

## Alcoholic Beverages in Ireland

Thousands of years ago, alcohol was discovered, possibly by chance, when berries, fruit and cereals mixed with water were left fermenting in the sun. It was only a matter of time before the process was harnessed enabling alcoholic drinks to be produced as required. Beer, wine and spirits are all believed to have originated in the Middle East in the areas around Egypt and ancient Persia. Clearly the beverages were appreciated and enjoyed because, around 1300 BC manuscripts of the time record the application of regulations to beer shops in an effort to control over indulgence.

The methods of production of beer in Ireland may have been learned from the Britons or perhaps the knowledge travelled the same route as the grain which originated in Egypt. By the Bronze Age, around 1500 BC, Irish Agriculture could have supported beer making, and certainly by the time the Celts arrived from Europe, beer was being made and consumed in Ireland.

The oldest of the existing breweries in Ireland is Smithwicks of Kilkenny which was established in 1710 and now forms part of Diageo. Guinness itself was founded in 1759 when the original Arthur Guinness took over a brewery at St. James's Gate Dublin. During this time the standard of beer generally available in the Ale Houses and Inns varied considerably, and the manufacturers faced stiff competition from imports. When porter was first introduced into Ireland in the 1770's, it is recorded that only the English beverage would satisfy the Irish palate. However, it was not long before the relatively new Guinness Brewery diversified into porter in the 1790's – around the same time as Beamish & Crawford established in 1792 and later by Murphy Brewery (Ireland) Ltd., (now Heineken) founded in 1856 – and the trend of imports began its dramatic reversal. This marked the beginning of a new age for Irish beer and the enjoyment of the worldwide reputation still enjoyed today.

The structure of the brewing industry has remained virtually unchanged since the last century and is made up of Diageo (incorporating Guinness), Beamish & Crawford

(part of Scottish & Courage) Murphy Brewery (part of Heineken) and in Belfast the Bass Ireland Brewery (part of Interbrew).

Irish Brewers Association (IBA) members play an active role in the activities of both the European Brewing Convention (EBC) and the Brewers of Europe Organisation (CBMC). The IBA is part of the Drinks Industry Group of Ireland, which has engaged in a range of programmes aimed at counteracting the excessive consumption of their products.

Today the output of the Irish beer industry is around 9,000,000 hectolitres per annum. Consumption of beer (at 5% alcohol by volume) is around 125 litres per capita. 40% of the beer produced in Ireland is exported. Alcoholic beverages are very heavily taxed in Ireland and the excise on beer is second only in the European Union to the rate in Finland. By contrast the taxation in Ireland is 10 times that applied in Germany. Only one quarter of the price of a pint of beer in Ireland is earned by the Breweries themselves.

Ireland enjoys abundant supplies of Beer's main ingredients, water and barley. Significant quantities of beer and Irish barley are exported to many parts of the world and almost all the national requirements of barley for the beer industry are sourced within Ireland. 40% of the Beer production in Ireland, and over one third of the Malting Barley is exported, much of it to non-European destinations.

The industry has undergone significant rationalisation over the last 100 years but some things never change. The annual general meeting of the Irish Brewers Association, which took place in 1911 on February the 3rd, was attended by a large number of members (according to the Irish Times published that week). After disposing of the formal business it is reported that a discussion took place on several matters affecting the interests of the trade more particularly the Tax impositions inflicted by the previous years Budget. It was decided that some action should be taken in the interests of the members to have these burdens lightened when the budget for the current year was introduced. Some things, indeed, never change.



PRESS RELEASE

# Provisional Programme 29th EBC Congress published

The Provisional Programme of the 29th EBC Congress has just been published. The Congress will be held in Dublin, Ireland, 17–22 May 2003. Congress venue is the Royal Dublin Society Showgrounds (RDS) in Ballsbridge, Dublin.

For further information please contact your national EBC Member Organisation or the EBC Secretariat, P.O. Box 510, 2380 BB Zoeterwoude, The Netherlands (tel.

+31 71 545 6047 / 545 6614 – fax +31 71 541 0013) – e-mail: [secretariat@ebc-nl.com](mailto:secretariat@ebc-nl.com).

The Programme is also available on-line: [www.ebc-nl.com](http://www.ebc-nl.com) and the summaries of all presentations (lectures & posters) will shortly be published on our home page.

Zoeterwoude, February 2003

