

## The Mill & Brewery at Bray 1807

An etching from 1807 by the artist Jean Claude Natte (1765 - 1839) showing the Bray Mill with a waterwheel, part of a complex which included the adjoining brewery at Bray. There had been a mill at his location in Bray since at least 1538, and a brewery from 1687, though the location of the latter is uncertain (IHTA). Both were substantially re-structured and rebuilt several times, and major improvements made included the construction of dams and weirs, sluices and millraces and the addition of a bakery and malt house. There were two waterwheels by the 1870's. The brewery ceased production around this time, though the malt house continued in production until the 1920's. The flour mills had been closed and converted into an electrical generating plant in 1891. Much of the remains of the complex, apart from a chimney and some other buildings, were demolished in the 1990's, when one of the larger buildings was converted into residential and office use as part of the Maltings development. The Bray bridge, located close to the mill and brewery, was omitted from the scene by the artist, presumably to provide a more picturesque view of the estuary of the Dargle River and sailing vessels out at sea.

In 1810 the Bray Brewery was put up for auction after the firm of Joseph Strong & Co entered bankruptcy. The advertisement for the establishment described it as : "The extensive Brewery at Bray, Co. Wicklow, with every utensil fit for immediate work, equal to the manufacture of 1000 barrels of malt per week, comprising extensive stores, vattage casks, drays, horses, etc all in complete order, with malt house, capable of making 3000 barrels of malt per year, and stores for 5000 barrels of grain; it is at present adapted for 2000 barrels per year, according to the revenue law. There is a neat dwelling house, garden, etc. The lease for ever, and abundant supply of water. The proprietor paid a fine ( i.e. purchase price) and has since expended £1,000 on the concerns. The advantages of this situation are too obvious to need comment". The Brewery was purchased by Simon Christie, who in Lucas's Directory of 1788 was listed as a grocer, wine and spirit merchant in Bray. Simon and his wife Mary had several properties on Main Street, at least one three-storey, most of which were rented out. They had acquired some land, including a parcel of about 25 acres adjoining Killarney House which was leased from the Fitzwilliam (Pembroke) estate, and which they in turn sublet to the Higginsons and later the Foots and the Jacksons.

In addition to their other holdings, the couple ran Christie's Hotel in Bray, which an advertisement of 1794 described as an inn and lodging house with large livery stables, offering "salutary sea-bathing and salubrious and restorative Goats Whey' to both short and long stay paying guests. An advertisement from May 1800 reads "CHRISTIE'S – BRAY The public are most respectfully informed, that the above-mentioned Hotel and Tavern continues to furnish that complete and extensive accommodation which the Proprietor humbly trusts has hitherto distinguished it. – The Traveller, the Summer

Resident, and Parties of Pleasure, may rely on constant and prompt attention to their commands. – The Larder and Cellars are always well supplied, the one with every variety the season affords; the other with the choicest and purest wines – The Hotel is in every respect well fitted up – the beds scrupulously neat and well aired. -Post Chaises and good Horses are in constant readiness. N.B. For the convenience of his respected Patrons, the Citizens of Dublin, CHRISTIE has set up the ROYAL CHARLOTTE, which leaves College-green every morning at ten o'clock, and Bray every evening at six". At the time, this enterprise would have been a leading competitor to Quin's Hotel (The Royal), which had opened as the Meath Arms Inn in 1788.

Simon Christie died not long after the brewery was purchased and the business passed to his son, Robert; and when he passed away some years later it was taken over by his wife, Hanna, who ran it for several years. In Pigot's directory of 1824 she was listed in her own name as a grocer, and also as 'Christie H & son, ale and porter brewers'. Some of the assets of the brewery were purchased by the miller Sotheren in about 1817, including a few acres of land at Little Bray, the so-called 'Brewery Waters' and rights to draw water from there, and a fishery with a house on it. In 1824 Hanna put the Brewery and Malthouse up for sale, along with about 5 acres of mostly waste ground adjoining the site on which some forestry had been planted. According to the description on this advertisement: "The Brewery and Utensils have been erected within these few years, on the most approved principle, and of the best materials; there is an excellent Dwelling House, which with the Brewery, its Stores and Offices, form a perfect square, thus rendering the whole admirably secure and complete. They are in the best possible order and have an abundant and never failing supply of water; a Purchaser, therefore, has an opportunity of immediately commencing business, with the further advantage of not having one Establishment of a similar nature to compete with, for nearly 20 miles of that very populous portion of the County Wicklow. ( ) The Malt House is most conveniently contiguous to the Brewery; it is in perfect repair, capable of Malting 400 barrels per month, situate in the best Barley County in Ireland, with the advantage also of having water-carriage for coals, nearly to the door, and if let separately would, decidedly, produce the rent of the entire Concerns".

The Malthouse and brewery were sold separately, with Henry Darley taking over the brewery. He sold it to J & D Watkins in 1837, and Watkins merged with other companies to form Watkins, Jameson, Pim & Co. Hanna died in Bray in 1854 and was buried at Old Connaught cemetery. A panel on the gravestone erected by one of her children records that "for upwards of 70 years (she) lived not for herself but for others" and refers to her "maternal worth and pure Christian benevolence". Also listed on a slab are Simon Christie, who died in 1795, his wife Mary, and their daughter, Margaret Hughes. The gravestone was erected by Hanna's son, Robert who added the names of his sister, Hannah Amelia, and his brother John, who had drowned at sea in 1799.

Sources : Illustration -Bray Mill Jean Claude Natte 1807 National Library of Ireland; contemporary newspapers; Pigot's Directory of 1824. This post first appeared in the Victorian Bray Facebook page in November 2025.