into it.

Meryl

I did 37 years with the company, which I have to say I thoroughly enjoyed and moved from Lands End to John O'Groats effectively. I joined in Cornwall, ended up moving to Gloucestershire, from Gloucestershire up to Perth covering the northern half of Scotland including Shetland and Orkney and then in 1984 moved back into the Head Office block at John Player and Sons in the Boulevard. So really I've gone from one end of the country to the other, and half-way back



Despatch

again, and thoroughly enjoyed my 37 years. What more can I say?

Graham

I am still in touch with a lot of people I met at Players...Special people, special memories.

Carole

We were in the right place at the right time, we had the best years working for the company, it was a pleasure to go to work, the years went past so fast but I've never ever, and never will, regret working for John Player's. They were the happiest years of my life.

Les



Traffic Depot

John Player's Promotions

A cross section of employees were invited to attend the John Player Special launch. I was one of the lucky ones. We caught the train, First Class, to London. Peter Roper, the Branch Chemist, was in our group. Our destination was the Mayfair Hotel where we enjoyed a grand lunch.

We then attended a staged presentation, introducing the new brand in a glossy black packet bearing a gold JPS logo. Back in the bar, we toasted the launch with Black Velvets (champagne and stout), served in stemmed glasses with gold JPS logo.

A very enjoyable day and a privilege to be invited.

Carole

I was well into my Player's career by the time they launched a product called Players No.6, which was a cigarette with a gift coupon. I then was the interior design exhibition manager and I had seven designers, window dressers and exhibition people in my group. When we launched the catalogue we needed showrooms to show the public. We had one in Nottingham which was the old Windsor cinema and then one on Oxford Circus. Every August the 1st they launched a new catalogue, which meant a whole load of new gifts which had to be catalogued and arranged.

Roy



“Player’s Please”

– NO, THANK YOU – A TARNISHED IDEAL

In 1953 aged 15 years I left secondary modern school on a Friday and commenced working in Player’s offices the following Monday.

We all lived in a different world compared with how we live today.

John Player and Sons was the number one employer and it was considered to be a well paid job for the whole of your working life. To work there carried prestige.

I was so happy – firstly working in the Secretariat as a messenger girl delivering post and mail to every department and factory. My second role was attached to the Sales Office working on an addressograph machine which was fed with metal plates of addresses of every customer – we had to clean the plates with carbon tetrachloride which made one feel drowsy. My third and final last position was in the Sales Office typing orders on a sensomatic machine which incorporated an adding machine. I started to smoke aged 18 years when given free cigarettes.

In 1960 I left my employment with Player’s for a better paid position and a new career. Since then I have worked in several different professions and I can say that working at Player’s was the happiest time of my life. The camaraderie, the long-standing friendships, the professionalism, the facilities, athletic club, social life, clubs, restaurants - we had it all. We were looked after very well - in all a marvellous model of an exemplary working environment.

However

Now, with experience and knowledge, I have regrets in relation to the ‘product’ which I feel may have precipitated some of the health problems from which I now suffer. Evidence has now shown cigarette smoking causes cancer and other respiratory problems. It was known by various governments about the health risks. We were not aware of the dangers.

Smoking created addicts and the money gained from the addiction paid to make an exceptional working environment. “IGNORANCE IS BLISS – IT IS A FOLLY TO BE WISE.”

Janette



*Top left: Office Football Club, Left: Hockey Club,
Back: Athletic Club*

Sporting Times at Player's

You could participate in any sport you wished to. I was in the netball team and I used to play tennis, I adored that part of it.

Janette

My favourite sporting time has got to be the annual Tobacco Trades seven a side Hockey tournament at Crystal Palace. We travelled by coach on the Saturday and had a wild night in London, then played very competitive hockey all day Sunday. We played against Imperial, Gallahers, Wills, Churchman's and other tobacco companies. We often won the tournament, even after the night in London - a great weekend.

Carole

The social club played a large part [in terms of social life] in as much as I would take my wife to the Club, pick up three more girls, who were playing hockey, travel out to outlying districts. I would drop them off, then I would spend an hour having a look around the area, then return the girls to the club at Aspley Lane at the end of the Saturday evening. Thus I was learning about the area, plus I was learning about the people, and it was fantastic, and I really enjoyed that.

David

The athletic club was absolutely marvellous.

Janette

Social Life at John Player's

My favourite annual event I think would be the Tea Party. They had it on the recreation ground in a marquee and over the years that marquee got bigger and bigger. So, they were good events and I was meeting people from way-back – I never knew them in their working life there – because they'd been retired 10 or 15 years but then there were people who'd only just retired where I knew the faces, knew the names. There's lots of stories to tell. I was quite amazed that they always made a fuss of the oldest man or the oldest lady that was there. It was either a lady or a man, up in the nineties, and still lively "Oh, I smoke 20-a-day still" and all this sort of thing. It really made a super day for me.

Paul

A day that sticks in my mind is always gala and family day where the whole factory would come together at the local sports club. You would just enjoy one another's company, one another's families, until the evening when there would be a dance and we'd probably be turned out about 11.30.

David

I would think the favourite event for me and a lot of others working at Player's was the 'Player's Bonus' that was normally paid in March and it was almost like winning the pools. My memory of it was getting what was in

the day brand new five pound notes, the white ones all crisp and new. It often paid for holidays or you could save it up to buy a car. The company in the bonus payment always had a 'Bonus Dance'; we used to get dressed up for that and go into town and have a good evening.

Les

The favourite annual event that I used to go to was the Bonus Dance, this was really good. Everyone had just had their bonus so you could splash out on a new dress and new shoes and everything. There was always a Miss Player contest and one particular year Miss Player from Stirling came to Nottingham. She stayed at my mum and dad's with me and I took her round Nottingham showing her the sights. I took her to the dance in the evening and she was one of the Player girls. She didn't actually win, but she was a lovely girl and we had a lovely time.

Meryl

I also remember going on the annual outings, we used to go in coaches to Blackpool and various other places, and it was so lovely because at that time of course we didn't go abroad for holidays and you had to save up. We all had the opportunity of being together at the seaside and having lots of fun. It was really super and I'm so pleased that I went through all those experiences.

Janette

Miss Player Competition





Christmas at Player's

Probably the most memorable thing for me, being associated with Players, is not only the fulfilment and enjoyment of meeting the other people, but the meeting of my wife. As a lad from Ipswich I can remember chasing round the factory trying to keep up with this girl that I'd seen from Nottingham...

Almost three years later we were both made redundant in Ipswich and so we travelled to Nottingham and this is when I started work at Horizon and she returned to her job in the laboratory. I really enjoyed this session, she played hockey and she worked in the lab, the lab employees were one of the last units that actually made events work. We had ice skating nights, we had walks, we had brewery trips, beer trips on buses, all sorts of events – games nights, treasure hunts, all sorts of things.

David

In the early days each factory had a Christmas concert and that was almost semi professional. The joiners, engineers, design studio helped with the stages. Each factory put on a show for staff and directors and then you go through different routines.

Roy

At Christmas we would all go to the local pub at lunchtime. It was so busy The Pheasant on Prospect Street would run out of glasses.

Roy

There would be departmental dinner and dances at the Elizabethan Rooms and the Bonus Dances at the Sherwood Rooms. Christmas concerts in the factory canteens. I remember as a child going to a Christmas panto at St. Peter's church hall. Weekend coach or rail trips would be organised by someone in your department.

Phil

JOHN PLAYER & HIS SONS



John Dane Player
Born 1864 - Died 1949



John Player
Born 1839 - Died 1884



William Goodacre Player
Born 1866 - Died 1959

John Player was born in Saffron Walden, Essex, on the 10th of August 1839 to parents John and Sophia Player, his father was an attorney. John had three older siblings: Samuel, Sophia and Elizabeth, and a younger brother Joseph.

In the early 1860s John came to Nottingham and worked as a draper's clerk for a Mr Robert Dickinson at 42 Long Row. In 1862 John Player married Mrs Ann Whiteley in the Shoreditch district of London. John and Ann's first son John Dane Player was born two years later, and in 1866 his brother William Goodacre was born.

The 1871 census lists John's occupation as a tobacconist, employing one man and three boys. In 1877 he bought the tobacco factory of William Wright in Broad Marsh. By the 1881 census his occupation is given as a tobacco manufacturer employing 80 persons and he is registered as living at 13 Park Valley. The same year he purchased land in Radford and built

three factories on the site. The Castle Tobacco Factory opened in 1884 in one factory while the other two were rented out to lace manufacturers. However, by 1900 all three factories were producing tobacco products.

John Player died on the 9th of December 1884 and was buried in the General Cemetery. His business was then run by a small group of family friends for the next nine years until John Dane and William Goodacre took over the running of the firm in 1893.

John Dane and William Goodacre Player managed their father's business until their retirement in 1932. During and after their tenure both sons gave generously to charities, hospitals and local organisations in and around Nottingham, the total of which will never be known as they shunned any publicity for their philanthropy.

[This information was researched by Phil, using resources at the Nottinghamshire Archives.](#)