

# Book Review

## A History of Beer and Brewing

by Ian S. Hornsey

Publication: December 2003  
Publisher: Cambridge: Royal Society of Chemistry  
Price: £39.95  
Softcover, 742 pp  
ISBN: 0 85405 630 5

Brewing history traces the development of civilisation itself! As a consequence, this is a remarkable book. As well as providing much information on the history of brewing and today's brewing methods and organisation it considers the history of the periods under discussion. This history relates many interesting anecdotes of which this reviewer (who considers himself an amateur historian) was unaware. Also, although published material on alcohol and brewing is vast, this book provides new insights into the subject which have not been published previously. For example, during a consideration of fermentable raw materials available to pre-Neolithic peoples, it is stated that, with the possible exception of lactose in milk and honey, sugars such as sucrose, glucose and fructose would only have been available on a seasonal basis because they would be difficult to store for year-round supply. However, starch was (and still is) available year-round in a stable condition. Consequently, the importance of starch for fermentation became clear.

This book is written in 9 chapters. As would be expected Chapter 1 is entitled 'The Beginnings' and considers the origins of fermented beverages. Developments in, what is now, Iraq and Africa are discussed. The author comments that 'by the time this book is published the war in Iraq will be over'. This maybe factually correct but the consequences of the war are certainly not over! The author also rightly states that many of that country's artefacts relating to the early days of brewing will have been lost for ever.

Developments in 'Ancient Egypt' (Chapter 2) are discussed in considerable depth. Also developments are related to the society of the time. Also the recent work of Dr Dewlap Samuel from the Department of Archaeology at the University of Cambridge is discussed. Samuel has confirmed that malting of both barley and emmer (a type of wheat) was a feature of brewing during this period. There is a very informative section in this chapter on 'The Role of Beer in Society'. It discusses why some classes drink wine and other classes beer. The brewing technology of the period is outlined and the publications by Lutz in the 1920s are relied upon for background data. Some very interesting and unique references are cited for ex-

ample, 'Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile' (published in 1805).

The next chapter on 'The Ancient Near East' complements the one on Egypt and considers brewing in Sumer, Akkad, Babylonia and Assyria. This chapter discusses types of beer such as 'black beer', 'spelt beer', 'fine white beer' etc. and also the fact that quality control was becoming a reality. Beers were placed into categories: 'prime quality,' 'second quality' and according to ingredients such as 'emmer beer' and 'date beer' and colour 'dark beer' and 'golden beer'. There is also an extensive section on the raw materials that were employed at this time, particularly grains with an emphasis on barley.

'Other Ancient Beer Drinking Peoples' are considered in Chapter 4. This included beer-drinking peoples from Hatti, Phrygia, Lydia, Cilicia, Armenia, Syria and Phoenicia. Brewing practices in many of these regions are discussed in detail. Indeed, some sections tend to be repetitive. As well as brewing in the Middle East, Celtic brewing in northern Europe is discussed. It is admitted that archaeological evidence for brewing in the Celtic period is sparse. The Romans destroyed this Celtic culture and language and when the Romans retreated only pockets of Celtic culture remained who continued to brew a form of beer.

Most the remainder of this book concerns the British Isles. Chapter 5 essentially describes the first 1000 years AD from the Roman invasion until the Norman conquest. This period traces an evolution from wine consumption, which was popular with the upper echelons of British Iron Age Society, to the gradual increase in brewing. One of the prime reasons for the introduction of brewing technology into the British Isles was probably the Celts. The Celts brought the necessary skills out of the Near East, travelled westward and then took a northerly route to Gaul and the British Isles. Again the evolution of brewing practices are described in detail. The chapter concludes with a description of the early days of brewing in Holland.

The next chapter deals with the period from the Norman conquest until the death of Elizabeth I. Contrary to expectations, the Norman conquest did not change the British national beverage, which at the time was a bland unhopped barley/malt drink, until the introduction of hops from continental Europe. Although the ruling classes in early Norman Britain drank wine, the general population was faithful to its ale. The William the Conqueror Domesday Book considered nearly all aspects of British life, but it tells us nothing about beer and brewing. This chapter is full of information about British life from 1066 until the death of Elizabeth I in 1603. As well as tracing the evolution of brewing during this period of particular interest to this review are details of Elizabeth's court and her drinking habits (beer and diluted wine) and of her courtiers and servants. In addition, details of the brewing equipment employed enables an educated guess about brewing techniques.

Publication no. G-2004-0811-256  
© 2004 The Institute & Guild of Brewing

The next chapter is entitled 'The Start of Large-scale Brewing' and begins with the Stuart age. With the increasing need to boil wort with hops, brewing needed more sophisticated premises and equipment which required capital investment. At the same time, the manufacturing side of the business gradually became divorced from the retail side. During this period there were two events that were to prove important to the British brewing industry, particularly in terms of disseminating scientific information. The first was the inauguration of the London Patent Office in 1617, which encouraged the publication of practical new ideas and enabled invention to be protected. The first brewing patent was recorded in 1634 and was concerned with the more efficient use of fuel. The second event of note was the founding of the Royal Society by Charles II in 1662 which promoted the publication of scientific information including brewing.

The 17th and 18th centuries were periods of scientific progress and the publication of brewing developments. One of the leading questions of the day was that of 'spontaneous generation' which propounded that life was being continually created out of inanimate matter. This question dominated some areas of scientific thought and it was not until Pasteur that it was finally laid to rest. Leeuwenhoek's discovery of microbial life (yeast and bacteria) with the use of his home-made microscopes should have put an end to this question, but adherents to spontaneous generation would not listen!

The penultimate chapter describes 'Some Beer Styles and Some Breweries' and discusses porters, Bavarian beer,

potato beer, heather ale, and Devonshire white ale. It also describes the development of British breweries during the nineteenth century such as the City of London Brewery, Truman's Brewery, Golden Lane Brewery and Courage. With the ravages of time and many business deals (which are described in the final chapter) most of these famous brewing dynasties have disappeared.

The final chapter considers 'The 20th Century'. If a reader is not interested in history (brewing or otherwise) but is interested in the current British brewing scene this chapter is ideal for them. It describes what has happened in British brewing over the past 100 years. It considers the rise and fall of the tied public house estates, batch versus continuous brewing, the influence of two world wars and their aftermath on the business, the evolution of British lager and the demise of British ale, current technical and scientific developments in brewing. The influence of the Campaign for Real Ale (CAMRA) and the beer market in Britain is discussed and the book concludes with an overview of the current debate on 'Beer and Health'.

This reviewer fully recommends this book to anyone interested in brewing. It is well illustrated with a comprehensive table in contents. If there are criticisms, they are that the references are difficult to follow because they are not listed in alphabetical order at the end of each chapter and that the subject index is incomplete!

Reviewed by Graham G. Stewart  
Ph.D., D.Sc., FIBiol, FIBrew