

Kia ora, gday and welcome to the History of Aotearoa New Zealand. Episode 86: Speight's Prologue. This podcast is supported by our amazing Patrons, such as Robyn and Nixonia. If you want to support HANZ go to [patreon.com/historyaotearoa](https://patreon.com/historyaotearoa). Last time, we discussed all about Māori games from physically intensive ones like kī-o-rahi to mentally stretching games like mūtore. For the next wee while we are going to set aside the few remaining topics we have left on pre-European Māori, we will return to them, do not worry. I just had a, shall we say, stroke of inspiration. In August 2021 I took a holiday to Dunedin in the South Island, in part to show my American partner all the old haunts from when I was a student at the University of Otago. But also in part to do all the things that I didn't do or was too poor to do back then. You know the touristy kinda things like the albatross colony and the pre-WWI fort there, Otago Museum, Orokonui Ecosanctuary and of course the world's steepest street and New Zealand's first cheese factory. One of the things I was very keen to do was the tour of the Speight's beer brewery.

Speights, you see, is a bit of an iconic brand in the what we call the deep south, in fact its tagline is 'Pride of the South'. This is the beer that my step dad drank when I was growing up, the working man's beer, the beer that you had with your mates at the sports pub while watching the rugby, the one the fellas drank in the wool shed after a hard days shearing. So to me it has always had this kind of mystique around it, like when I see a place serving Speight's I know I'm not in some craft beer bar down an alley in Wellington. It's the taste of the deep south, of where I come from and so it holds a bit of sentimental value to me.

This tour itself was absolutely amazing, learning all about how beer is made and the specific history of the Rattray Street brewery. Being who I am, I couldn't help but ask the very nice tour guide where I could learn more about Speight's history. He pointed me to a book by the former in house archivist, Donald Gordon, which the brewery considered to be the best source on their past. The tour guide warned me though that this book was extremely difficult to get, the entire company only had one framed copy in the staff room, which he kindly took a photo for me. Thankfully, after some digging, not only did I managed to acquire this book, but a signed copy by the author at that! This was a very expensive book so that deserves a huge thank you to the Patreon supporters who through their support directly made this series of episodes possible. I cannot stress that enough, without the support of the patrons, these episodes likely would not have happened, thank you. So that is what we are going to be talking about for the next wee while, we will be discussing Speight's history from before its founding in 1876 going to about the mid-90s. Along the way we will meet a bunch of interesting characters from quirky brewery workers all the way up to the brewery owners and even members of parliament. We will see how the Kiwi beer industry has changed over the last 150 years, how they survived a gold rush, prohibition, the six o'clock swill, a depression, two world wars, mergers, boycotts, and the intense rivalry between two titans of brewing. This is the story of how the Pride of the South came to dominate the lower South Island beer scene. This is the story of Speight's.

Now after all that, let's clear up the obvious question. No, I am not being sponsored by Speight's or their parent company, Lion, to do these episodes. I did reach out to Speight's for some assistance with the research and whether they would like to sponsor or otherwise endorse this series. Although they were more than happy to help with the research, they politely declined to commit to anything more serious than that. That is of course their right and I don't in anyway begrudge them for their choice, I'm just some tosser off the street but I don't want anyone to think I have sold out on this one just cause they came at me with an offer of a six pack. They didn't, I just found their tour to be so fascinating that I wanted to know more and six months later, here we are.

Before we get into any history, there is one key piece of information that we really ought to go over. How to brew beer. A lot of what we are going to be discussing will involve talking about the ingredients and equipment used in brewing and that isn't really gonna mean much to you if you don't know where everything fits into the process of producing a cold one. Thankfully, the fundamental steps of brewing haven't really changed since humans discovered how to do it, so by in large the processes used today are the same ones that were done in 19<sup>th</sup> century New Zealand, albeit today they have some much fancier equipment. The four basic stages of brewing are malting, mashing, boiling and fermenting. Through these stages beer has four basic ingredients, grain, usually barley but sometimes wheat, water, yeast and hops.

The first step, malting, involves encouraging the barley to germinate before abruptly stopping that process by heating and drying. Once all the husks and stems are removed the germination is started by steeping the grain in water for about 24 hours in a concrete or kauri container. After this the grain is taken out of the water and thrown all over the malting floor. That is pretty much exactly what it sounds like, literally just on a floor in a big room. It is here that the barley would begin to germinate, by that I mean it would start to sprout. While this is occurring a person, called a maltster, would turn over the barley to allow it to aerate and not overheat. In the past this was done with rakes or shovels but is now done by automated machines. The barley is in the malthouse, tossing and turning as it sprouts for 8-12 days, depending on the air temperature. Once the malt has reached the desired point of germination it is taken to a kiln to dry, stopping the sprouting process. The malt would be laid out on tiles with holes in them with the fire underneath and dried over 2-3 days in about 60 degrees C heat. At this point the grain is now referred to as malt and would go through a final cleaning before being bagged, ready for use in brewing. The point of the whole malting process is to cause the enzymes in the barley to become active and start breaking down the starch within, turning it into sugars. These sugars are later used in the fermentation stage to fuel the yeast in the beer, who in turn will make alcohol. This meant that knowing when to put the barley into the kiln was a key skill for any maltster since not all the carbs and protein would be broken down, there still needed to be enough for some later processes. So there was a delicate balance of ensuring there was enough sugar and carbs in the grain. Depending on how long the malt is dried for will depend on what kind of beer you are trying to produce. A shorter drying time will result in a more pale beer whereas a longer time will give a darker one. A fun fact about malting is that once it is all done and ready to move to the next step, it tastes like malt biscuits!

The next stage is to take all that malt and crush it in a malt mill. Initially these were operated by hand but later steam power automated the process. When the malt is crushed it is called grist and sent to the mash tun, a big enclosed container made of kauri and later copper. In the mash tun the grist is well mashed, hence the name of this step. Although, it isn't mashed in the sense that they get a giant potato masher and have at it. Rather the mash tun is filled with hot water, how much depending on the desired alcohol content of the final beer. The water is sometimes treated with calcium and magnesium to turn it into what is called a hard water. We won't go into what this means but basically it results in a better flavour. The mash is now a thick kinda slurry and is stirred around to get the enzymes working again to finish the process started during malting. The liquid and solid portions of the mash would now be separated.

The liquid, known as wort, is pumped out into another vessel while the solid stuff was given some more water to get out whatever sugar might be left in it. The liquid from that is then added to the rest of the wort and boiled. Just like drying the malt, this was done by putting some wood under it and lighting a fire but later a steam coil would be used instead, which was likely much safer. Once the wort is boiling, hops would be added. The wort is then boiled for about 2 hours after which the

hops were filtered out. In the early days the hops would be pressed to squeeze out a little more wort from them and the resulting dry fibres burnt in the boilers. Now that the wort was very very hot, it needed to be cooled. And fast. At first the method was to pump the wort into long 25cm deep troughs, basically increasing the surface area as much as possible which would aid in cooling. However this does take about a day to get the wort to the desired temperature which slows down the whole process. Additionally, having the wort just laying around in the open air meant it was more likely to get contaminated. The method changed in the 1870s when a design was patented consisting of looped copper pipes that were filled with cold water and the wort was run over the pipes to cool it. We will talk about how this process specifically works in a later episode.

The cooled wort is now pumped into another vessel for fermentation to take place. This where the yeast is added, which is probably the bit you are most familiar with, the yeast eats the sugar and converts it into alcohol and carbon dioxide gas. After 36 hours fermenting the almost-beer is transferred into squares or butts, which are rectangular vats or 400L casks, respectively. Fermentation was finished off in these vessels and the yeast rose to the top so it could then be skimmed out. Once done, the beer was put into smaller casks and allowed to condition for a few months, which is when a secondary fermentation would happen. Finishings such as isinglass along with a small bag of hops for dry hopping are also added at this step. These help improve the flavour and clarity of the beer, which isn't exactly about whether the beer is transparent but that's not important. After the brightbeer, as it is now known, has been conditioned, it can be sent off, ready to be sold and subsequently consumed.

So by in large, that is how beer has been made across the centuries and still is even today. The steps obviously differ slightly depending on recipes, the type of beer being brewed and all sorts of other things but they all follow this basic guideline. Hopefully this will help you understand what we will be talking about over the coming episodes since things like mash tuns, wort and malt will be mentioned fairly often. The last thing I would like to touch on before get into some history is pasteurisation. Louis Pasteur, who discovered the process, did a lot of research around micro-organisms and how they affect brewing between the 1850s-1870s. In fact, a lot of what we know about how fermentation works and how beer gets contaminated by micro-organisms comes from Pasteur directly. It wouldn't be until the 1890s that European, or what they called Continental, breweries began pasteurising their bottled beer. Unfortunately, it took a bit longer to get to NZ when the Captain Cook Brewery in Auckland was the first to start doing it around 1906. In case you don't know what pasteurisation is, the most common method was to bottle the beer and dunk it in warm water, getting it to a temp of 50-60 degrees C. It would stay there for 20mins and then allowed to slowly cool down. The point was to kill off any harmful organisms by heating the beer for longer at a lower temperature, rather than just boiling it which could ruin it entirely. This general concept would gradually change though as more discoveries were made and technology progressed over the decades.

With that in the back of our minds, let's get into some history. The problem one has when trying to decide how to start a story is, in fact, where to actually start. We have this problem in history where if we want to talk about why something is the way it is and we want to give the fullest account, the best place to begin is 300,000 years ago when humans evolved. We have the same problem here whereby we can't just start with the founding of Speight's in 1876 as by that point the Colony of New Zealand had grown and changed quite dramatically since the signing of Tiriti o Waitangi 36 years earlier. We really need to set the scene to give you an idea of the political and economic environment Speight's would come into and what would play a key part in its development. Additionally, the brewing industry at the time was very different to what we know today having

grown to service people like gold diggers, crafters and all sorts of other colonists. So we also need to talk a bit about New Zealand's beer scene up until that point, which means we need to discuss its original influence from Britain. And that seems like as good of a place to start as any! Beer is actually a very old beverage, we have evidence showing beer was brewed as far back as ancient Egypt and Greece but where it becomes more directly relevant to our story is medieval England. Ale was often the drink of choice in those days and its production was actually considered to be a woman's job, known as an ale wife. As such not many men were involved in the process, with the exception of monks who were brewing either for themselves or for travellers who came to them on pilgrimage. The ale wives also didn't brew for commercial sale, there was no intention to sell it or make profit on it, they mostly brewed for the use of their own family. It wasn't until the Renaissance that hops became widespread in Europe and became a staple ingredient in beer. This was due to its bitter flavour but also cause it has preservative properties allowing beer to be sent long distances without gotten rancid, which meant that it could now be used as a commodity in long distance trade. Around this same time, men gradually took over from women as the primary sex responsible for brewing, women now more often being bar maids. Brewing was still mostly a family affair though with the beer brewed usually not going much further than a household or between neighbours. The concept of a brewer as we know it, that is a person who brews beer as a profession, wouldn't pop up until the 16<sup>th</sup> century. These brewers had very small commercial breweries that were only able to service their local village, which is how it stayed for the next 200 years or so. Once the Industrial Revolution kicked off, cities were growing at a rapid pace as more and more people moved to work in factories and other industries. With the population more concentrated and all those people needing their thirst quenched, this led to much larger breweries whose output dwarfed those of the Renaissance.

This leads us to when Europeans found out that Aotearoa exists, by which point beer brewing was already an old and well-developed industry. As far as I am aware, Māori didn't brew alcohol of any kind, so when James Cook sailed over the beer he brewed was the first ever in these islands. He didn't bother with beer his first time around in 1769 though, it was his second voyage in 1773 that he decided that his men needed a few cold ones. Specifically, Cook was camped in Tamatea/Dusky Sound in Fiordland along the western Coast of Te Wai Pounamu, the South Island. On the 1st April, Cook wrote in his journal a pretty detailed account of how he wanted the crew to make the beer, which involved adding yeast and molasses to a rimu tea. We obviously don't know exactly how this tasted, but it possibly very bad cause Lion Breweries did try to recreate it in the 1980s and apparently it was "unanimously pronounced revolting. However, it was recognisably an ale." Despite this 1 star review some 200 years later, Cook's crew thought it was fine, one sailor writing, "this beer I think is a very palatable pleasant drink. The major part of the people I believe are of the same opinion, for they seem to drink pretty plentifully of it." Another member of the crew wrote "after a small amount of rum or arrack has been added with some brown sugar and stirred into this really pleasant refreshing and healthy drink it bubbled and tasted rather like champagne" Arrack being another kind of alcohol made from coconut. Despite this high praise, don't be too quick to take Cook's crew at their word. Not that I'm calling them liars, to them it probably did taste pretty damn good, but they had just spent about 3 months at sea without touching land, nearly anything would have tasted good to them at that point. Whatever the case, the beer would have alleviated the problem that Cook was trying to solve, that of staving off scurvy, which thankfully and unusually only one man had got on the long voyage from Europe. Cook had previously used wort and marmalade to cure scurvy on his first trip to Aotearoa and used sauerkraut to prevent it. On his second go round, the rimu was possibly the ingredient that was meant to actually prevent scurvy and the beer was more of a delivery system to get the crew to chug that shit. Cook would continue using rimu and mānuka to brew beer, gradually improving the recipe. Cook's midshipman would later return to

Dusky Sound leading his own expedition and there he would set up Aotearoa's first 'brewery'. I use quotes there cause it's was probably just the country's first semi-permanent site where beer was brewed rather than an actual brewery.

Aotearoa's first commercial brewery wouldn't be established for another few decades in 1835. Joel Polack, the European explorer who we have mentioned a few times in past episodes, set up the small operation in Kororāreka/Russell, the colony's future capital. At the time it was mostly a trading post for local sealers, whalers and merchants which had been set up in the previous decade. Since the settlement wasn't really producing much of its own, Polack most of his barley and other ingredients from New South Wales in Australia. The brewery was a success and Polack undoubtedly did well financially from it, he noted that he didn't do it for the money but rather to give the settlers an alcoholic alternative to what he called "deleterious spirits that were consumed less probably from taste than the want of an invigorating substitute." This is something that we will see crop up every now and again, this idea that spirits like rum, gin and whiskey were the devils drink and should be shunned due to their deliterious effects on society. They actually talked about spirits in a similar way that a lot of people do of drugs today, as shown in this quote from a report to the government, "it is remembered how many families have suffered, how many terrible affliction has been insured, how many lives have been lost through the intolerable curse that for so many years pervaded the colonies". In fact, one of the more liberal parts of the prohibition movement were happy for beer to be available, they just didn't want people drinking spirits. After Polack broke the ice we see breweries popping up all across New Zealand since brewing was a fairly easy profession, in the grand scheme of professions a colonist could have, and they were a pretty much guaranteed source of good money given the Pākehā population of early colonial New Zealand was mostly men and it was rare that one of them didn't drink. Because of these two factors, it was common for most early European settlements to have a brewery fairly quickly and usually it the largest building in town. The next brewery after Polack was in Nelson in 1842 and then another in New Plymouth the year after that. Again, these were smaller operations designed to service customers in the immediate area but it wasn't long before they grew to cater to the ever increasing amount of settlers arriving on Aotearoa's shores. The Nelson brewery in particular was quite lucky cause it had landed itself in virtually the only area in the country that had the right conditions to grow hops. If you have listened to the episodes on pre-European Māori food, this may come as no surprise, the Nelson Golden Bay area was an exception to most rules of where plants could grow due to its much warmer weather. This climate meant that Nelson became the only local source of hops in New Zealand, otherwise brewers had to import it from overseas, most often Tasmania but also California in the US and Kent in England. By the 1860s it's thought that there were 20-30 commercial breweries just in Auckland alone which again shows the ever increasing amount of Europeans who were immigrating to New Zealand. With a lot of them needing their daily dose of bevies with the bois.

Naturally, the types of beer New Zealand began making came from Britain and Ireland, since that's where most people were immigrating from. So things like ales, porters and stouts were standard fair. Later lagers would become more popular. It didn't take long for New Zealand brewers to start experimenting, partially out of pure creativity to try and make an interesting beer but also in the sense that constraint breeds creativity. By that I mean, since Nelson was the only local source of hops, which couldn't possibly supply the entire country, it was expensive to import them. So brewers tried to find plants that had the same properties as hops but were cheaper to obtain or even add interesting flavours if they could. Plants they tried were things like liquorice, quassia, wormwood and even opium! The use of sugar in NZ brews was also born out of similar constraints back in Britain. The English would commonly add sugar to their beer to dilute it which would mean that they could pay less duties tax on it, since taxes on beer were based on the strength or alcohol content of

the beer. Around the time Europe began settling Aotearoa, Britain was getting a lots of cheap sugar from the West Indies, specifically cane sugar. So when Europeans came over their tastebuds were already primed for beer with cane sugar in it, which in turn has influenced the tastes of Kiwis today meaning that Aotearoa's beer has generally been sweeter. Beer in early New Zealand would have been about 5%.

One of the things that brewers were looking for when wanting to set up a brewery was good access to clean freshwater. As one of the four main ingredients, decent water was very important to ensure the brew came out well. In fact, it was so important that what you find is that when one brewery shuts down or sells up, the building will generally have another brewery set up shop in the same place. The type and quality of the water also affects the flavour of the final beer, as we mentioned calcium and magnesium are often added to make a hard water which can be desirable. In Speights' case, they don't need to do this cause their water is naturally hard, being from an aquifer beneath the brewery. You may have noticed that Speights in a bottle is different from Speight's on tap or you may have even noticed that Speight's on tap in the North Island is different from that in the South Island. Well, the reason for that is the Dunedin brewery only brews for South Island pubs, North Island pubs and all bottled Speight's comes from another brewery in Auckland, meaning they don't have the nice hard aquifer water. So if you aren't drinking Speight's in a South Island pub, it's not the true Pride of the South.

For the malt, most of it had to be imported ready made as most breweries didn't have the facilities to go through the malting process themselves. This changed in the 1870s, by then most breweries were big enough to have the buildings, equipment and expertise needed. However, now that breweries could do their own malting they came across another problem, the low quality of the barley being brought in. In particular the issue was around how and when the farmers harvested the barley, often they would harvest too early when the crop was still green, which meant that it was unable to germinate when soaked in water. Additionally farmers weren't terribly careful with how they cleaned the barley meaning it was prone to splitting which resulted in the grains rotting. In the hopes of improving the quality of the barley stock in New Zealand, prominent Dunedin brewers by the name of Marshall and Copeland imported 1000 bushels of barley seed from England, distributing it among the farmers. A bushel being about 36 litres. Later in 1872 brewers sponsored prizes for the best bushels of barley. Even though this did improve the quality of the grain locally available, unfortunately there just wasn't enough being harvested to meet brewing demand so a lot of it still had to be imported. This eventually led to the evolution of the farmer-brewer contract system. Once a brewer knew roughly how much barley they would need for the year, they would go to farmers and offer them X amount per bushel to purchase the whole crop, usually with a bonus if the farmer grew the barley at or above a certain standard. This was good for both brewer and farmer as it meant they avoided fluctuations in supply and demand and gave financial security to both parties. Any excess grain not used was usually sold off as stock feed.

Just like barley, the general equipment needed for brewing also had to be imported in the early days since there wasn't much local craftsman who could make it. By the time Speight's came about the preferred method of brewing involved a brewing tower or at least having the brew start on the highest floor of the brewery. The idea was that the liquid could be fed via gravity to the floor below to go through the next stage of the brewing process and thus saving money pumping it around. Some parts of the process actually were helped by the use of gravity such as the cooling of the wort which would heat the water for the next brew at the same time. We will discuss how this worked in a later episode.

Brewing in early colonial New Zealand was a bit of a wild west in its regulation but also in the types of people that were taking up the profession. You would think that experienced brewers in the Old World would be the ones coming over to ply their trade in Aotearoa, however that wasn't really the case. Pretty much anyone who had a vague idea of how to brew was giving it a go. This is the New World, a fresh start, the time to take risks, who dares wins, your future and that of your family could be secure, leaving behind a legacy they would tell for generations! Unfortunately, only a select few would actually end up doing well out of it and a lot of the issues that plagued the early brewing industry were because of the inexperience of the newly minted brewers. What didn't help is that back in those days brewing wasn't a matter of being able to understand dials, measurements and graphs. A lot of it was orally passed down knowledge from master to apprentice and the techniques used weren't based on hard numbers with acceptable ranges but more like feeling and intuition. For example, some brewers would know when to proceed to the next stage based on how their reflection looked in the wort! We also find that early pubs often weren't made to be all that long lasting either. Instead of materials like proper building stone being used in their construction, they were usually ramshackle buildings more akin to sheds with iron roofs. A lot of this was down to the sorts of people that they were commonly servicing, that being the gold miners, who were rather transient in nature.

Next time, we will talk about those gold miners and how they influenced the New Zealand beer industry as well beginning to narrow our focus from the whole country to what was going on with brewing in Dunedin in the lead up to the founding of Speight's.

If you want to send me feedback, ask a question, suggest a topic or just have a chinwag you can find my email and social media on [historyaotearoa.com](http://historyaotearoa.com). You can also find helpful resources there like transcripts, sources and translations for some of the Te Reo Māori we have used. You can help support HANZ through Patreon, buying merch or giving us a review, it means a lot and helps spread the story of Aotearoa New Zealand. As always, haere tū atu, hoki tū mai. See you next time!