



The National Liberal Club

Oktoberfest 2006





History of Beer

Beer is the world's oldest and most popular alcoholic beverage, with annual worldwide sales currently exceeding 35 billion gallons (133 billion litres). There are as many as 80 distinct styles of beer; including IPA, Brown Ale, Amber Ale, Blonde Ale, Cream Ale, and Red Ale.

Beer originated in Egypt and Mesopotamia during the 5th millennium, when grain was fermented into an alcoholic gruel or liquid beverage. In the bible, Noah was said to have made a provision for beer on the Ark. The Ancient Greeks had a reverence for it; "He was a wise man who invented beer," opined Plato. However, the Romans preferred wine and considered beer fit only for barbarians; indeed Tacitus wrote disparagingly about the beer brewed by the Germanic peoples - one of the earliest references to beer brewing in North-Western Europe.

From 500AD brewing remained a family-orientated activity in Europe; then, during the 14th century, demand grew and larger scale beer production was undertaken by pubs and monasteries. Mass consumption had arrived.

Until the 15th century, the English described 'ale' as any fermented unhopped beverage; though by the 16th century it was used to describe any strong beer. Hops, which is related to the stinging nettle, is a preservative and was first brought to Winchester by the Dutch in the early 1400s. By 1428 hops was grown in England and has been used in English brewing ever since.

By the 15th century, the German brewing industry was so well established that its produce was being exported as far away as India. In 1500 there were 600 breweries in Hamburg, producing such exotic varieties as North German Spiced Beer and Cherry Beer - both of which are still available today.

In 1516, William IV Duke of Bavaria adopted the *Reinheitsgebot* (purity requirement), which restricted the price and composition of beer; the ingredients were water, barley and hops (at that time yeast was not a known ingredient). This requirement was actually introduced to ensure the availability of affordable *bread*, since the more valuable wheat and rye were reserved for bakers. Although *Reinheitsgebot* prevented competition from brewers outside Bavaria from selling beer made with other ingredients, many Bavarian brewers became non-compliant. Although it was finally replaced in 1987 by *Biersteuergesetz* (beer tax law), it is still recognised as the world's oldest valid food law.

Germany's brewing centres developed in Brunswick, Einbeck, Berlin, and in Bremen, which was the primary supplier of beer for England, the Netherlands, and the Nordic countries.

Whilst most Bohemian beers were top-fermented with a dark, cloudy appearance, during the 1840s, some Bavarian brewers started 'lagering' (storing) their beer in cool caves and using bottom-fermenting yeasts. The result was pale lager (pilsner variety), which had an improved flavour, clarity and shelf-life. Official records show that pilsner beer was first produced on 5 October 1842 in Plzeň, formerly in Western Bohemia and now part of the Czech Republic. Naming it after the town, pilsner has since come to dominate the German beer market.

New breweries are still being opened across Europe including many micro breweries, which are akin to French brasseries. These are attached to pubs and bars, allowing independent establishments to produce small amounts of their own beer. Approximately 80 such breweries were started in the UK during 2005.



Oktoberfest

The German brewing industry is celebrated annually in the Oktoberfest, which occurs during the 16 days prior to the first Sunday in October. The event is held at a designated 64-acre site in the Bavarian city of Munich. The first Oktoberfest occurred on 12 October 1810, to commemorate the marriage of Crown Prince Ludwig (later King Ludwig I) and Princess Therese of Sachsen-Hildburghausen. It has since become the world's largest party and currently attracts some 6 million visitors.

Beer drinking occurs in giant marquees around the site and convention holds that it is quaffed from 1litre Steins (tankards). These are made from pottery, earthenware, glass, pewter or wood, and typically incorporate a hinged thumbflift. The thumbflift was originally applied as a reaction to the swarms of flies that overwhelmed Central Europe during the 1400s. The feature kept beer free from insects and other debris, while allowing the beverage to be easily consumed. It led to an early requirement in many German principalities for food and beverage containers to be covered.

A special beer is brewed for each Oktoberfest, which, in terms of taste and alcoholic content, is slightly darker and stronger than other beers.

Together with traditional music and singing, the men clap their hands and slap their thighs and knees in the famous Bavarian *Schulplatter* folk dance.

Bavarian food that accompanies the beer includes such delicacies as *wurst* (sausage), *hendl* (chicken), *käsespätzle* (cheese noodles), *sauerkraut*, and roast ox tails.



Prost!