



Archive Fact Sheet: Employee Welfare at Guinness

The Guinness Company has always had an excellent reputation for the financial, medical, recreational and other benefits provided for its employees. Guinness has also maintained a strong sense of its own social responsibility supporting many initiatives, not just for the benefit of its own employees, but for the community at large. The second Lord Iveagh, Chairman of the Company from 1927 to 1962 once remarked in his annual speech that the Company Directors had:

'always felt that it was not only the duty, but to the advantage, of the company and its shareholders, that the company should bear its part in serving this civilisation and this way of life in which we all believe'¹

Guinness employees have traditionally benefited from security and continuity of employment. Dismissals were rare and resignations uncommon, as Guinness salaries and wages were always 10 to 20 per cent above the Dublin average. The other main financial benefit was the famous Guinness pension. Records of pensions date back as far as 1860 and were provided for retired employees as well as their widows and orphans. Initially pensions were provided to workers on an entirely voluntary basis by the company so that the workers were not expected to contribute but in 1949 a Pension Fund was established to provide security for employees' pensions.

¹ Extract from article 'Guinness as the Good Citizen' by Sir Hugh Beaver, Managing Director, 1959.

If you have any further questions about the history of Guinness please contact us at:

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Support for employees' families in retirement and after death went beyond the provision of a pension. Burial allowances were provided to families of deceased workers; preference was given to widows of deceased employees for employment as housekeepers, attendants and office cleaners within the Brewery; widows received an extra allowance for every child under the age of 14; and a free dinner was given every week day to the sons of both widows and pensioners to encourage them to attend school.



Free Meals for School Boys



The Medical Dispensary

Guinness also provided healthcare for employees and their families. The first free medical dispensary was opened in 1870. It provided free medical attention and medicines for employees and their families, free hospital beds and treatment. The Company also provided a sick allowance which was carefully graded and could be as much as three quarters of the weekly wage. By the 1930s, those employed at the dispensary included: three doctors, two dentists, two pharmaceutical chemists, two nurses, a Lady Visitor (who took charge of the widows and orphans), and a masseuse. Dr. John Lumsden, the Company doctor, established the St. John Ambulance Brigade and a formal Ambulance Division was established in the Brewery in 1904, with almost 100 members

The terms of employment of Guinness employees included many benefits such as paid annual holidays, free meals, annual excursions and a beer allowance. A special dining room was provided with a staff of cooks and attendants where employees were served breakfast, lunch and dinner. From 1886 onwards a system of annual excursions was introduced providing employees with free train tickets and an extra

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allowance. This was intended to enable workmen and their families to enjoy a day in the country.

One of the earliest benefits granted to employees was a beer allowance which for many years consisted of two pints of GUINNESS® per day for every male employee over the age of 21. Employees received their allowance at the 'tap', a special beer distribution point within the Brewery where men would congregate to partake of their allowance, drinking from metal tankards. Employees could opt to receive a scrip instead of the beer which they could then exchange for goods at the Co-operative Store.

The Company supported initiatives which provided financial assistance to employees including the Guinness Permanent Building Society founded in 1901, for the purpose of lending money to employees at a low rate of interest to enable them to purchase houses. Other individual departmental 'Mutual Benefit Societies' were established with the full support of the Company, providing savings and loan facilities for their subscribing members.



Employees at the 'tap'



Iveagh Play Centre, Patrick Street

Apart from these basic methods of support, efforts were made to improve employee welfare in general and that of the local community: annual donations were made to local schools and charities; boys employed in the Brewery (from the age of 14) were encouraged to attend the City of Dublin Technical Schools while working, and not only were the fees paid for by the Company but they also awarded prizes to those who excelled in the examinations.

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The first Lord Iveagh, Edward Cecil Guinness began building houses for his employees to rent from 1872, constructing housing on a site close to the Brewery for nearly three hundred Brewery families. A 'Lady Visitor' was appointed in 1884 to dispense pensions and advice and provide a communication link between the Brewery and its employees. The Iveagh Trust, originally known as the Guinness Trust, was established by Edward Cecil Guinness in 1890 to provide housing for the poor in both Dublin and London. The funds from the Trust were also invested in other welfare schemes such as the Iveagh Play Centre, for local childrens' recreation and instruction.

Social activities for employees were also supported and promoted: In 1903, the Guinness Athletic Union was founded to promote and foster games among the staff and employees of the Brewery. The Iveagh Grounds at Crumlin were presented to staff by the First Earl of Iveagh in 1928 and in 1959, the Company began construction of a Bi-centenary centre with theatre and swimming pool. The Guinness Fanciers' and Industrial Association was established in 1893 and was organised by a Committee of employees for the holding of competitions and exhibitions ranging from dog breeding, to wood carving, photography, handwriting and dancing.

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