

Preserving Forest Grove

Newsletter of the Historic Landmarks Board

What Did the Pilgrims, British Colonists in India and Ancient Mariners Have in Common?

By
Claude Romig

"Disclaimer: this article has very little to do with Forest Grove history. It has everything to do with beer, though"

Beer: The world's oldest and most widely consumed alcoholic beverage. According to *beerfacts.net*, the average American annually consumes 23.1 gallons of it. The sailors and colonists on the Mayflower

ank it. In fact, it was because they were running out of beer that they landed where they did, in Plymouth Bay instead of where their charter from the Virginia Company of London authorized them to land (between 38 and 41 degrees north latitude). Beer, unlike water, tends not to go bad on long ocean voyages. It was quite usual for ships to carry "ship's beer," a not-very-

alcoholic concoction that, along with the even weaker "small beer," was drunk in formidable quantities during the colonial era.

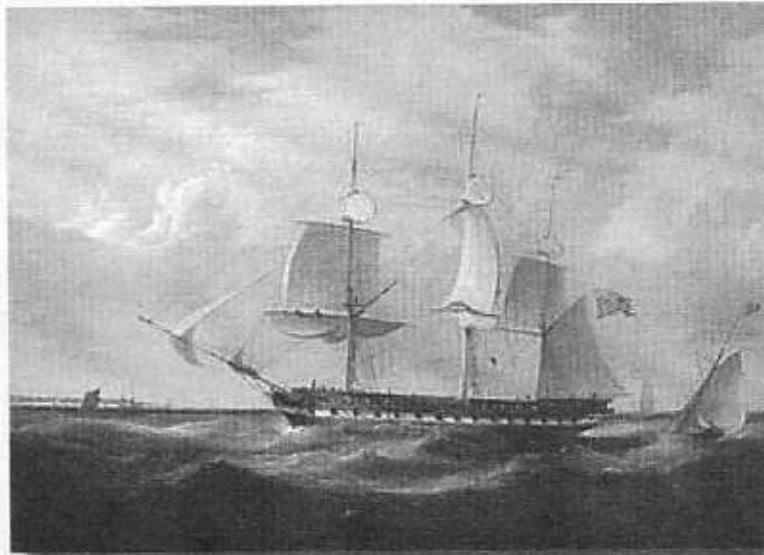
People were such prodigious beer drinkers in that period because the rivers that flowed through European cities were public sewers and garbage

dumps. People died from drinking the water. The preparation of beer entails at least one hour of boiling the water, grain and hops that make up the "wort", effectively killing everything in the process. Beer was therefore a very safe beverage (though I imagine

having it with breakfast every day contributed to some unusual situations).

The Pilgrims spent 64 days at sea until they sighted Cape Cod. Now fast forward 150 years: India is ruled by the British East India Company and ships regularly sail the months-long journey from Britain to India.

They still carried beer as their beverage of choice, but they also carried beer to sell in India: to the British colonists and soldiers garrisoned there. Who, prior to the introduction of what were soon to be called India Ales drank arrack, an alcoholic beverage distilled from fermented fruit, grain,



The East Indiaman "Kent" off Deal, England, William John Huggins, ca. 1825

sugarcane, or the sap of coconut palms. According to British beer writer Pete Brown, "If you got a particularly good vintage, you may only go blind." Because of the number of people dying from this particularly potent alcoholic beverage, the British wanted more beer.

The problem was, the traditional English mild and pale ales

could not survive the six-month-long trip on a ship from England to India. The beers would go bad. There existed porters, though, another popular style of beer from the time that could survive the trip. But porters are heavy beers unsuited to the hot, dry climate of India. Brewers had to come up with a lighter, drinkable beer that could survive the long ship ride through changing climates.

Enter George Hodgson, a British brewer at the Bow Brewery located near the Thames on the River Lea. He was a lucky man: the docks for the East Indiamen, the merchant ships that went to and from India, were at Blackwall on the Thames, just a short distance from his brewery. According to zythophile.wordpress.com, "When the captains of the East Indiamen went looking for beer to sell in Bombay, Calcutta and Madras, alongside a host of other goods from England including everything from china, to hams to furniture, they went to their nearest brewer rather than one of the big London concerns."

Hodgson made a number of beers, including porter, but settled on what he called "October beer" to export to the British colonists. What distinguished October beer from other beers of the period was its lighter color, high alcohol content (7.5 to 8%), and an unusually high infusion of hops. Hops are a mild antibiotic and Hodgson knew this. This undoubtedly contributed to the beer's increased longevity.

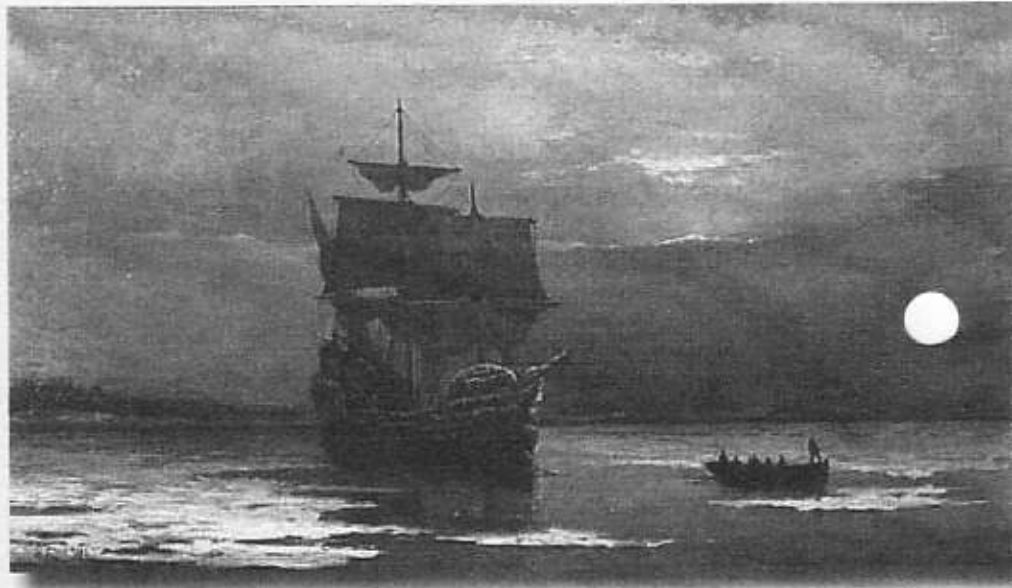
More about October beer's pale color: [beer-pages](#).

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com says that "The Hodgsons, as far as anyone can tell, were the first to use pale malt, a type made possible by the new technologies of the industrial revolution, in particular the curing of malt in coke-fired kilns. Before coke was invented, malt

was cured by wood fires and the result was brown malt and brown beer."

The problem lay in the brewers' method of malting, the process of converting a grain's starch to sugar. "Brewers made their own malt by soaking barley and allowing it to germinate (sprout), but to prevent the embryonic plant from



Mayflower in Plymouth Harbor by William Halsall (1882)

consuming all the fermentable sugars as food, they needed to halt germination," says www.northamericanbrewers.org. "Brewers stopped it by "kilning", a process of drying the wet grain in an oven. Unfortunately, their ability to control the oven's temperature was primitive and often the grain was kilned to a darkish hue, which was then imparted to the finished beer." By the late 1700s, the malting process was becoming more controllable and grains weren't as deeply kilned. Although the beer was still a deep copper color, it was comparatively "pale".

The Indian colonists and troops loved this new beer. In time, many returned from India to

England. "Demand for the export style of pale ale, which had become known as "India Pale Ale," developed in England around 1840 and India Pale Ale became a popular product in England. Some brewers dropped the term "India" in the late 19th century, but records indicated that these "pale ales" retained the features of earlier IPA," reports *wikipedia*.

The original English IPAs were strong, very hoppy beers, containing about 7-10% alcohol by volume and boasting an enormous 100 International Bitterness Units of isomerized alpha acid (the hop substance that makes beer bitter: for comparison, Coors contains approximately 7 IBUs). Today, some English IPAs are less than 4% alcohol by volume.

George de Piro, Brewmaster at C.H. Evans Brewing Company asked the question, "How is it that modern English IPAs became mere shadows of their ancestors?" A big part of the answer, he says, can be found within the English beer taxation system. "Prior to 1880, brewers paid tax based on the raw materials they used. The Free Mash Tun Act changed this to a system in which tax is paid on wort produced, and the amount of tax paid is dependent on the specific gravity, or "alcohol potential," of the wort. Higher strength worts cost more to make, and were taxed disproportionately more than weak worts, so English brewers began to make weaker beers."

Prohibition in the U.S. continued this weak beer tradition. Lighter-tasting lagers supplanted ales as the beers of choice for the vast majority of drinkers.

The craft brewing revolution of the last 30 years gave American beer drinkers something they had not seen since the early years of the 20th century: a variety of beers that actually taste different from each other. Today's India Pale Ales have become a signature beer style of the Pacific Northwest. Characterized by a relatively high alcohol content, a characteristic bitterness and a huge hop profile, this style of beer has become a favorite worldwide.

One wonders if modern sailors prefer a pint of robust IPA to a draft of water on their long voyages?

New Members: Welcome to the Historic Landmarks Board

Larry Wade

I moved to Oregon 25 years ago, and now as a General Contractor in my semi-retirement, I have owned and totally remodeled two old homes in Old Town. I live near Cedar Mill so am not a town resident, but I have come to know the city well with my almost daily commuting. I love Forest Grove and its small town but cosmopolitan atmosphere, and have come to appreciate the challenges facing it. I want to help. My wife and I have Midwest (Omaha) roots, but moved here from historic suburbs (Acton, Harvard) west of Boston.

My professional career was in high tech (computers, software), and I have worked for the biggest and the smallest companies, for-profit and non-profit, in technical, managerial and consulting capacities. I serve on the Concordia University Foundation board locally, and I believe my business, contracting and non-profit experience will help continue the historic preservation work. I am honored to be allowed to serve.

Holly Tsur

My professional experience includes over 30 years as a technical communicator. I have worked as a technical writer, instructional designer, stand-up instructor, Web content author, marketing communications writer, technical and grammatical editor, project leader, and department manager.

I am a standing member of the Board of Directors for Institute for Culture and Ecology where I assist on a volunteer basis with grant writing and fund raising. I recently helped to set up Forest Grove's Community Gardens, currently providing food for over 200 local area families. My main roles in the community garden committee have involved setting up press opportunities, grant writing, obtaining donations, and writing content for their Website.

Since November 2005, I have been the proud caretaker of the Lelia B. Smith House at 2011 18th Avenue. I say "caretaker" simply because I believe that one can never really own such an amazing house. You can only be lucky enough to be the old painted lady's caretaker for as long as you are allowed. I am happy that I can now help the Historic Landmarks Board by becoming an active member.

The Forest Grove Historic Landmarks Board Grant Program

Is your house on our local register? If it is, did you know that your house is eligible for restoration / rehabilitation grant funding? The Historic Landmarks Board has funds to help you with your projects. If you are planning any exterior restoration work such as restoring architectural features or if you have structural work to do such a foundation repair, we'd love to help. We fund projects up to 50% of the cost of the job per grant. Come see us! We can also help you find historically appropriate solutions to any problems you may have.

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In this Issue:

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