

## BOOK REVIEWS

**A Brief History of Lager: 500 years of the world's favourite beer**

**Dredge, M.**

**London: Kyle**

**2019, Pp.224, £14.99**

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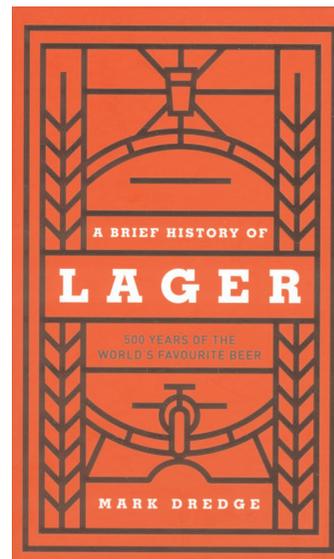
With his latest book, his sixth, Mark Dredge has made a significant departure from his previous publications. Known for works such as *Beer and Food* and *The Beer Bucket List* this is his first, as he noted in a recent interview, without pictures. Over some 200 pages he attempts to describe the origins of lager and the reasons why it has become by far the world's most popular style of beer. This is, of course, a massive undertaking and one that contains numerous pitfalls for the unwary or naïve investigator. To mention just one issue that continues to provoke much research and speculation - what are the origins of *Saccharomyces pastorianus*, lager yeast? Dredge does not duck such questions, neither does he provide glib answers. Rather, he provides the reader with a number of explanations, often through interviews with brewers and scientists, being honest enough to conclude that we may never know the truth.

Yet there is much concerning lager's history of which we are more certain and the author describes this in his customary entertaining and accessible style. Much of this story will be familiar to those that have already taken an interest in the story of lager, but Dredge does offer additional insights. For example, Gabriel Sedlmayr and Anton Dreher's visits to English and Scottish breweries during their European study tour of 1833 are well-known episodes in the story of lager's evolution. However, the author also brings to light two other young German-speaking brewers, Josef Meindl

from Braunau and Georg Lederer from Nuremberg, with whom Sedlmayr and Dreher shared a flat in London's East End.

*A Brief History of Lager* also includes accounts of the author's own travels around the world in his quest to learn more about beer's development. Sometimes these appear to dislocate the book's narrative flow, but at others they provide some of its best passages. Take, for instance, this evocative description of the cellars beneath Pilsner Urquell brewery:

There's one cellar that's greater than any other, where you'll be many metres below ground, where your breath forever condenses, whether it's January or July, where the walls around you were hand-dug over many decades and are scratched and storied. Those walls have seen 180 years of



human activity, and the production of millions and millions of glasses of golden lager beer. Today those cellars lead nowhere, but you could walk for many kilometres in the darkness, past where thousands of barrels were once stored. And while they lead nowhere now, look back in time and they take us to the beginning of the world's most famous beer style: Pilsner. (p.69)

The combination of passages such as the above with a solid historical account merge to make this book both highly engaging and instructive. One frustration is that, although it contains footnotes and a bibliography, no references are provided. That said, there are many more positives. Personally, I hope that *A Brief History of Lager* is not a one-off by Mark Dredge and that he will be writing more books 'without pictures' in the future.

TIM HOLT

**Brewed in the North: A history of Labatt's Bellamy, M.J.**  
**Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press**  
**2019, Pp.xii & 452, \$34.95 CAD & USD**  
**ISBN 978 0 7735 5915 8**

The author of *Brewed in the North: A History of Labatt's*, Matthew J. Bellamy, is Associate Professor of History at Carleton University in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada. He specializes in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century Canadian history covering areas such as government and business relations, branding, consumer consumption, and the brewing industry. His earlier works include the book *Profiting the Crown: Canada's Polymer Corporation, 1942-1990*. Bellamy has also published numerous articles in the scholarly press including, I should add, in *Brewery History*. A facility for communication comes across in the book despite its serious and scholarly tone. It is a comprehensive history of the Labatt company's 'trajectory', as the author puts it, from its first days in 1847 until its sale in 1995 to Belgian-based Interbrew S.A., now Anheuser Busch InBev. The work combines the perspectives of business and social history as well as biography, and hence retains good readability without (from that standpoint) excessive reliance on tables and charts. Those the book does contain are clearly laid out and easy to follow.

The book describes the ethnic and family roots of company founder John Kinder Labatt, who was born of Huguenot origins in Midlands Ireland in 1803. Many aspects of his personality are brought out effectively, often through quoting letters he wrote to his wife or business associates. The picture is of a prudent man, yet one willing to take calculated risks relatively late in life. Bellamy makes the point that Labatt never had an early drive to be a brewing entrepreneur; rather he entered the field after years of successful farming in London, Ontario, having encountered the malting and brewing fields through business dealings.

Unusually for Ireland's provincial centres of ca.1800, Labatt's birthplace of Mountmellick was a 'Manchester' characterized by a burgeoning textiles industry and other activity associated with the Industrial Revolution. Growing up in this environment attuned young Labatt, Bellamy argues, to the capitalist business ethic and the importance of hard work. Bellamy traces Labatt's journey from Ireland, where his activities seem not to have amounted to much, to London, England where he worked as a clerk in a timber business, and finally to the London of southwestern Ontario where he migrated to take up arable farming. Labatt's special motivation to succeed intensified due to acquiring upon marriage in England numerous dependants, relations of his wife. After doing well for some years at farming in pre-Confederation Canada Labatt entered the brewing field (1847) with his old friend and mentor, Samuel Eccles, whose background was in farming and brewing. They sourced malt and hops from the London area.

Eccles left the partnership in 1855 and was paid out by Labatt over a term of years. Eccles was concerned brewing had a clouded future due to increasing Temperance agitation in Canada. Labatt persisted with brewing and was rewarded due to making a good product and profiting from the growing economy and British garrison then in London. Labatt took good advantage of the expanding railway network to ship his product to regional agencies, which was the beginning of ceasing to be a local brewer. Bellamy underscores the importance of the emerging railway system in Upper Canada to Labatt's business and the nascent Canadian economy.

Labatt carefully planned his succession to ensure passing of the brewery, ultimately, to the most capable of his progeny, his third son John Labatt II. Labatt II,

described by Bellamy as, like his father, ‘pragmatic, principled, and forward-looking’, took the reins and was yet more of an entrepreneur than his parent. With great determination, having spent the Civil War period with a brewer in Wheeling, West Virginia to study India Pale Ale, in 1867 Labatt II introduced and actively promoted an IPA, a type still relatively new to Canada. The beer became and remained a major seller for Labatt brewery until the 1950s, even that is for many years after lager beer was introduced into its portfolio (1911). Labatt II’s excellent sales capabilities - he was once termed a ‘pusher’ - and the self-confidence gained growing up in a prosperous family, helped make the business into a major regional brewery.

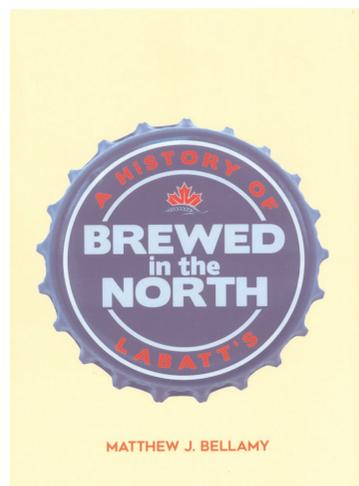
Bellamy shows how the company was constantly at the mercy of potentially impactful challenges such as the new Canada Temperance Act, but that from 1879 until 1890 its profits showed considerable growth (despite some annual swings). Labatt took advantage of improving bottling technology to transfer a large part of company output from draft production, which was less profitable. Cross-Canada shipping helped absorb production at the London brewery excess to local needs. A stroke of luck was that London remained a node of pro-drink culture into the early 1900s, which assisted Labatt and local competitors such as the Carling brewery. Finally, Labatt II was willing to overlook in some cases the final destination of his product, i.e., despite entering now ‘dry’ areas. This was a harbinger of a new corporate culture, notes Bellamy, one that would flourish full-measure during the Ontario and American Prohibitions in the next century.

John Labatt II met his Waterloo, though, through an ill-considered attempt in the 1890s to introduce his ales and porter to the American market in Chicago. This bootless saga is well described by Bellamy, who points out the blind spots that led in part at least to this failure, including Labatt II’s failure to appreciate the significance of lager in U.S. brewing by this time. Bellamy argues that the company never fully recovered from this debacle, which helped shape its future, for better and worse, in particular the aversion for too long to international expansion. Labatt II also failed to crack the distant British Columbia market, which seemed to hold on, for ale and stout sales, to malt liquors imported from a yet-more-distant Britain, but this reversal was much less impactful than the Chicago debacle.

Still, Labatt II had some early success in the Quebec market, and in some western markets, ones the business would later repeat in the era of national brands post-1960s, particularly with Labatt Blue/Bleue Pilsener.

The existence of the business was threatened by the advent of WW I and the Ontario and the American Prohibitions. John Labatt II died in 1915 and his two sons John Sackville and Hugh took over management in this atmosphere, with the real risk the company would be wound up in about 1920. While they had perhaps less executive skill than their paternal ascendants, they did make the inspired decision to entrust daily operational control of Labatt’s business during the Prohibitions (1916-1927 in Ontario) to company general manager Edmund Burke, a ‘fiery Irishman’. Burke had a hard-headed approach to business that often played fast and loose with Prohibition restrictions, but he ensured the survival of the company.

After Burke’s swashbuckling, but effective managerial reign, Labatt’s destiny, starting from the early 1930s, was increasingly guided by highly skilled professional managers, chartered accountants and, later, MBA graduates. The company henceforth adopted a strict code of corporate responsibility in contrast to the freewheeling days under Burke. Its advertising, highly regulated by Ontario’s post-Prohibition liquor control regime, restricted effective promotion but Quebec’s laws were more liberal. Publishing adverts in Quebec-based



magazines that were nationally distributed kept the company's fortunes healthy mid-century. Labatt's went public in 1945, benefitting from sophisticated Toronto 'Bay Street' advice while ensuring a family stock holding of 80% of the shares. By the mid-1960s, after a takeover attempt by the American Schlitz brewery was derailed by a U.S. court (not by the Labatt family, who wanted to sell), the family controlling stake, then some 35%, was sold to a group of investors including the powerful Brascan company.

The later 60s and 70s was the period when regional breweries had to become national in scale or face liquidation or takeover by other Canadian brewers. Hence the creation of national brands and increasing focus on advertising expenditure and creative marketing. Labatt Blue Pilsener was a major success albeit expensive in conception and execution. Labatt's also embarked on a steady program to acquire Canadian breweries outside Ontario to compete more effectively in a fragmented, highly regulated marketplace. The existence for many years of provincial laws that discriminated against brands shipped from other provinces made this a necessity although the concomitant exclusion of American beers benefited the Canadian brewers as a whole. E.P. Taylor's Canadian Breweries Ltd. led the way to becoming national in scale, but Labatt's followed, so that by 1970 there was a Big Three of Canadian national brewers: Carling O'Keefe; Labatt's; and Molson Breweries. Labatt's ended before its takeover as institutionally controlled with a board of directors that did not own significant shareholdings, which had enlarged the takeover risk.

With the reduction of provincial and international trade barriers due to the adoption by Canada of free trade policies, Labatt undertook, in fact from the 1960s, broad business diversification, in tune with the 'conglomerate' business philosophy of the time. Yet diversification rarely had results comparable to the core brewing business, which remained a 'cash cow' until the sale in 1995 to Interbrew. Bellamy argues, successfully in my view, that the company lost sight of its core strength, unlike say Interbrew or a Heineken. A telling anecdote is that in the 1960s Blue Pilsener was blind-tasted by Labatt's against competitive Canadian lagers and found essentially similar and thus deemed sound: effective advertising must be the answer, therefore, to its growth. It surely would have been inconceivable to management

then to promote, say, an all-malt beer in the 19<sup>th</sup> century tradition. Bellamy does not state, but I'm sure he would agree, that Heineken's return to all-malt brewing some 25 years ago for its flagship brand, would not have occurred as a gambit to Labatt management of the early 1990s. (Labatt did introduce finally the all-malt John Labatt Classic, but it remained a niche brand and furthermore to my recollection was fairly anodyne in character).

The company climbed on the light/dry/ice beer wagons in the 1980s and early 90s, content finally to take an American license for Budweiser and make beer that was ever lighter and (I might add) founder John K. Labatt probably wouldn't have recognized as beer. Bellamy points out pertinently that Canadian craft brewing developments eluded the company in importance, another example of viewing beer too literally as a fungible commodity.

The book is an impressive addition to Canadian brewing historiography. Even as it is not a history of Labatt's beers vs. its business, personally I would like to have known, say, how early Labatt IPA was brewed apart from the suitability of London's water and the generally higher hop character of IPA as compared to Labatt's earlier ales. And when a Labatt toured the Pilsen brewery in 1950 to learn about pilsner beer, what did he learn, exactly? Labatt Blue has always seemed a North American adjunct lager style, quite unlike a classic Czech pilsner. I think there was a place for a deeper discussion of this kind in the book.

The book benefitted from its extensive reliance on the Labatt Collection (archive) at Western University in Ontario and an unpublished history of Labatt's by the late Canadian historian Albert Tucker. As Bellamy points out, quoting Craig Heron, relatively little systematic research has been done of Canadian brewing history. Of course, numerous popular studies have been produced, all certainly useful, but with few exceptions Canadian brewing, unlike for some other small-population countries, seems to have attracted little scholarly attention. Bellamy's book goes a long way to off-set that, as did Craig Heron's 2005 book *Booze: a Distilled History*. Clearly there is room for much more, and these works and some other publishing, especially in journals, point the way for newer researchers. It is an interesting question why the paucity noted for Canada has existed;

one reason we think is the long hand, even after re-legalization of beverage alcohol in most parts of Canada by the 1930s, of a hesitant, even puritanical attitude to drinks and drinking. The regional nature of the country - still quite potent - is another factor likely inhibiting a greater scholarly study of our breweries in the past.

Finally, we noted a small number of errors, for example, the American biochemist who developed a light beer formula in the 1960s was Joseph Owades, not James Owandes. These few slips are inconsequential for the importance of the book, whose publication is a major event in Canadian brewing historiography, as noted earlier.

GARY GILLMAN

**Guinness Down Under: The famous brew and the family come to Australia and New Zealand**

**Smith, R.**

**Tauranga, NZ: Eyeglass**

**2018, Pp.392, NZ\$49.99**

**ISBN 978 0 473 40842 8**

This book is a labour of love. Its origins lie in the author's interest in his wife's great-grandmother, Sarah Anne Guinness, who left Ireland to live in Australia, Fiji and New Zealand. From there it developed into an investigation into the different branches of the Guinness dynasty which made their way to the Antipodes. Four grandsons of Arthur Guinness, the company's founder, made this trip independently of each other in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is the story of them and their descendents which make up the largest and most interesting part of the book.

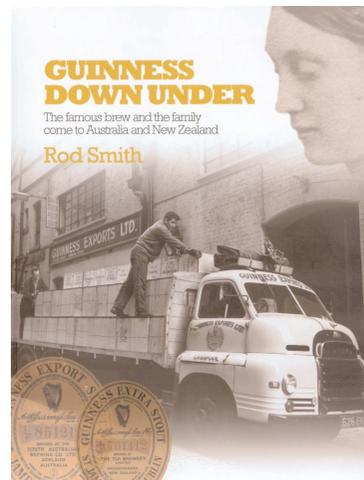
To provide some background to these characters the first section deals with the Guinness's origins and Arthur Guinness's successors, a complex task helped by the inclusion of family trees throughout the work. Of course, much of this has been covered in numerous other publications, but the author soon moves on to other themes, most of which have received little or no attention at all.

The role of the bottling firm of Edward and John Burke, brothers and grand-children of Arthur Guinness, is one such topic. They became one of the most significant bot-

tlers of Guinness and were major players in the Australian market. Another under investigated area, which makes up most of the third and final section of the book, is the brewing of Guinness in New Zealand and Australia. Difficulties encountered included finding the best partner with the facilities capable of producing the stout and how to market a drink quite different from local brews. The author offers fascinating insights into these problems and also describes the political machinations involved.

However, it is the middle section which really lifts the book. An impressive amount of detail regarding the four relatives who emigrated to the Antipodes is presented in a highly readable manner. Only one went into brewing and in a rather dubious manner. Arthur Benjamin Burke was dismissed from Saint James's Gate brewery for drunkenness and eventually turned up in Melbourne in 1853. Here he was involved in a number of breweries, one of which was renamed the Guinness Brewery. Eventually the Irish firm had to take out advertisements in the local press to emphasise that Guinness could only be obtained through their official bottlers. The other three relatives had very different experiences of life Down Under, all equally absorbing.

The author questions whether it would have been better to publish two separate volumes, a family and a business history, but he has produced a combination which works well. Smith is not a historian, having been a journalist, youth worker and public servant. Occasionally



this shows, context is sometimes missing and he includes fictionalised letters from Sarah Anne Guinness which add little to an already interesting narrative. Another criticism is that the book ends suddenly with the return of brewing Guinness to Lion's Adelaide brewery in 2012; there is no concluding chapter or even paragraph. Some closing remark tying all the various strands together would have been welcome for a work that took eight years to write and far longer to research.

The writing is engaging and some of the stories very moving. The variety and quality of the illustrations are

first class as is the design of the book. What one is left with is a better understanding of the difficulties encountered by two entities: a company's entrance into a market on the other side of the world and individuals' efforts to establish lives far from home in often difficult circumstances. It is to the author's credit that he has described both so well and makes this book an excellent addition to the canon of Guinness literature.

TIM HOLT