

WOMEN & BEER

the 30-second beer

In the earliest brewing civilizations, Sumeria, Babylon and Ancient Egypt, beer was made mostly by women. Fast forward a few thousand years and evidence from medieval England tells a similar story: brewing was women's work. They produced beer in the manner of a cottage industry, selling it from their homes or hawking it in the streets, but they were also brewing on a more commercial scale. Yet, in parallel with other historical examples of sex discrimination, as brewing became more profitable and industrialized, women were pushed out. There's also a correlation between women being expected to inhabit only the private space of the home, while men occupied public space – including the public house. It may not be the most important element in the battle for equality, but beer is a feminist issue. Not only was women's freedom to produce it curtailed, but public attitudes dictated they ought not to drink it either. Marketing, from advertising campaigns through to sexist beer names with pump clips to match, has done its best to promote the idea that beer is a man's drink. This is daft considering women make up half the population. Happily things are coming full circle. Growing numbers of women brewers, a glut of organizations representing women in the beer industry and increased interest among female drinkers show beer is a drink for all.

3-SECOND TASTER

Women were the first brewers and publicans – only in more recent times has beer been presented as being for men.

3-MINUTE BREW

In the 1970s Irish feminists staged a pub-based protest. Around 30 women each ordered a brandy, which they were served. They then asked for a pint of Guinness but were refused. They drank the brandy and left without paying. It was apparently legal to refuse to pay if there was an error with your order. Not allowing a woman her beer was clearly a grave error.

RELATED ENTRY

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THE ORIGINS OF BEER
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3-SECOND BIOGRAPHIES

HILDEGARD VON BINGEN
1098–1179

Abbess of a Benedictine convent. She brewed beer and was probably the first person to write about hops in a scientific way. She also wrote about barley

SARA BARTON
1965–
Founder and head brewer of Brewster's Brewery, Lincolnshire. As well as naming her brewery after the term for female brewers, Sara's brewing ethos is to make beer appealing to all. She also brews a range of beers named after famous women

30-SECOND TEXT
Sophie Atherton

Women's relationship with beer dates back thousands of years.

