

History of Hops

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Origins and Domestication

Hops most likely evolved over a million years ago in present-day China, and have been grown wild in Europe for thousands of years [1, p221]

- For most of this time people brewed beer without hops. It is surprisingly unclear when hop usage for brewing actually began
- It's thought they were first domesticated in the 9th century, the first documented use is from a statue written by a French abbot in 822, but it does not specify exactly how the hops were used in the beer [2]
- Some archaeological evidence in modern northern Italy exists as far back as 550 BC, almost 1400 years earlier, a drink showing "pollen from cereals, trees, and hops" [3]

Hops used to be used for a number of other things, including dyes, rope, cloth, and some folks would stuff hop cones in their pillows to help them sleep [1, p223]

- Therefore old texts mentioning gathering wild hops don't necessarily have to do with putting them in beer

Hop cultivation for beer is thought to have been in full swing by 1100-1200, though some German sources claim it began in Hallertau in the 900s [2]

Boiling Makes Beer into a Keeper

It's thought that hops took over in the brewing worlds once boiling became more common, which was not until fairly late historically [3]

- Boiling hops in the wort only became common from the late 13th century onward in Northern Germany. Beers from Hanseatic League trading towns had the advantage that they could last more than a fortnight without turning to malt vinegar [2]
- Exporting hopped beer enabled the brewers to become rich enough to join the local aristocracy, apparently which didn't happen in Britain until the 18th century
- *"The Hanseatic towns of Bremen and Hamburg were the first to perfect hopped beer, and they had a huge market advantage: their beer kept. They could brew it, ship it to Amsterdam, and even then it would outlast beer brewed locally"* [4]

Hops have been used throughout the brewing process, including: in the mash even for raw ales, as part of lauter filtration, the now-popular boil and dry hopping, and extracted as hop tea and then added to the beer, even to to the drinker's taste in the glass [1, p255]

Hops Invade the British Isles

Wealthy buyers from the Low Countries imported hopped beer, and Flemish brewers quickly started using hops too [2]

- Dutch towns were growing and supplying hops to brewers by the 1360s, and hopped beer took off by around 1400
- Around the same time, hopped beer started being imported into England

The English traditionally made unhopped "ale", which had existed in Saxon times, and were mostly conservative-minded about it

- The first brewer of hopped beer was a Dutch immigrant in 1412 (Martyn Cornell notes in this context "Dutch" meant "German" at this time rather than "person from the Netherlands") [2]
- Low Country immigrants were the primary brewers of hopped beer in England at first and hops were imported from across the channel [2]

As people acquired a taste for hops and the preservative qualities were better known, the opposition began to wane in the 1400s [5, p66]

- The beer brewers were granted more official recognition of their trade in 1464, establishing measured such as kilderkin (18 gallon) and firkin (9 gallons) that persist today [5, p69]

- Though London had accepted hopped beer, bias against hops continued regionally, e.g. Norwich banned use of hops in 1471 [5 p69]
 - The English Brewers Guild was established in 1493 [5, p70]
- Flemish immigrants started settling Kent in the 1500s to grow hops [5, p86]
- The exact date is unknown, but between 1511 and 1524 [2]
 - The City of London sent officials called “hop searchers” to make sure the hops being grown were suitable for brewing [5 p86]
 - Hop cultivation reached Herefordshire (West Midlands) by 1577, and the two regions show different terminology thought to be indicative of hop farming beginning in two places simultaneously: “hop yard for hop garden, hop kiln for oast house, crib rather than bin for the container” [2]

Hops Take Over the Ale World: British Beer in the 1700s

Over the next couple of centuries the lines would begin to blur between beer and ale

- The beer and ale brewers were separate fellowships until the time of Edward VI (1550's) [5 p96]
- By the middle of the 16th century, ales were starting to use smaller quantities of hops and the distinctions became more difficult [5, p71]

In 1710, Parliament banned the use of hop alternatives to ensure brewers couldn't get around the hop tax of a penny per pound [2]

- Hop farming could be very profitable when yields were good, but they swung wildly year to year[2]
- Apparently the revenue department didn't like the hop tax because it was impossible to know how much money it would bring in [5, p172]
- A tax levied to pay for the War of the Spanish Succession made malt more expensive relative to hops, further helping beers trend towards using less malt and more hops in the balance, paving the way for the popularity for a hoppy brown beer called “Porter” [8, p22]

“Keeping” beers were hopped at rates according to the season, and dry hopped in the cask [6, p13-14]

- Brewing was a seasonal activity, and the strongest beers with the freshest hops were called “October Beers” , a name used to advertise IPA through the 1800s [6 p81]
- Dry hopping was standard even for keeping porters and stouts, which were also exported to the Caribbean and India
- Martyn Cornell cites anecdotes where people attempted to grow the hops from the dregs of a Hogshead, or eat the hops for moisture after being shipwrecked [6, p36]

In the 1700s, London brewers had the pick of hops from Kent, which were preferred in Pale Ale [6, p29]

- It was thought the sea air in the growing region provided superior flavor
- The hops were most likely around 3-4% AA, varieties included Kent, Farnham Pale, Canterbury Brown, Flemish, and Long White
- Hops were delivered in “hop pockets”, leaving them susceptible to rapid aging and oxidation, but some would be repackaged and kept as cool as possible [6, p29]

Rise of the India Pale Ale and Bitter

It's thought the early IPAs from Hodgson in London weren't as highly hopped as later examples from Burton in the 1820s, and hop rates increased gradually [6, p29]

- Burton IPAs sometimes used around 5-6 pounds per barrel (excluding 1-2 lbs of fresh hops per cask), equivalent roughly to 1.5-3 pounds of high alpha American hops per barrel [6, p73]

The British went from uncertain about hops to completely crazy for them in the Victorian Era, and IPA became the beer of Britain's railway age as the railroad built out to Burton in 1839.

- The National Railway's first stage was completed in 1855 and by then Bass alone was making more than 300,000 barrels per year. Allsopp built a four acre brewery next to the Burton rail station just for IPA [6, p51]
- England became industrialized in the 1840s and people had more money to spend, so after 1850 IPA became more popular, with it served chilled and in glassware enhancing the appeal [6, p54]
- Medical professionals also claimed IPAs had restorative qualities or the bitterness was good for you [6, p54]

- British hop preference pecking order seemed to be Farnham, then Kent, but some brewers thought “North-Clay” hops, grown in the clay soil of Nottinghamshire were the best for keeping beers and would pay a premium for them. [2]

Hops in the Late 19th Century

The second “great British hop”, Fuggles, was available by 1875. The seed is thought to have come from a basket of hops picked from George Stace Moore’s farm in Kent, was planted by Richard Fuggle, then promoted by his sons the following decade

- The hop is advertised as “Fuggle’s Goldings” in a newspaper in 1871, which helps explain why it was called Savinjski or Styrian Golding when grown in Slovenia [7]

19th century American hops were primarily the indigenous Cluster, but Fuggle and Goldings were also grown in North America late in the century [6, p110]

- American hops from Oregon and the Northeast conversely became available in England in the 1870s and were used early in the boil by British brewers [6, p73]

The availability of artificial refrigeration, increased popularity of running beers over keeping beers, the preference for a sweeter palate, and increasing alpha acid percent led to decreased hop rates by the start of the 20th century [2]

TO HOP PLANTERS.

THE NEW HOP, KNOWN AS “FUGGLE’S GOLDINGS.”

MR. W. R. TOMPSETT is favoured with instructions from Messrs. Fuggle to **SELL** by **AUCTION**, at the Maidstone Road Inn, Paddock Wood, on **WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 8th, 1871**, about 100,000 **BEDDED HOPSETS** of the above kind.

Great care has been taken to keep the stock pure. The sets are well rooted, and will be sold in Lots of 500 and 1,000 each.

This Hop is as forward as the Jones’ kind, very prolific, and ranks in price with the ordinary Golding, while it is much more hardy and less susceptible of blight.

The Sets will be bedded near the Maidstone Road Inn, Paddock Wood, where they may be seen a week previous to the Sale, by applying to Mr. Levett, at the above Inn. Luncheon will be provided at one o’clock, and the Sale will commence immediately afterward.

Catalogues may be obtained at the Star Hotel, Maidstone; Rose and Crown Hotel, Tonbridge; Swan Hotel, Tunbridge Wells; at the place of Sale; and of Mr. Tompsett, Auctioneer and Valuer, Stone Castle Farm, Tudely, Kent. [135

Ad from the “Maidstone & Kentish Journal”, Saturday Oct 21, 1871

Scientific Advancements into the Modern Day

Scientific advancements led to hop breeding programs starting around the turn of the 20th century in the UK, US, and Germany to create higher alpha acid hops [2]

- Alpha acids were first measured in 1888 after it was realized the soft resin content was the best test of the keeping qualities they would lend to a beer
- Researchers at Wye College, in Kent, started cross breeding English hops with American hops to raise the alpha acid content. e.g. Bramling Cross was introduced in 1927
- Many hop varieties used today are based on hops developed at Wye College

Pre-craft American IPAs were certainly not common, but a highly influential one was Ballantine’s: which was aged for a year before sale and was more of an old school stock pale ale approach [6, p132]

- Hops were grown in the US in New York until the 1950s, then the Pacific Northwest primarily after that, as the New York State hop industry was virtually wiped out by blue mold, and then a fungicide that sterilized the land
- The “Chico” strain used by Sierra Nevada is thought to be the same yeast
- Ballantine used a proprietary “vacuum distillation” technique with Bullion hops for dry hopping

Northern European farmhouse brewers never completely embraced hops, some still use very little or none. Hops are mostly wild and similar to noble German hops in alpha acid content and character [8, p223]

- The ones that do use hops used them in a number of ways: in the mash, as part of filtration in the lauter tun, dry hopping, or boiling separately as a hop tea, sometimes even adding by drinker’s taste in the glass [8, p225]

Cascade and the Modern IPA

Cascade hops were first planted as experimental hop #56013 in 1968 before being named and released in 1972, but adoption was slow at first [6]

- It was championed by John Segal, whose father, George, took interest in hop farming after buying a hop plant in a candy shop in New York during the Great Depression
 - The Segals farmed hops in upstate New York before moving to Yakima in the 1950s, a prescient move
- Anchor and Sierra Nevada were among the first breweries to really try to use the new hop

- The original Liberty Ale used Hallertau hops and was criticized for being too bitter - they reformulated it with Cascade hops and released it as the 1975 Anchor Christmas Ale, before it became a full time beer in 1984
- Liberty Ale is considered the first modern “American IPA” even though they never called it such [6, p144]
- Sierra Nevada founder Ken Grossman came across a field of new Cascade hops on his annual trip to Yakima in 1981 and decided to use it in a new beer, inspired by the Ballantine’s IPA he remembered drinking in the 1960s [6, p145]

Modern beers, first DDH IPAs, now Hazy IPAs find new ways to saturate beer with hop flavor, and new products to deliver it without the vegetal matter

- Cryo: Yakima Chief Hop Product
- Salvo: Hopsteiner Product

References

- [1] Garshol, Lars Marius. *Historical Brewing Techniques*
- [2] [Cornell, Martyn. Zythophile: A Short History of Hops](#)
- [3] [Larsblog: The Early History of Hops](#)
- [4] [Beervana: The Original Hop Revolution](#)
- [5] Monckton, H.A. *A History of English Ale and Beer*
- [6] Steele, Mitch. *IPA: Brewing Techniques, Recipes, and Evolution of the India Pale Ale*
- [7] [Cornell, Martyn. The surprising secrets behind the origins of the Fuggle hop](#)
- [8] Pattinson, Ron. *Porter!*