

Postcards from Forgotten Pioneers

The symbiotic evolution of the hospitality sector and the leisure industries has been poorly served by historical resources and lacks the kind of seminal text (Gourvish and Wilson, 1994) that the brewing industry enjoys. Some recent texts made bold claims (Slattery, 2009) but they do not deliver; and even respected sources (Davenport-Hines, 2011) can prove error-strewn.

Since this year sees the fiftieth anniversary (Naughton, 2012) of *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Kuhn, 2012), it is appropriate to reflect on the historical paradigm that has emerged for the hospitality sector, and to challenge some of the persistent historical myths that are being perpetuated. Rather than attempting a detailed re-evaluation that is beyond the space available here, this article will address some oft-overlooked case studies and highlight their implications.

Pre-History

We must start, though, by recognising that the accepted timelines of the hospitality sector tend to fare poorly when matched against the historical record. The excellent work by Quek (2011a, b; 2012) and others offers many useful insights; however, such works also serve to collate persistent myths that are then perpetuated. Hence, a quick demonstration of this overlooked 'pre-history' should serve to illustrate how the co-evolution of leisure and hospitality can be underplayed by mainstream research.

Quek (2011a, b; 2012) accepts the standard dates for Pan American Airways [operated by Juan Trippe] and the Hilton hotel chain [of Conrad Hilton] expanding their hotel operations internationally; the author then implies that British hotel groups' international expansion and significant US investment in Europe did not occur until after 1979. Whilst Quest (1972) offers a more balanced overview, the rich history of leisure-related organisations developing hospitality operations, well before this period, tends to go un-noticed and is under-appreciated.

The *Sydney Morning Herald* (1949), for instance, observes that, during 1947-49, all of the leading hotels in Bermuda passed into British hands. Billy Butlin [of Butlin's Limited amusement park and holiday camp group; along with Louis Jackson, of British National Films studios, and others] had acquired the Princess hotel, Pembroke, Hamilton. Lady Yule [jute heiress and operator of the British National Films studio] had [also with Jackson] acquired the Belmont Manor Hotel, Warwick, Bermuda, and the Inverurie Hotel. John Moores [of Littlewoods Pools] had acquired the Elbow Beach Surf Club. The British-based consortium [headed by Sir William Stephenson, Canada] had, through the Bermuda Development Company, taken control of the Castle Harbour Hotel, Bermuda,

the Bermudiana Hotel, overlooking Hamilton Harbour, the St George Hotel Beach and Golf Club, and the Mid-Ocean Club residential club.

These hotels within the BDC consortium are worth examining in more detail. They were operated, before WWII, by Britain's Furness Withy shipping group, in a typical expansion by a transport company from leisure into hotels [or vice-versa]. The BDC consortium investment seems to have been a personal one [separate from Pan Am] by the Trippe family, which continues to own the Castle Harbour Hotel [now redeveloped as Tucker's Point Hotel & Spa resort] to this day. That might explain why Hilton Hotels Corporation [which had first expanded internationally in 1942] was expecting to manage the three hotels but, despite marketing to this effect (Hilton Hotels, 1948), would only operate the Bermudiana hotel. Viewed from the modern day, one might not appreciate how important a staging post Bermuda was at that time; nor which season was dominant for its various tourist groups, which influences the opening and closing of the leading hotels.

This Bermuda example highlights how the rich history of the leisure industry is influential globally in developing critical aspects of the hospitality sector. It also serves to illustrate just how often the widely-accepted timelines of the hospitality sector fail to match the historical record.

Butlin's Bahamian Debacle

The Sydney Morning Herald (1949) alluded to Billy Butlin's Bermudan hotel interests, but these, along with the Fort Montagu Beach Hotel, Nassau, Bahamas, formed only part of a much more ambitious and global leisure development (The Times, 1948). In 1948, Billy Butlin, along with Brigadier-General Arthur Critchley [a noted pioneer of greyhound dog racing and former Director-General of British Overseas Airways Corporation] and others, established Butlin's (Bahamas) Limited, New Providence, Bahamas, to develop the [685 acre, US\$2 million year-round] Butlin's Vacation Village, West End, Grand Bahama, where Butlin, with his associates, had acquired some 10,000 acres of land from the UK government.

In 1950, following a number of challenges, including construction disrupted by labour problems and the devaluation of Sterling, which was said to have increased construction costs by around 25 per cent, Butlin opened the partially-completed Butlin's Vacation Village, with an initial accommodation for some 1,000 guests; this was expected to double to around 2,000 guests a few months later with the project targeting visitors from the USA and Canada. The complex featured the same format as in the UK Butlin's holiday camps - lines of terraced chalets [here, named after British counties] around a central leisure and dining complex and 'Red Coats'. Butlin has imported some 500 birds to offer pigeon racing as an activity, and replanted palm trees. Also on offer among the facilities are tennis

courts, swimming pool, baseball grounds, bowling alleys and fishing boats. Guests arrived on aircraft, landing at a large airstrip, while seaplanes and flying boats offer flights between Miami or Palm Beach, Florida, USA and the island's harbour, where tenders were expected to bring visitors ashore from passenger ships and ocean liners, and which would also serve the MV Grand Bahama passenger ship, sailing between Florida and Grand Bahama.

Unable, against the backdrop of the Korean War, to raise the additional £800,000 needed, to complete the development (The Times, 1950), the opening season of the village proves disastrous and the Butlin's (Bahamas) Limited subsidiary suspends development. By October, debts reached some US\$1.7 million and there was talk of British staff being left stranded. Disputes and a failure to find a purchaser would delay liquidation [1950-1953] and Butlin subsequently surrendered the leases of the Princess Hotel, Pembroke, Hamilton, Bermuda, and the Fort Montagu Beach Hotel, Nassau, Bahamas, to their landlords [actually Butlin, himself, and his associates, operating as an 'American group'].

While Butlin would continue to develop his leisure and hospitality projects, back in Britain, this Bahamian project would cause significant rifts with his City investors (Reid, 2011). Meanwhile, the Inter-Continental Hotels Corporation [of Juan Trippe's Pan American World Airways] briefly managed the Princess Hotel, Bermuda, before it is sold on to Daniel Ludwig [an associate of Howard Hughes and whose conglomerate, encompassing the American-Hawaiian Steamship Company shipping line and the National Bulk Carriers oil tanker business, would make him one of the world's richest men]. Ludwig used this property to develop the Princess Hotels hotel chain, across the globe. The Jack Tar Hotels group, Galveston, Texas, meanwhile, will acquire [for some US\$2.5 million] the [rebranded, 250 bedroom, 2,000 acre] Grand Bahama Club resort with plans to add a golf course, large convention centre and yacht marina - later, marketing the complex as the Grand Bahama Hotel and Country Club resort.

The Butlin's Vacation Village project echoes many other large-scale leisure resort developments and many of the socio-economic challenges that it faced are still being faced by today's entrepreneurs. Indeed, the Jack Tar group would go on to undertake a similar refocusing, when it rebranded the Playboy Club Hotel and Resort, Ocho Rios, Jamaica, as the Jack Tar Jamaica resort, when Playboy Enterprises found diversification proving costly.

Western Hotels

The Western Hotels group evolved (Copeland, 1976), through Western Hotels International and Western International, to become the Westin brand within the Starwood Hotels portfolio; yet the

company timeline (Westin, 2012) belies the breadth and depth of innovation that this company demonstrated.

In 1949, Western Hotels invited Victor Bergeron [of Trader Vic's restaurant, Oakland] to open a Trader Vic's restaurant within one of its hotels, beginning a trading relationship collaboration between the two. Western Hotels noted, by the mid-1950s, that it earned far more profit from coffee shops and cocktail lounges than it did from its formal dining rooms (Copeland, 1976); hence, the company's preference for Trader Vic-style themed restaurants that tapped into the vogue for such themes as did the Polynesian-inspired 'Tiki culture'. In a private capacity, Edward Carlson [Western Hotels' President] is influential in both organising the [1962] Seattle World's Fair and the design of the Space Needle, within which Western operates a revolving restaurant, only the second in the world.

In 1958, some years before its formal rebranding as Western International, the company formed a joint-venture with the Guatemalan government and marketed several of its overseas hotels as Western International Hotels (1958), alongside a [short-lived] California-based Caravan Inn joint venture. These overseas hotels formed the basis for international expansion, especially via a joint-venture in Mexico, and when, in 1966, Hotel Corporation of America [operated by the Sonnabend family] joined Western International in a joint reservation system, it encompassed some 72 hotels, across the USA, Europe, Latin America, and the Middle East. By 1968, when Britain's Trust Houses hotel and catering group entered into a shares-swap agreement with Western International, the two groups would enter into a joint-marketing agreement that involved around 250 hotels, across some 15 countries and, in 1969, Edward Carlson becomes a director of Trust Houses. This brought Western International into the consortium behind the Travelodge chain, with its strengths in North America, Australasia and the Pacific, as well as into Trust Houses' ambitious plans for the Post House chain of motor hotels across Europe. Part of the United Airlines from 1970, Western International would become more ambitious in its global expansion spread and in its hotel design. In 1976, it took over management of the [John Portman designed, US\$55 million, 723ft, 70-storey, 1,100 bedroom] Peachtree Plaza Hotel, Atlanta, Georgia, USA, with its tri-level revolving roof-top restaurant, [half acre] atrium lobby lake and [within the Terrace Room] a 100ft-wide waterfall. This style of ambitious interior design would influence other hotel groups, including the Scottish-based Skean Dhu group - helping to explain why their Irvine hotel featured, until relatively recently, an indoor tropical lagoon. Hence, Western International's evolution, both in terms of the style of its hotels and the geography of its global operations, was linked to trends within the wider leisure industries. Even the ending of its innovative phase seemed to be triggered by the United Airlines conglomerate's acquisition of

Hilton International, and then quickly selling both the Hilton International and Westin chains during the 1980s as it sought a clearer strategic focus.

Graham Lyon

Britain's first post-war motel was probably the Kenilworth Auto Villas motor hotel (Townsville Daily Bulletin, 1952), centred around the Rouncil Towers country house, Kenilworth, Warwickshire; where, impressed by US motor hotels and motels, the millionaire showman John Collins [son of Pat Collins, who operated the Crystal Palace Amusement Park, Sutton Coldfield] had built [£1,000, air-conditioned] chalets, with wooden parquet flooring, twin built-in beds, electric cooker, step-down bath and iced water on tap. To see the British motel evolving, however, one should look to Graham Lyon (The Times, 1961).

Having organised motor coach tours in continental Europe during the 1920s and 1930s, and having established the Autocheque company, which offered motoring services and hotel reservations for motorists taking touring holidays of continental Europe, after WWII Graham Lyon acquired, the White Cliffs Hotel, Dover, Kent, England and the Hotel de France, Dover. Later, he operated the *Merry Dolphin* restaurant, *Port of Dover*, and the restaurant at *Ferrybridge* airport, Lydd, Kent.

Louis Erdi completed [1952-54] the Royal Oak Auto Hotel, Newingreen, near Lymington, Kent, England, for a joint venture between the Graham Lyon Hotels group and the Watney Combe Reid & Company brewery group; this motel is built around an old Mackeson Inn, operated by Whitbread, on a roundabout on the A20 road around 65 miles from London. Graham Lyon Motels and the Graham Lyon Hotels group announced plans for some 12 motels - combining hotel accommodation and garage facilities - across southern England; which include a motel actually at Ferryfield Airport [which had been built by Silver City Airways for its successful 'air car ferry service' across the English Channel] as well as motels in Warwickshire, Oxfordshire and north Somerset. The group also began development of the New Forest Motel, Ower, near Southampton, Hampshire, and [in 1955] the Devon Motel, Exeter Bypass, Matford. In 1957, Louis Erdi completed the influential [42 bedroom] Dover Stage motel [also known as the Dover Stage Coachotel], Dover, Kent, which targeted coach tours travelling on cross-Channel ferries, and had been designed in consultation with such motor-coach proprietors.

At the time of his early death in 1963, via his Watney Lyon Motel joint venture with the Watney Mann brewery group, Graham Lyon, operated some five motor hotels: the New Forest Motel, Ower, the Devon Motel, Exeter Bypass, and the Dover Stage Coachotel, Dover, plus a motel at Frome and the Epping Forest Motel, Essex.

In 1964, the Watney Lyon Motel chain opened the [£100,000 34 en-suite bedroom] Chichester Motel, Sussex, and its Chichester Motel became the first to use a factory-made pre-fabricated system [of steel frame and panels], devised by the Swiftplan division of the Taylor Woodrow construction group. The [60 bedroom] Oxford Motel opened the following year, on the Oxford bypass, and the evolution of both this motel [into the Oxford Hotel, within the Puma chain] and the nearby traffic infrastructure further highlights the symbiotic evolution between leisure industries and the hospitality sector.

By 1966, there were thought to be some 83 motels and motor hotels across Britain, up from around 75 in the previous year, when there were some 3,500 motel rooms; with prices ranging from 16 shillings and six pence for a single a single bed in a four-star motel in South-west England, to around five pounds and ten shillings for a double room at a motel near London. Operators now included the Esso Motor Hotels chain, Centre Hotels, the Rank Organisation, Forte's (Holdings) Limited and the Trust Houses group. While these chains feature prominently in numerous industry analyses, it is Watney Lyon's evolution that can demonstrate how leisure trends truly drove Britain's motel sector. That year, Watney Lyon opened the [60 en-suite bedroom] Forth Bridges Motel, on a nine-acre site close to the South Queensferry approach road to the Forth Road Bridge near Edinburgh, Scotland. The motel boasted a 120-seat restaurant and a 150-seat cafeteria; however, viewing that [now deserted] site on Google Maps demonstrates just how far traffic flows, customer tastes and hospitality economics have all moved on since then.

Originally planned for 1964, the Falcon Motel, Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire, opened in 1967, as a motel wing linked to the [fifteenth century] Falcon Hotel. Watney Lyon now operated some 10 motels and announced plans for a [£425,000, 60 bedroom, six acre] motel in the grounds of Worsley Old Hall, near Manchester, with a stated intention to build a motel 'every 100 miles' along main roads that would become motorways, echoing Trust Houses' ambitious plans for its Post House chain. The Worsley project was contested by locals, although later a Marriott hotel would be built in the grounds.

In 1971, Grand Metropolitan Hotels acquired the Dover Stage motel from the Watney Mann brewery group. By then, hospitality was entering an era (Quest, 1972) influenced by the Hotel Development Incentive Scheme and the power of conglomerates like Grand Met, Trust Houses Forte and J. Lyons. The legacy of Graham Lyon, meanwhile, had passed to such entrepreneurs as Gordon Currie, at Clydesdale Commonwealth Hotels or to Henry Edwards, at Centre Hotels.

Conclusions

These overviews of some all-too-often overlooked hospitality pioneers demonstrate how the evolution of leisure industries and the hospitality are inextricably linked.

Billy Butlin's Bahamian adventure reminds us that large-scale leisure resort development is not a recent phenomenon. Butlin's experience also demonstrates that hospitality entrepreneurs need to focus on the cultural aspirations of their customers and to never forget that cyclical trends within the wider environment tend to attract downturns much more frequently than textbooks would have us believe. Although Butlin came close to realising his dream, global success fell to those with much deeper pockets, able to build upon the foundations that he had laid - although in the long-term, even those investors were overtaken by the fast pace of the sector.

The case of Western Hotels reminds us that the lifespan of a company is surprisingly short (de Geus, 1997) and that the long-lived companies featuring in many analyses are, by all accounts atypical. The company's use of partnerships, both in the design and operation of its hotels as well as in its global strategies, proved highly effective; however, such partnerships and networks can get overlooked during sector analyses. Western Hotels' focus on niche markets, some lasting just a few years, and apparent avoidance of areas like Europe due to partnership strengths in those locales can lead researchers to misinterpret the facts, when comparing the group's network against chains like Hilton.

The evolution of the Watney Lyon motel chain offers a useful benchmark against which to critically evaluate the various trajectories of comparable chains; whether that be the evolution of the Esso Motor Hotels chain [into the Crest and Scandic groups] or how commercial pressures and hospitality economics pushed Rank's planned motel developments into becoming more traditional, up-scale, hotels. Similarly, one can recognise how the in-car registration areas, so popular in early motels, have evolved as tastes have changed; a trend seen globally within hotels like the Unicorn, Bristol, or the Southern Cross, Melbourne, Australia.

The 'pre-history' example and the individual case studies should also remind us of the need to challenge many of the widely-accepted hospitality timelines and of the need to critically evaluate these, before using such timelines as the foundation of further research or analysis. Then researchers will be able to translate historical issues into current analysis with much more likelihood of success.

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