



The History of Brewing Beer in Höchststadt / Franconia

In Europe, the tradition of brewing dates back to the 6th century, when Irish monks brewed beer in their own breweries at their monasteries. When Charlemagne became German emperor in 800 AD, there were about 300 monasteries in Bavaria alone where beer had been brewed for over 150 years. Today, the Bavarian Monastery of Weißenstephan in Freising is the oldest still operating brewery.

In the area around **Höchststadt**, the business of brewing was first mentioned in the late 14th century, when towns like Herzogenaurach and Erlangen were granted the right to brew beer. Then in 1410 the bishop of Bamberg also allowed the citizens of Höchststadt to brew, sell and serve beer. The taxes gained from this were to be used to finance the defence facilities of Höchststadt.

Actually, being granted the right to brew, sell and serve beer was nothing unusual at that time, because it was part of the liberties granted to every citizen in the diocese of Bamberg when a town was awarded its city rights.

In 1446, the dukes of Bavaria abolished the general prohibition to brew beer and in 1516 William IV, Duke of Wittelsbach established the Bavarian “Reinheitsgebot” (beer purity law), which stated that only barley, hops and pure water were to be used as ingredients for beer.

A very significant document for Höchststadt is the tax calculation from 1592/93. It is the oldest existing list of all tax-paying inhabitants of Höchststadt, which wasn't destroyed in the huge fire during the Thirty Years' War. This list is the oldest register containing the names and addresses of the inhabitants of Höchststadt, which has been passed down through the centuries. During the fire on 10th March 1633, all documents in the Town Hall of Höchststadt were destroyed, when marauding Swedish troops ransacked the entire area.

In 1604, the prince-bishop of Bamberg, Johann Philipp von Gebsattel, granted the citizens of Höchststadt the privilege to brew beer themselves. However, in order to avoid the danger of house fires, he recommended the establishment of a public brewing facility which could be used by every citizen of Höchststadt.

Records of Höchststadt's famous beer cellars date back to 1669. The beer that hadn't been sold was immediately stored there. That same year, a new public brewery is also mentioned.

Another interesting document, dated 30th March 1698, is the book of minutes of the Höchststadt town council. It is the oldest remaining document, which gives detailed information on the cellar facilities themselves, who owned the property and the legal situation of the beer cellars of Höchststadt, which are rich in tradition.

In 1698, several beer cellars already existed and the names of their owners are known. There were 4 cellars with three galleries and six cellars at each gallery. So there were a total of 18 beer storage cellar rooms at that time.

But sometimes the Höchststadt citizens weren't too law abiding. On 30th May 1698, the minutes of a town council meeting states that cellar galleries had been dug illegally and beer had been bought and sold at the cellars, which was also prohibited. The 17 culprits – all of them owners of existing cellars - were severely punished and denounced publicly. Obviously, the digging and use of the beer

cellars was seen as a welcome extra source of income by the authorities. Therefore, those responsible at the town's administration decided to raise an annual fee of three pounds of beef for each cellar and it was announced to the public that this had to be paid punctually. It was also made clear that no further cellars were to be dug without the explicit consent of the strict authorities.

According to the inscription at the *Mühlstüberl* cellar, its date of origin was in that very same year - 1698.

Supposedly, the first small cellar house was erected in 1707, but the first actual evidence of a cellar house dates back to 1730. This development and a report from 1715, where dancing at the cellars is mentioned, indicate the beginning of a local recreational area.

Several documents from as far back as 1725 still exist and have been passed down through the generations. These contain information about the purchase, inheritance and building of beer cellars.

The public brewery facility, in which the town council meets today, dates back to 1741.

In 1796, during the Napoleonic Wars, the brewing business in Höchstadt had to face a severe setback when marauding French troops smashed all the beer kegs and looted the beer cellars. But that didn't stop the Höchstadt citizens from digging more and more beer storage cellars into the sandstone at the Nackendorfer Knock in the succeeding decades. Between 1758/59 and 1818/19 the number of galleries almost doubled from 30 to 56 and the number of small cellar houses increased, too. The last cellars were built between 1930 and 1936.

Of course, their love for beer also caused trouble in Höchstadt. A report dated 1861 states that everyone in Höchstadt was drinking beer and that its citizens visited the beer cellars far too frequently. Drinking beer had become a vice.

Particularly in the evenings after finishing their daily chores, the people of Höchstadt enjoyed spending their spare time at their cellars. Therefore it is no surprise that in 1888 the consumption of beer per head in Höchstadt was 283.7 litres.

A letter to the Bavarian government in 1861 states that, although people in Höchstadt brewed their own beer and therefore beer was by far the most important drink in town, there were only a few extremely intoxicated persons to be seen.

In 1932, one cellar enthusiast wrote words for an "Original Cellar Song" and asked the local teacher, Mr Pfister, to compose the music for it.

Closely connected to brewing is the cultivation of hops, which also had a long and successful tradition both in the area along the Aisch River and in Höchstadt itself. In 1881, for instance, at the world exhibition in Paris, hops from Höchstadt were awarded a prize. Hops from Höchstadt were even exported to England, which was clear evidence of its excellent quality.

It was when Carl von Linde introduced his new refrigeration machine at an international brewing congress in 1873 that the beer cellars gradually began to lose their significance.

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Hops