

BOOK REVIEWS

Ontario Beer: The heady history of brewing from the Great Lakes to Hudson Bay

By McLeod, A. and St. John, J.

Charleston, SC: Histroy Press

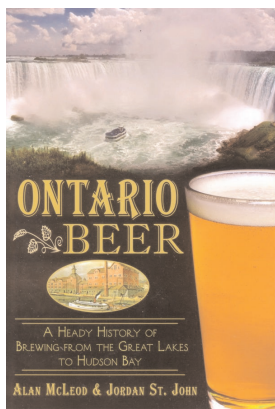
2014, Pp. 142, \$21.99

ISBN 978-1-62619-256-0

The province of Ontario came into being some 250 years after what the authors of *Ontario Beer*, Alan McLeod and Jordan St. John, speculate to be the first time beer was drunk in the region. Unfortunately, it was not a happy occasion as the person who did the drinking was Henry Hudson who was set adrift by his mutinous crew to die in the bay that would be named after him. From this rather inauspicious beginning we are provided with an informed and very readable account of Ontario's beer and brewing history.

Of course, no country or region's brewing industry exists and develops in isolation and this is certainly the case with Ontario, it influenced significantly and was impacted upon the industries of both the USA and

Great Britain. Therefore, this is not just a book for those interested in Canadian brewing history, but also for those concerned with events south of the Great Lakes and across the Atlantic.



The authors argue that a distinctive Canadian brewing culture began to emerge at the beginning of the nineteenth century. This was in part due to the consolidation of a Canadian national identity, a product of the War of 1812. Beer came to be viewed as a more patriotic drink than rum, a spirit that had been extremely popular, but which had a strong association with the enemy across the border. The distinction was further exaggerated soon afterwards with rise in popularity of porter, the result of a significant influx of Irish, especially from Munster. At roughly the same time Ontario also experienced an influx of Germans, the first lager brewery being established in 1837.

Throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century Ontario felt the contradictory effects of, on the one hand, an increasingly powerful temperance movement, and on the other, the expansion of the railway network. While the latter was a boon to the industry the latter would eventually lead to the introduction of prohibition. The Canadian experience of prohibition, which lasted in various guises from 1916 to 1927, was markedly different from that of the USA, the legislation was less draconian and each province differed in how it was enforced. In Ontario it was still legal to produce and export beer and it is not surprising to find that some found its way to the US.

It was around the time when prohibition was repealed that one of the most important figures in twentieth century brewing, on both sides of the Atlantic, came to prominence, Edward Plunket Taylor. Through numerous acquisitions and mergers, initially helped by British investors, E.P. Taylor gained control of 50% of the Ontario beer market by 1950. Two years later his Carling Black Label was first brewed under contract in the UK. This was the beginning of Taylor's expansion across the

Atlantic. His aim was to acquire a 25% stake in every publicly traded brewery in Britain, a move that triggered the complete restructuring of the UK brewing industry.

Back in Canada the nature of the beer being produced was changing. In line with what was happening south of the border beer was becoming lighter and brands such as Labatt's 50 Ale and Molson's Crown and Anchor joined Black Label to displace the bigger beers as these breweries biggest sellers. By the beginning of the 1980s Ontario's beer market appeared to have reached saturation point and drinkers began to look elsewhere, a change reflected in the growing popularity of Bud and Miller.

The 1980s also saw the emergence, if only slowly, of a microbrewing scene in the province, helped by the legalisation of brewpubs in 1986. Many of this first wave did not make it beyond the 1990s, but a second wave that came about at the turn of the century, proved more successful, helped in part by the establishment of the Ontario Small Brewers Association. During this period the major brewers experienced major changes; Molson merged with carling O'Keefe, the resulting company being acquired by the Australian firm Elders IXL Ltd., and Labatt was taken over by Belgian's Interbrew. However, it is with the microbrewers that the authors end their book, asserting that the quality of beer being brewed in Ontario has never been higher, the choice greater and therefore the province has entered its 'golden age'.

Compared to the UK and USA, Canadian brewing history has remained relatively unexplored. This welcome addition to the literature is the first from the History Press on a Canadian subject in a series of nearly 40 books on North American brewing. Although it does assume some prior knowledge of Canadian history this is an excellent introduction to the subject, helped by a generous amount of illustrations, many in colour.

TIM HOLT

**The Shepherds and Shepherd Neame Brewery,
Faversham, Kent, 1732-1875**

By Owen, J.

Canterbury: Mickle Print

2011, Pp.124, £11.95

ISBN 978-0-9559997-3-4

**The Emergence of Shepherd Neame from the
earliest days of brewing in Faversham, Kent,
1100-1732**

By Owen, J.

Canterbury: Mickle Print

2014, Pp.135, £14.95

ISBN 978-0-9559997-7-2

**Percy Beale Neame and the Shepherd Neame
Brewery, Faversham, 1836-1913**

By Owen, J.

Canterbury: Mickle Print

2014, Pp.135, £14.95

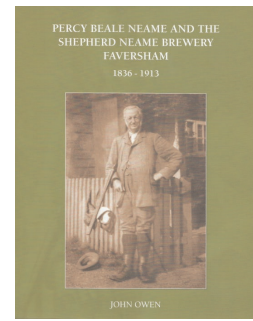
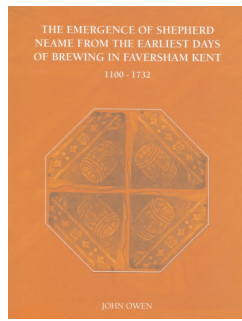
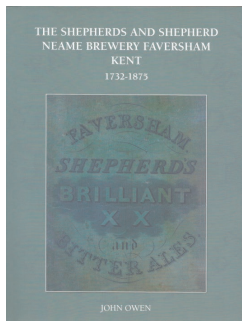
ISBN 978-0-9559997-8-9

Each of these slim volumes does what it says on the cover. They are listed in order of the date of publication.

If you are interested in the history of Britain's oldest brewery up to 1875, then read the first volume. Back in 1698, (the date prominently displayed by Shepherd Neame today), it was owned by Richard Marsh. The first Mr Shepherd arrived on the scene in 1732. You have to wait until 1864 before the first Mr Neame came along. The last Mr Shepherd died in 1875. Since then, it has been controlled and managed by the Neame family.

If you are interested in a painstaking exploration of the activity of brewing in a small town from the earliest available records, then read the second volume. Faversham is not any old small town, of course. It had a royal abbey from 1148 and was quite an important port town (its earliest charter shows it to have been a member of the Cinque Ports at least as early as 1252). These things tended to encourage good administrative practices, especially where tax was concerned; Faversham's municipal records are among the best available, and the author has scoured them for every whiff of barley and hops.

If your interest is primarily in family history, the third volume might be for you. The first chapter tells the general reader much about the extended East Kent farming family of Neame; the endnotes reveal the use of an astonishingly wide range of sources. In 1864, Percy Beale Neame, the youngest son of a youngest son, went into a business he knew nothing about, but grew into the archetypal Victorian sole proprietor. No aspect of the brewery escaped his attention.



Sole proprietorship meant that the assets and liabilities of the brewery belonged to Percy Neame. At his death in January 1913, they formed part of his personal estate, along with all his other assets and liabilities. John Owen calls the last chapter ‘Aftermath’, a word usually associated with disaster. It nearly was a disaster for the business. His trustees and executors were concerned to generate the cash to meet Percy’s testamentary wishes. It would have helped the reader if the author had been able to draw up some sort of balance sheet, because the reader is told, on the one hand, that Percy had liabilities not covered by his other property (vol.3, p.68) but, on the other hand, that Percy died ‘the richest man in Faversham’ (vol.3, p.72). In any case, Percy’s trustees considered selling or closing the brewery. The valuer of the business opined that market conditions were such as to preclude an initial public offering of shares; also that a private sale would be unlikely to raise enough money to discharge Percy Neame’s liabilities. Furthermore, it was their opinion that the piecemeal sale of brewery assets at breakup value may be insufficient to produce the capital needed to fund his widow’s annuity. The solution, in November 1914, was to form a limited company - its various classes of shares and debt allocated so as to achieve the terms of Percy Neame’s will. His three sons continued to manage the brewery; two of them died in 1916.

John Owen was an insurance underwriter by profession, but his current role as the archivist at Shepherd Neame provides him a perfect platform that brings focus to his lifelong interest in the history of Faversham. Both parties benefit from this relationship. Top of the list of names on the ‘Acknowledgements’ page of his first volume comes Jonathan Neame, CEO, ‘for his active and continuing encouragement of research into all aspects of the history of the brewery’. Jonathan has written a very warm foreword to the third volume.

I particularly admire John Owen’s willingness to take a stab at production figures where no records exist. For example, he reckons that in the early 1300s, the population of Faversham was about 1,500 people. The adults would consume about one gallon of beer a day; the children about half that. On the assumption that supply equalled demand, he derives a figure to which he adds something for the thirsty visitors to a busy port town. In his view, the town’s total production would have been about 13,000 barrels per annum. The tax records for 1327 show that there were eighty-seven named brewers in the town, all of them women. The taxes they paid demonstrate which of them brewed commercially, and which for little more than domestic consumption (vol. 2, p.7). The author uses the same sort of informed guesswork to great advantage throughout.

John Owen’s method is to draw together data from widely different sources in order to create a very convincing narrative. His knowledge of people, places and the structure of society in the district is encyclopaedic. His work, however, is neither parochial nor antiquarian; the opposite is true - he makes every effort to put the history of brewing in Faversham into its regional and national context. All the more strange, therefore that he gives such short shrift to Rigden’s Brewery, Shepherd Neame’s major local competitor, and dismisses them (on limited data) as only ‘half the size’ (vol 3, pp. 28 & 36). When Fremlins of Maidstone acquired Rigdens and closed down its Faversham brewery in 1949, one can only wonder about the reaction across the road at Shepherd Neame. But John Owen has not ventured far into the twentieth century. Dare we hope for a fourth volume?

PETER TANN