

## Preface

The requirement for another text relating to the history of brewing became obvious to me whilst I was researching for a previous book, for no comprehensive account of the subject has been forthcoming since Corran's fine 1975 offering. Like other aspects of historical research, the pathway of the story of beer is littered with misconception and oft-repeated errata, much of which originated, and was proliferated and widely disseminated during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. I do not pretend to have unravelled all of the tangles that I have encountered in the depths of various libraries, but certain, hitherto generally accepted but unfounded facts can now be viewed in a rather different light.

Ever since man became sapient he has devised means of intoxicating himself, principally in order to create, albeit temporarily, a more pleasurable *milieu*. In all but a few cultures, the most common means of intoxication has resulted from the metabolic by-products of the anaerobic metabolism of certain species of yeast, a process that has historically been elicited in a variety of ways. In addition to ethyl alcohol, a variety of hallucinogenic, narcotic, and otherwise potentially lethal substances, mainly of plant origin, have been employed to induce euphoria. Many anthropologists are of the opinion that these mood-altering compounds played an important role in the development and maintenance of many ancient cultures, and that their use today can be interpreted as representing the vestiges of their one-time significance.

For obvious biological reasons, highly-soluble, fermentable sugars (such as sucrose, glucose and fructose) are rarely encountered in a free form in nature, and, over the millennia, starch, the main relatively insoluble, polymeric food storage compound of green plants, has provided the starting material for alcoholic fermentations in many parts of the world. The resulting alcoholic beverages may conveniently be classified under the broad heading of "beer", although many such products bear little resemblance to the beers now widely consumed in the Western World, many of which are based on barley as a raw material.

In the absence of much indisputable archaeological evidence of

brewing activity in prehistoric times in many parts of the world, I have used the book to examine the origins of agriculture, and have accordingly embraced the premise that without the wherewithal to grow crops (principally cereal crops), there would have been little likelihood of ancient man engaging in beer production and consumption. Out of choice, early man ceased to be nomadic and turned to agriculture in order to ensure a regular supply of the raw materials for his intoxicants. As a matter of expediency, almost any form of starch can form the starting material for “beer”, or other forms of alcoholic beverage; the initial form of the starch presented to the brewer will, of course, ultimately determine the manner of the brewing process. In order to appreciate the methods and results of some of the earliest attempts at brewing, it is essential that the reader holds no preconceived notions as to exactly what a modern definition of the words “beer” and “brewing” might encompass.

In essence, the book covers a time-span of around eight thousand years, and attempts to document the early days of brewing in Mesopotamia and ancient Egypt, before inevitably concentrating on events in northern Europe, and Great Britain in particular. Most brewing historians would probably agree that the story starts with the ancient urban civilisations of Mesopotamia, seemingly somewhere around 6000 BC, although it is not without possibility that brewing may have originated in an ancient civilisation in Asia Minor prior to that. The account of brewing activity in the British Isles ranges from Neolithic times, *via* the Roman occupation, the times of the Anglo-Saxons and Normans, to the ages of the Plantagenets, Tudors and Stuarts. We then embark upon the era which saw the birth of the “common brewer”, when, for the first time, beer began to be produced, for financial reward, on a vast scale. From the late-18<sup>th</sup> century to the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards, beer became brewed in a way in which many of us would recognise today, and we witness the emergence of innovative technologies, such as the use of steam power, control of fermentation, and refrigeration. Even in our northern European climes, the latter, in particular, has revolutionised the way in which beer is produced, stored and served.

When I took the present project on, I was initially excited by the fact I was able to view the 20<sup>th</sup> century with hindsight, but my enthusiasm was soon to be tempered by the realisation that many of the more important events in 20<sup>th</sup>-century brewing were, either of a purely technological/scientific nature, or related directly to high finance. My feeling then was that such innovations would be best dealt with in rather more specialist texts. I have, however, tried to outline some of the more important landmarks in the history of brewing in modern times, and make no apology

that my choice is somewhat subjective, and will not meet with universal agreement by those (past and present) in the industry.

It is a great irony that, just as the two World Wars during the 20<sup>th</sup> century resulted in the permanent rearrangement in the way in which British beer was brewed and sold, and thus became of significance to brewing historians, so a major conflict at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century was to prove of equal importance to them. By the time that this book is published the war in Iraq will be over, but many of that country's artefacts relating to the early days of brewing will have been lost to us forever; something for which we shall all be much the poorer.

