

## **PLYMOUTH GIN – A BRIEF HISTORY**

- 1431 The Dominicans or Black Friars build a monastery on the waterfront at Plymouth.
- 1539 Dissolution of the monasteries by Henry VIII. The former monastery becomes the town 'lock up' and later the town meeting and lodging house.
- 1550-1600 Plymouth rapidly develops into the largest naval base in England and the world.
- 1620 The Pilgrim Fathers lodge at the former priory before setting sail on the Mayflower for the New World.
- 1640 The buildings used by the Huguenots as a refuge.
- 1672 The buildings become the first non-conformist chapel.
- 1697 Earliest distilling records. Building becomes a mault house making various alcohols (Gin, Rum, Beer etc)
- 1706 First documented reference to Black Friars Lane
- 1730's First reference to 'the strength of the Plymouth water' served at a local dinner party. It is probable that this early Plymouth Gin was similar to the London 'Old Tom' gins ie. sweetened.
- 1793 The first documented reference to Coates & Co's Plymouth Dry Gin, the world's first Dry Gin, produced at the Black Friars Distillery.
- 1820 Mr Coates has no male children. His daughter had married a Mr Freeman and for the next 130 years the company is owned and run by members of the Freeman family.

- 1848 Pink Gin invented by Royal Naval ship's surgeon. He used Plymouth Gin to make the medicinal Bitters more palatable.
- 1850 Plymouth Gin's supplies to the Royal Navy now top 1000 barrels a year of 100° UK Proof product (57% abv or 114° US Proof).
- 1855 New copper pot stills installed at Black Friars distillery; these are still used today.
- 1860 The main strength sold on the UK mainland was 72° UK Proof or 41.2% alc./vol.
- 1870 The use of the monk device on the label believed to have come into use in this year.
- 1870 Plymouth Gin was now the most widely distributed gin in the UK 'West Country' and known as *'the wine of the country'*.
- 1880 In the London courts *"there is widespread superstition in the Western Counties that no bottle of "Plymouth Gin" is beyond suspicion that does not bear the label representing the person of the Black Friar"* . The Western Figaro.
- 1884 Plymouth Dry Gin awarded Prize Medal at the International Health Exhibition in London.
- 1884 ,1888 Injunctions in law against local "Plymouth Gin imitators.
- 1896 The first documented recipe for what would be called a dry martini published in New York in *Stuart's Fancy Drinks & How to Mix Them*. Plymouth Gin is the key ingredient used alongside a French (dry) vermouth and a dash of orange bitters.
- 1900 Plymouth Gin is the world's largest volume brand of gin.
- Early 1900's American export strength produced at 44.5% abv.

- 1906 The Company's earliest surviving promotional material – a twelve page booklet with turn of century photos and stories.
- 1917 Prohibition stamps stuck on Plymouth Gin bottles. "Inventoried under Act of Congress, Oct. 3, 1917. UNIVERSITY CLUB 1<sup>st</sup> District, Illinois. Imports at that time at 89 degrees US proof (44.5% abv) with \$100 reward for counterfeit goods.
- 1920's & 1930's The cocktail era – many white spirit based cocktails are made with Plymouth Gin.
- 1925 Plymouth Gin produces its first Cocktail Booklet – includes the Dry Martini, Pink Gin, Gimlet and others.
- 1930 The Savoy Cocktail Book first published; Plymouth Gin specified in 27 cocktails including The Charlie Lindbergh, One Exciting Night, The Prohibition Cocktail etc.
- 1932 Booths Gin was the largest volume gin brand in the UK. (Production of Booths Gin in the UK was terminated in 1998 by UDV)
- 1933 Coates & Co. win a landmark case in the London courts against Burrough's (owner of Beefeater Gin) for attempting to market their own 'Plymouth Gin'. Thereafter a Geographic Designation (a sort of Appellation Contrôlée) is in the statutes. Plymouth Gin can only be made within the ancient city walls of Plymouth.
- 1941 Black Friars Distillery hit by 5 German fire bombs; the offices and most of the old records destroyed but the distillery equipment was unscathed and the oldest parts of the buildings were saved by locals fighting fires throughout the night.
- 1941, later. As a result, the Admiralty sent out a message to the British Fleet saying that Plymouth Gin had been hit – but had survived. British Officers in Malta reacted by offering any gunner who sank a ship or downed an enemy plane a bottle of Plymouth Gin.
- 1944 Post war rationing of grain neutral spirit leaves family management unable to obtain good quality spirit. Poor product produced. The Royal Navy switch to "Horses Neck.
- 1946 Family again obtain good quality grain neutral spirit, but there is an acute lack of funds by now.

- 1953 Freeman family sell the business to J.C. McLaughlin, an entrepreneur.
- 1957 US author John D. Macdonald creates the *Travis McGee* series. McGee a red blooded and insightful detective sips Plymouth Gin on his boat *The Busted Flush* in 20 books. McGee often reveals the true splendour of Plymouth Gin.
- 1958 McLaughlin sells the company to Seagers Evans (owned by Schenley Industries of the USA).
- Early 1960's A San Diego radio station uses a Plymouth Gin 'Glug Glug' water jug to make the sound for their time signal.
- 1963 Schenley import the brand at 94.4 degrees US proof (47.2% abv). A new US promotional drive is underway with MD Dick (Bomber) Harris. Commissioning kits given to owners of prestigious US private yachts including to the Commodore of the St Francis YC, San Francisco.
- 1975 Schenley sells Plymouth Gin, as part of the Long John portfolio, to Whitbread of the UK.
- 1982 Whitbread buys James Burroughs, owners of Beefeater Gin.
- 1991 Whitbread pulls out of spirits and sells both gins to Allied-Lyons, later Allied Domecq.
- Early 1990's Allied Domecq downgrades the base spirit in Plymouth Gin from grain neutral spirit to cane spirit, and from 40% abv to 37.5%. The bottle and label cheapened. Shame, shame, shame!
- 1996 Plymouth Gin bought from Allied Domecq by 4 private enthusiasts. The spirit strength immediately put back to 40%, and 100% grain neutral spirit again replaces cane spirit.
- 1997 Sales triple with exports up eight fold on 1996. The company produces its 14<sup>th</sup> cocktail booklet.
- Jan 1998 The company announces a UK distribution agreement with French spirits group, Remy-Cointreau.

February 1998	New package unveiled returning to traditional label style and the bottle used at the turn of the 19 <sup>th</sup> century. The spirit of the monk is featured again - inside the bottle. 'When his feet get dry it's time for another bottle'.
Feb 1998	The company returns to the traditional 41.2% abv strength for the US and the UK markets. The head distiller states " <i>it is a strength which holds all our seven botanicals perfectly without the alcohol burn evident in many stronger gins</i> "
March 1998	The company announces distribution deals with Todhunter Imports in the USA.
Jan 1999	Seagram UK take over the UK and Irish distribution of Plymouth Gin.
June 2000	Vin & Spirit purchase 50% of Coates and Co.'s equity. This purchase improves Coates financial position and eventually gives Plymouth access to Maxxium, V & S's global distribution partner.
June 2001	Distribution moves from Seagram to Maxxium UK. In the two years Seagram have distributed the brand, sales in the UK have doubled to 36,000 cases.
July 2001	Nick Blacknell, previously head of Absolut in the UK joins Coates as Marketing then Managing Director.
Feb 2002	Plymouth Gin switches sales force in the USA to Future Brands, a joint venture between V & S and Jim Beam Brands. The Absolut Spirit Company becomes the Importer. Both companies offer Plymouth an unparalleled opportunity to become a major player in the US premium spirit market.
June 2002	Vin & Spirit increase their shareholding to 80%.
2002 onwards	Plymouth Gin continues to expand into the World's major gin markets with a view to becoming an Impact top 100 brand within 10 years.