

Book Review

Hops and Glory: One man's search for the Beer that built the British Empire

by Pete Brown

Pp. 358. Macmillan: London, 2009.

£14.99

ISBN 978-0-230-70635-4

Have you ever wondered how famous beer styles originated? *Hops and Glory* is a modern travelogue interwoven with chapters on Victorian history exploring the fascinating origins of India Pale Ale. Pete Brown, an established beer marketing man but now beer writer, sets out with a keg of old style I.P.A. to follow the route and conditions that Burton upon Trent's iconic Pale Ale took to mature and travel to India. This is a story full of intrigue, determination, disappointment, deceit, despair, bravado, passion with bad luck and some very good luck. All the ingredients of a Victorian melodrama but about beer (with a subtext of money, industry, nawabs and gentry) which is amusingly, yet fully presented, as a very good read.

It all started, depending which story you are following, in 2006 or the 1830s and earlier. For me the history of India Pale Ale is the most fascinating and Pete Brown has dug into a wealth of archives in Burton from the now mothballed Bass

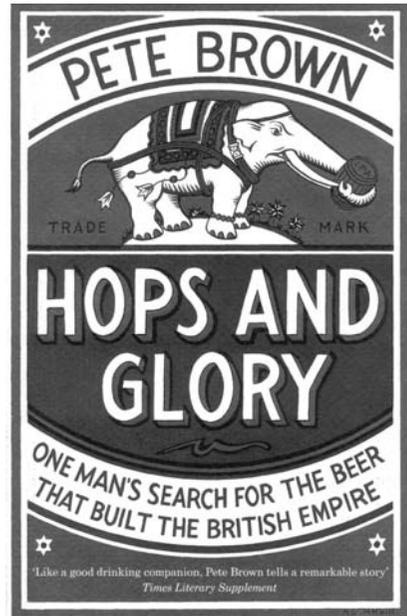
(Coors) Brewing Museum - when Allsopp and Bass (followed by many other brewers) saw an opportunity to brew a Pale Ale which was better than Hodgson's to sell to the East India Company via their London office. This expanding market was needed to quench the thirst of their staff and soldiers in India with a deluxe, expensive but fiery beer. In those days the East India Company ran 'British India' as their fiefdom, trading and dealing with the Indians for cotton, opium etc to sell on in England, with sailing clippers to transport their goods (and staff) round the Cape of Good Hope.

All that changed in 1858 when the H.M. Government took over India - but the race went on. Later in the journey access to archives in London and Kolkata gave Pete insights and more stories which expand the buccaneering and skulduggery of trading thousands of miles from home. The peak trade had passed by 1890, as the Suez Canal had opened in 1869, this cut travel time and local brewers also entered the market. Bass, the winning Pale Ale brand, allowed its world beating beer and once largest brewery in Burton to wither away to a pale shadow of its former self.

Switching to the modern tale many present day constraints hampered a complete

replica of the journey. However, using an 1850 recipe the Coors (Bass) White Shield Brewery (1920s pilot size design) brewed, with the authors help, an I.P.A. One keg, named Barry, (a traditional cask would have been impractical?) of the brew set off on the first part of the journey by canal barge from Burton to London with our intrepid writer nursing it and his sanity for the three month trail (a typo for trial). The very tightly timed schedule, with Barry in tow, included travel by air, cruise line, sailing clipper, container ship, taxis, and trains. Dodging customs and pirates via South America to India until, with a 'replacement' keg, they arrived by a most circuitous route. This allowed the beer to Maderise, infuse the bouquet of the dry hops and clarify to a superb balanced hoppy Pale Ale.

It would be a shame to give away all the highs, lows and becalming episodes that beset a modern adventurer with such an unusual travel mate. Suffice it to say a successful tasting was enjoyed with relief by all, including the British High Commission in India, and one can but hope that this modern day successor will have a new lease of life.



It is a pity that there are no photographs in the book to illustrate the epic. There is however a world map of the route(s) together with an excellent appendix, bibliography and reference list to make this a great historical story and valuable book.

Chris Marchbanks