

RESPECTABLE REFRESHMENTS

J. SCHWEPPE AND CO. AT THE CRYSTAL PALACE

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Ensuring the comfort of the visiting public was a major concern of the commissioners and the provision of refreshments, waiting room and washroom facilities was an integral part of the design of the halls. The refreshment tender, which stipulated that no alcoholic beverages would be served, was won by J. Schweppe and Co. of Malvern.

Over the 141 days of the exhibition Schweppe sold 1,092,337 bottles of their soda water, lemonade and ginger beer, an effective advertisement for their company and for Malvern's reputation for pure water.

The Comfort and Convenience of Visitors

By the time the exhibition closed on 11 October, over 6 million visitors had passed through its fabulous halls. Many had travelled a long way to attend and the number of exhibits meant that visitors spent most of the day there. The commissioners decided that 'light and moderate' refreshments would be available but were determined not to 'allow the Building to assume the character of an Hotel, Tavern or Dining-Rooms'. In keeping with the educational and family-friendly atmosphere, 'no wines, spirits, beer or



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The Refreshment area at the Great Exhibition by Louis Haghe, 1851.

intoxicating drinks' were to be sold or allowed into the building.

Refreshments were confined to three areas: the eastern and western refreshment courts and a first class room in the central transept. These arrangements were in tune with the expectations of the respectable visiting public. The temperance movement, which campaigned for moderate consumption of alcohol, or even total abstinence, was well established by the 1830s. Social segregation based on price was an integral aspect of Victorian society, being experienced, for example, by every traveller on the expanding railway network.

Schweppe won the contract with a bid of £5,500. This proved to be a successful business venture as a total of £75,557 was taken in

the three halls, an average of around 3 d per head for every visitor. Those paying the higher admission prices were calculated as spending almost twice as much as those entering on cheaper tickets.

Tea, coffee, cocoa and chocolate were available in addition to the bottled drinks. Ices, pastry, sandwiches, patties, cakes and biscuits were also for sale, along with bread and cheese in the eastern and western courts. Bath Buns were the favourite snack – over 934,691 were sold – with plain buns a close second – 870,027 of these were consumed. Banbury, Pound and School cakes, Italian and Victoria biscuits and macaroons were other popular items. Savoury provisions included potted meat, tongue and ham consumed with mustard and pickles.

A further measure to enhance the experience of visitors was the provision of separate waiting and wash rooms for ladies and gentlemen. 827,820 visitors made use of the facilities during their visit.

Malvern Water

The quality of J. Schwenpe and Co.'s bottled drinks relied on the quality of the spring water used in their manufacture. By 1851 the company was bottling from Holy Well at Malvern, a flourishing watering place in Worcestershire where the rain-fed springs had a reputation for purity. This is due to the natural filtering system of the pre-Cambrian granite which forms the hill range.

Dr John Wall, who undertook the first known analysis of the spring water in 1743, observed that it contained 'nothing at all'. Wall's medical and scientific work was influential in promoting the reputation of Malvern's water and its popularity grew from the mid-eighteenth century.

Modest buildings were built over Holy Well in Malvern Wells and St Ann's Well in Great Malvern. Other facilities for tourists, including accommodation, a library and landscaped walks, developed in these two settlements in the early decades of the nineteenth century. Visitors to Malvern could also enjoy water from numerous other springs, spouts and fountains rising across the hills.

The Resort Town

Malvern's hills, waters and fresh air attracted growing numbers of visitors. Development quickened from the 1840s due to its growing popularity as a centre for the practice of hydropathy. This new form of water cure offered health seekers a rigorous regime incorporating a wide variety of water-based treatments – including the infamous wrapping in wet sheets. A healthy regimen was integral to the hydropathic cure.

Patients followed a treatment plan tailored to their individual needs based on drinking large quantities of pure water, avoiding alcohol, taking plenty of fresh air, walking in the hills and rest and

relaxation. In 1851 Malvern was the most fashionable hydropathic resort in the country and would have been well known to many visitors to the Great Exhibition. Charles Dickens, Florence Nightingale and Charles Darwin were among the Victorian celebrities to take the Malvern cure.

Schwenpe and Co

Water is reputed to have been bottled from Holy Well since 1622 but commercial production expanded around 1850 when Schwenpe and Co. took over the lease. The company were already successful manufacturers of carbonated soft drinks. Jacob Schwenpe was one of the earliest to develop factory-scale production of soda-water, setting up in London before 1800.

The process of 'fixing air' in liquid was first developed by

Joseph Priestley, Unitarian minister and polymath, in the later 1760s. The commercial potential of the discovery was considerable as many water supplies at the time were considered to be unsafe. Weak 'small beer'

continued to be a staple beverage for many people.

Aftermath

The medicinal benefits of the early soda-waters were promoted with some manufacturers

specialising in artificially matching the constituents of

famous spa waters. Flavoured and sweetened soft drinks later grew in popularity with all age groups. Ginger beer was available by 1815 and lemonade by 1833. Publicity achieved at the Great Exhibition ensured Schwenpe's products became one of the nation's best-loved water and soft drink brands.

In 1892 Schwenpes moved its factory to Colwall, on the Herefordshire side of the Malvern Hills. In 1969 it became part of Cadbury Schwenpes and was later sold to Coca-Cola Enterprises. Production of Malvern Water ceased in 2010. The spring water can still be freely sampled and is easily collected from several spouts in the hills. Bottled spring water from Holy Well is once again in commercial production. ●

A nineteenth-century Schwenpes mineral water bottle. The egg shape became popular around 1790 when the bottle had to be stored on its side, thus ensuring that the cork stayed wet and did not perish.



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Further Reading

Jane M. Adams, *Healing with Water: English Spas and the Water Cure 1840-1960* (Manchester University Press, 2015).

Colin Emmins, *Soft Drinks* (Shire publications, 1991).

John Harcup, *The Malvern Water Cure or Victims for Weeks in Wet Sheets* (Apella Archive, 2010).

Cora Weaver & Bruce Osborne, *The Springs and Fountains of the Malvern Hills* (Aldine Press, 1994).