

PETER MANDERS: AN EXTRAORDINARY BREWING LIFE

30 May 1938 to 3 June 2024

Peter Manders was a pivotal figure in the transformation of the Australian brewing industry. His 53-year tenure at Carlton & United Breweries (CUB), and within the Australian brewing industry in general, is as remarkable as it is impressive.

It was a time of momentous technical innovation and Peter was at the heart of this change, earning a reputation for shouldering substantial responsibility at an early age.

By his 32nd birthday, he had been assigned as Head Brewer across many of CUB's breweries including the major workhorse, Victoria Brewery. Later, education of burgeoning brewers and the public in general became his focus.

He relished his role as a trailblazer. His innate curiosity and scientific mind always drove his success and enthusiasm for his industry. So often welcoming new ideas and questioning the status quo, everything was open to conjecture unless he could prove otherwise.

While there were new systems and pathways to create, Peter was a quiet achiever; never one to brag and always the company man.

In early 1956, Peter Manders began his CUB career as a cadet chemist on the verge of completing his biochemistry degree. With the automation of brewery processes in its infancy, Peter's responsibilities at the new Carlton Central Research Laboratory quickly increased. His passion for the brewing had begun.

Within four years, he was a brewer at Victoria Brewery. Three years later, he became the first Head Brewer to be appointed to the Darwin Brewery. Peter was just 24 years old.

His skills and brewing knowledge were soon put to the test as he managed Darwin's production issues. At the time, bottles of the Darwin Stubby and Darwin Draught were hand-filled, pasteurised in hot water and the caps hand-sealed ready for transportation in wired crates. A very labour-intensive task.

Peter streamlined efficiencies and increased local demand for CUB beer, a poor second to the preferred Swan brand. The latter initiative was enhanced by the fact that the brewery was across the road from the local RAAF base and Peter had access to a twin-engine aircraft. He had gained his pilot's licence before he could drive. Friendships grew and the beer flowed.

In 1966, Peter returned to Victoria Brewery and acted as head brewer at various CUB breweries, including Ballarat, Rockhampton and Darwin, while those in this position took holidays. A 12-month stint as Head Brewer at the Ballarat plant followed, before he returned to Victoria Brewery as Head Brewer.

Here, he oversaw skyrocketing demand for CUB beer. The bottling and can lines ran around the clock, serviced by three shifts per day - no mean feat considering the brewery's facilities were more than 100 years old.

Production at Victoria Brewery was further challenged when it introduced the first VB stubbies in 1972. Soon the first cans of 26.6 imp fl oz (750 mL) Carlton Draught were added as was Crown Lager, presented for the first time with a new elegant 375 mL long-necked bottle with a gold label. The production of Carlton Diet Ale, another first for CUB and Victoria Brewery, created increased complexity for brewery operations.

Foremost a biochemist, Peter was keenly interested in the technical advances, reflected in new brews, as this knowledge made it easier to add new beers to production lines.

It's not surprising then that he took up the challenge of creating CUB's first low alcohol beer, Carlton Light. His technical approach to its brewing resulted in the first low alcohol beer to receive the thumbs up from Aussie beer drinkers.

Launched in 1979, Carlton Light emulated high alcohol beers in flavour profile and, at 3.3% alc/vol, contained only 122 kilojoules per 100 millilitres. He was proud of his involvement in this CUB triumph.

While the implementation of Carlton Light was in full swing, Peter took on the role of Head Brewer at Carlton Brewery, returning to Victoria Brewery in 1983 to close it.

The closure was two-year process; one that enabled Peter to reallocate all brewing and packaging workers to other CUB plants much to his satisfaction. He vividly recalled locking the doors on the last night of the brewery's almost 130-year history.

After such illustrious 30-year career in brewery operations, it was fitting he then became part in the team that founded CUB's technical division, BrewTech.

Formed in 1985, BrewTech was responsible for advanced technologies to further streamline the brewing process regarding productivity and consistency. Overall quality assurance, the development of new beers and, later, technical education and training also were included in its brief.

Peter was at the forefront of developments to achieve excellence in the quality of the raw materials sourced for CUB beers. However, it is for his establishment of the CUB Technical Education Unit in 1987 that he is best remembered at BrewTech.

The unit offered tertiary students, specialising in brewing, complementary courses regarding the latest in brewing technology so these potential recruits could be of real value to brewery operations from the get-go.

In all, Peter instigated and implemented three brewing science courses. The first examined the significance of raw materials and the intricacies in the chemistry of the

brewing process; the second showcased the technologies of the physical brewing equipment while the third considered the advanced computerised systems being integrated at the time.

In 1995, Peter was appointed CUB Master Brewer and I had the pleasure of working with him. Together, we initiated the CUB beer and food program; a program to place beer on the menu as the beverage of choice on dining tables around Australia.

30 years ago, such a program was very much a novelty. A grand ambition indeed and the first initiative of its kind in the Australian beer industry. I provided the marketing strategy, and food industry knowledge while Peter had the essential beer content to draw public enthusiasm and buy-in.

Our association endured more than a decade. As Master Brewer, Peter was the face and knowledge bank of CUB's beer and food program into the 2000s. His input gave him a media profile for all things beer and formed the template used by other Australian beer companies over ensuing years.

Peter's official beer tastings were not just in association with food. From 1988, he was a judge at the new Australian Beer Awards. As entries grew exponentially, in 2000 the Royal Agricultural Society of Victoria (RASV) became the major patron and the awards recognised as the Australian International Beer Awards. Today, they are celebrated as the second largest beer event of its kind in the world. Peter became Chief Judge in 2005, a position he held until 2014. At that time, there were more than 1800 beers presented for judging.

Although Master Brewer, Peter Manders retired in 2009, accolades continued to acknowledge his extraordinary contribution to the brewing industry and CUB, especially to the production and quality of its beers and their promotion.

In 2014 he was awarded a Degree of Doctor of Science (Honoris Causa) by the University of Ballarat for distinguished service to the Australian brewing industry. As the citation from the University states: "Peter's career and continuing influence on beer quality reminds us that knowledge, dedication and passion are powerful allies."