

## The History of the Coopers Brewery

One of the most popular hobbies in recent years has been small-scale brewing; producing high-quality beer at home. Millions of people have discovered the pleasures of creating, serving and drinking beer they make in their own “microbrewery”. Leading the way in the home microbrewery revolution was a commercial microbrewery in Adelaide, South Australia, the Coopers Brewery.

### The History of the Coopers Brewery

In 1852 a young shoemaker named Thomas Cooper emigrated with his family from Yorkshire, England to the exciting new world of Adelaide, South Australia. Australia agreed with this intrepid young man and he, his wife Ann, and their many children, thrived. Making beer at home has always been a common past-time in his native England, and in 1862 Thomas began making beer; legend has it as a tonic for his ailing wife. He shared his beer with neighbors and discovered he had a real talent for producing high quality ales. His beers were such a hit that Thomas was forced to move his brewing operation out of his kitchen and into a real brewery. Well, a real brewery by 1862 New World standards.



His ales grew in popularity as both his own family and the Adelaide community grew. In 1880 Thomas purchased land on Statenborough Street, less than a mile from his home/brewery on High Street. With a capital investment of 750 pounds Sterling, he built a facility that eventually evolved into the brewery as it existed until 2001. The first ale was brewed on the new premises on 23 July 1881. By 1882, Thomas was producing 30,000 gallons of beer a year, he had fathered 19 children (11 by Ann who unfortunately died in 1872, and 8 by Sarah, whom he married in 1873), and South Australia boasted a population of over 276,000.

The new century saw new challenges for the Coopers Brewery. As a producer of high quality ales and stouts, the brewery found its business squeezed by the growing popularity of more cheaply produced German-style lagers.

By 1900 Coopers' share of market in the South Australia colony stood at 1%. Thomas' son John was running the brewery by this time, with his brother Christopher at his side. Eventually his brothers William, Joseph, Samuel, Stanley Frederic, Charles and Walter all worked in the brewery as well. Coopers was one of 18 breweries operating in South Australia, and the only one independent and family-owned and operated. Two events occurred that would improve the fortunes for the Coopers Brewery. The Commonwealth of Australia was created, and with it came more stringent licencing requirements for breweries. This probably created an environment that allowed better run, more reputable breweries to survive. The other event was the backlash by consumers, muck-raking newspapers and law-makers against the shady practices of many of Australia's breweries. Many brewers were guilty of adulterating their beers with salicylic acid, tobacco and other cheap substitutes. The institution of nationwide labeling laws gave Coopers the opportunity to proclaim their beers as additive-free and generally more wholesome than many other beers. In 1910 the Coopers Brewery produced 64,450 gallons a year and employed 26 workers. The popularity of Coopers ales grew throughout Australia from the early 1900's. Because world-wide beer consumption eventually trended toward lighter pilsners, in 1968 Coopers introduced Coopers Gold Crown Lager. Although it proved popular, South Australians still overwhelmingly preferred the original British-style ales and stout for which the Coopers Brewery has become internationally known. Today the beer line-up includes Sparkling Ale, Pale Ale, Draught, Classic Dark, Stout, Premium Ale, Light Lager and the new, highly sought, hard-to-find, brewed once a year Coopers Extra Strong Vintage Ale (only 22,000 cases produced, but then at 7.1% alcohol, you don't need much!). According to Michael Jackson, in his seminal book *The New World Guide to Beer*, the joy in Coopers beers comes from their "heartiness and uncompromising honesty". In his follow-up book, *The Beer Companion*, Mr. Jackson gives both the Coopers Sparkling Ale and Coopers Stout a five-star rating.

It was in 1977 that Maxwell Cooper decided to make the quality of Coopers available to the Adelaide community of homebrewers. The brewery began providing homebrewers with unfermented wort packaged in a bag. The beers produced became a source of excitement with brewers across Australia. In 1984, the brewery hit on the

idea of concentrating the wort to a malt concentrate to make it easier to deliver to homebrewers outside of Adelaide. Since John C.G. Cooper had been working with malt concentrates as early as the 1920's, the know-how was already in place. The Coopers Beer Kit as we know it today was born. The Lager, Draught, Bitter, Classic Old Dark, and Stout are each made with the same exacting standards, and in the same way, as Coopers' commercial beers. Each of these pre-hopped kits are designed, brewed, taste-tested, re-tested and re-tested (for quality control purposes, you understand) to ensure that the homebrewer achieves the same high-quality beers the Coopers Brewery is known for. And they are each packaged with a Coopers brewing yeast that the brewery has used for years.

In 1997 the Coopers Brewery added a new twist to their product line-up by becoming the first brewery to provide homebrewers with a malt concentrate not based on one of their beer recipes that could be used by hobbyist brewers in developing their own recipes. Providing small-scale craft brewers with a Light, Amber, Dark and Wheat malt concentrate in a syrup form, and a Light DME allows the brewer the freedom of bringing together their own perfect marriage of malt, hops, yeast and water.

In keeping with the Coopers commitment to innovation in the home beer making world, in 2000 Coopers introduced a completely new line of Beer Kits. These kits, called BrewMaster Selection Series, are unique both in their styles and in their stylistic integrity. By producing a Pilsner, Wheat Beer, Nut Brown Ale and India Pale Ale, Coopers added styles that expand their beer kit line-up beyond those of actual beers made in the brewery. What makes these kits truly exciting is that for the first time, brewers can use a beer kit that comes with yeast specifically designed for the style of beer being produced. The Pilsner Beer Kit comes with a unique lager yeast that produces a truly outstanding lager beer while still being fermented at moderate temperatures (65-70°F). The Wheat Beer Kit includes a wheat beer yeast that creates the lighter refreshing summer style wheat beers of Northern Germany. Both the Nut Brown Ale and the IPA use a traditional British yeast that produces a clean, crisp British-style ale.

Today the Coopers Brewery is still owned and operated by fourth and fifth generation descendants of Thomas. Dr. Tim Cooper, an accomplished cardiology surgeon in his

previous career, received his brewing education at Birmingham University in England and as Directing Manager handles the day-to-day aspects of running the brewery. Glenn Cooper, as Chairman of the Board of the Coopers Brewery and Marketing Manager, oversees the general direction of the brewery and spends considerable time visiting with beer drinkers and beer makers. Even 72 year old Maxwell Cooper drops in pretty much daily for a pint and to see how the kettles he once operated are running.

