

BOOK REVIEW

Gambrinus Waltz: German lager beer in Victorian and Edwardian London

By Boak, J. and Bailey, R.

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www.amazon.co.uk/Gambrinus-Waltz-German-Victorian-Edwardian-ebook/dp/B00PIJUH1A

As Jessica Boak and Ray Bailey state at the beginning of their latest history, it can be argued that lager has become Britain's national drink. From its ascendancy in the 1960s it has pushed aside other beer styles to become ubiquitous in UK pubs, restaurants and on supermarket shelves. Yet this growth in popularity is not a unique event, it has happened once before. It is the story of lager's first rise, as well as its subsequent fall, that the authors set out to explain in *Gambrinus Waltz*.

They begin by describing briefly what lager is and how it originated and evolved - a familiar story to those who know the works of Ron Pattinson, Martyn Cornell and Evan Rail. They then tell how it developed from a well-liked local drink to an international phenomenon.

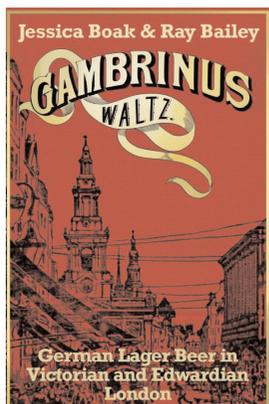
The Paris Exhibition of 1862 is seen as of particular significance in this respect, introducing vast numbers of attendees from all over Europe to the new beer style.

Of course Great Britain had its

own extremely popular beers, especially in London where the story moves to next. Obviously, lager's fame in Paris did not by itself guarantee its success over the Channel. The authors partially explain its acceptance by the existence of a ready-made group of consumers already resident in London. The capital of the 1860s was home to a disparate collection of German-speaking émigrés; figures of 16,000 to 60,000 have been estimated, many having left the Continent after the 1848 revolutions. A third factor which helped lager's entry into the English market was the esteem in which all things German were then held, a product of the popularity of Prince Albert, Queen Victoria's husband. These three aspects combined to provide a receptive climate for the first significant attempt to import lager during 1868. Boak and Bailey go on to describe the entertaining and sometimes rather odd venues and characters associated with the sale and consumption of the newly fashionable drink.

Just over a decade later and for the last 20 years of the 19th century London also became home to the production of lager. The Austro-Bavarian Lager Beer Brewery and Crystal Ice Factory, registered in 1881, was an ambitious enterprise built in Tottenham and covering some eight acres. Despite the substantial amount of investment in the concern it did not succeed, but imported lager continued to be very popular into the 20th century. So why did it all but disappear? The authors argue convincingly that it was a victim of a sudden rise in anti-German sentiments, the result of the outbreak of the First World War.

The authors conclude by discussing the recent re-emergence of lager, from the rise of the mass-produced product in the 1960s to the more contemporary success of 'craft' lager. They draw an interesting parallel between today and the mid to late 19th century, arguing



that Victorian lager and craft beer both 'began with cliques of urban tastemakers with money in their pockets'.

A few months ago a website posed the question, which three beer books yet to be written would you like to see published? I would argue that a history of lager in Britain should be one of them. There is still much to be discovered about this style of beer including a truly

convincing explanation of its growth in popularity during the last four decades of the 20th century. Boak and Bailey have whetted our appetites, it can only be hoped that they are given the opportunity to finish their story which they have begun in such a well written and superbly researched way.

TIM HOLT