



# John and James Toohey: Brewers

John Thomas Toohey, (1839-1903) and James Matthew Toohey, (1850-1895), brewers, were the sons of Matthew Toohey (d. 1892), businessman, and his wife Honora (d. 1878), nee Hall. John Thomas was born on 26 April, 1839, at Limerick, and was taken to Melbourne by his parents in 1841. His father bought town lots and settled many Irish families in Victoria. One of the founders of the St Patrick's Society in Melbourne, he was a political ally of (Sir) John O'Shanassy and (Sir) Charles Gavan Duffy. In the 1860s he was forced to sell at a loss; in 1866 he went to New South Wales and lived in virtual retirement. James Matthew was born on 18 March, 1850, in Melbourne: he is said to have been named after Fr Matthew, the Irish apostle of temperance.

After unsuccessful business ventures in Victoria, New Zealand and Queensland, John settled near Lismore: later James had a property near Coonamble. About 1869 with W. G. Henfrey John set up an auctioneering agency and cordial manufacturing business in Castlereagh Street, Sydney; the next year the brothers began brewing at the Metropolitan Brewery and in 1873 they bought the Darling Brewery in Harbour Street. In 1876 they moved

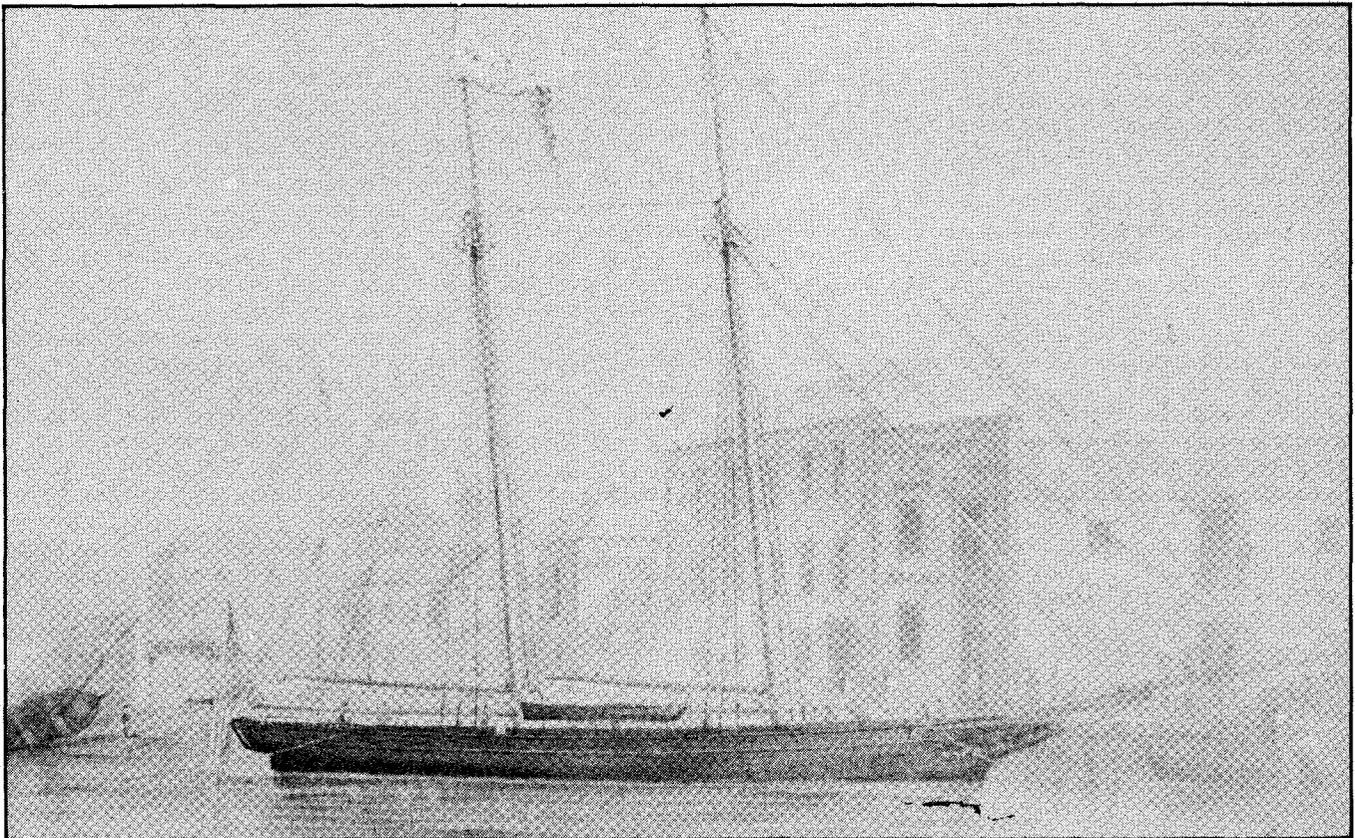


John Thomas Toomey, 1839-1903.

to new premises on the site of the old Albion Brewery in Elizabeth Street and began the Standard Brewery, employing twenty-six hands. Before 1880 imported beer was preferred to the local product, but in the 1880s Toohey's and Tooth's beers quickly became popular.

Vice-president of the Licenced Victuallers' Association, in 1886 James was appointed to the royal commission on the excessive use of intoxicating drink, but withdrew when he felt the balance between local and anti-local optionists was upset. In evidence to the commission he said that 'the system of shouting' was the cause of all the excessive drinking in the colony and that beer was less injurious to health than 'the ardent spirits'. He approved of the tied-house system and maintained that the 830 public houses in the Sydney metropolitan licensing district were not an excessive number, though there were a few too many in certain areas of the city.

Campaigning in 1885 for the Legislative Assembly seat of South Sydney, James claimed that the government's action in sending troops to the Sudan 'had resulted in a huge advertisement for the colony'. Favouring an elected Upper House, payment of members and the eight-hour system, he said he opposed local option and the abstinence party, as no act of parliament could make a man sober. He represented the seat in 1885-93. A firm protectionist by 1887, he saw most free traders as 'the curled darlings of the [Potts] Point and the merchants of Sydney'. He



Circular Quay, Sydney.



Sydney Harbour: west side of Sydney Cove and Dawes Point.

was a good speaker, if a little impetuous at times. According to the *Sydney Morning Herald's* political correspondent in 1887, he 'rolls the letter "r" beautifully, he drops his voice down to sweet whisper, lifts it up to a palpitating splendour, and then rolls it over the solemn path of prophetic parlance'. Dissatisfied with Sir George Dibbs's administration, he opposed him for Tamworth in July, 1894, but polled poorly. Next year he visited Ireland, England and Europe. James died at Pisa, Italy, on 25 September, 1895, and was buried in the Catholic section of Rookwood cemetery, Sydney. He was survived by his wife Catherine (Kate) Magdalene (d. 1913), nee Ferris, whom he had married at Parramatta on 5 June, 1873; they had four sons and eight daughters. Probate of his estate was sworn at £133,623.

On James death, John and James's eldest son, also named John Thomas, took over the brewery. John was a leading Catholic layman, benefactor to numerous Catholic charitable institutions and a financial supporter of the Irish nationalist movement. On Christmas Day, 1888, Cardinal Moran invested him as a knight of the Order of St Gregory. A leader in the Home Rule movement, he was prominent in the erection

of the monument over the grave of Michael Dwyer in Waverley cemetery in 1898. Well known in business circles, he was a director of several companies including the City Mutual Fire Insurance Co. Ltd. He lived first at Moira,

Burwood, and later at Innisfail, Wahroonga, and assisted in the development of both suburbs. He stood for Moraro in the Legislative Assembly in 1880 but was defeated by H.S. Badgery and R.L. Tooth. In April, 1892, he was nominated to the Legislative Council, but he very rarely spoke. In September, 1901, he gave evidence to an assembly select committee on tied houses. Next year the brewery became a public company, Toohey's Ltd, with John as chairman; the vendors received 375,000 fully paid shares and £175,000 cash. The well-known advertising slogan and symbol 'Here's to 'ee' originated in 1894.

For health reasons John went on a world tour with his family in 1902. He died suddenly in Chicago on 5 May, 1903, and was buried in the Catholic section of Rookwood cemetery, Sydney. On 26 August, 1871, at St. Mary's Cathedral he had married Sarah Doheny who died in 1891, survived by two sons and three daughters. Toohey was survived by his second wife, a widow Annie Mary Murphy, nee Egan, whom he had married in Auckland, New Zealand. His estate was sworn for probate at £275,215.

Sources

W.F. Morrison, *The Aldine Centennial History of New South Wales*, 2 (Syd. 1888); V&P (LA NSW), 1875-76, 5, 633, 1887-88, 7, 257, 1901, 6, 789, evidence 95, 191; T&CJ, 22 Nov., 1879; SMH, 8 Dec., 1880, 13, 14, 16, 17 Oct., 1885, 29 Jan., 4, 7, Feb., 29 Apr., 1887, 1 June, 1895, 8 May, 1903; *Bulletin*, 5 Jan., 1889. G.P. Walsh

(Reprinted from the Australian Dictionary of Biography)



The Sydney Reception Committee with the Redmond Brothers, 1883. The two Toohey brothers are marked with crosses in the back row.