

beer from the Netherlands

Welcome to our Dutch readers from the magazine *Manchet*! The love of Belgian beers apparently crosses borders, since our northern neighbours show a great interest in everything that is brewed in this small country of ours. From now on *Manchet*, the magazine for members of the Netherlands-Limburg 'Gulpener Biergilde' is to be included in the *Beer Passion* magazine. As a result, our Dutch readers not only obtain more information about Belgian beers, but the Belgians can also find out what is happening in the world of beer beyond their own borders. Beginning with the previous issue, we are focusing the spotlight on the best Dutch breweries and their beers in the 'Beer from the Netherlands' section.



Trappist beers from La Trappe

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Amongst the fields of Berkel-Enschot, a commune near Tilburg, lies the Netherlands' only Trappist brewery, 'De Schaapskooi'. I was welcomed there one drizzly morning by Peter Peeters, the brewery manager. A man with a passionate enthusiasm, just like the beers he brews...

The monastery dates back to 1868, when a Tilburg wool dyer bought a series of farms, one of which was called 'De Schaapskooi'. This good man offered to loan the buildings to the Trappists, who bought the entire site in 1883.

The fathers soon decided to seek a source of income. As the first abbot was the son of a brewer from Munich, and therefore had good contacts in the brewing world, they opted in favour of a brewery.

In 1884 the abbey had sent one of its fathers to Munich to learn about the new, low fermentation brewing method. They had decided to make the so-called 'Beiersch' beer, a sort of forerunner of Pils. The reason for this was mainly commercial: after all, there were a number of other breweries in Tilburg, all of which had a fair-

ly extensive range.

The 1970s: the Artois period

The monastery gradually expanded its brewery, sometimes succeeding, sometimes failing. They brewed a fairly wide range of beers, as well as a number of lemonades. The reason for this was that their own sources provided the fathers with a surplus of quality water.

In 1969 a decision had to be taken about the future of the brewery. Either they would have to cease their activities, or they would have to cooperate with a large, commercial brewery. They chose Interbrew, at that time till Artois from Louvain. 'De Schaapskooi' saw benefits mainly in joint research, purchasing and sales, and distribution.

However, the main aim was to safeguard the jobs of the lay staff.

Ultimately Artois' intentions proved to be more economic than social and they wanted to use 'De Schaapskooi' solely to produce so-called B-brands. Most of the beers produced were of the Pils type.

A fresh start

In 1980 the monks decided to start brewing beer themselves again. On a small scale, admittedly, because in the first year they brewed about a thousand hectolitres. The main difference compared with the previous period was that they now resolutely opted in favour of high fermentation beers. So no more Pils!

However, this switch was not entirely smooth. Consumers did not yet view 'La Trappe' as a fully-

fledged product, because the brewery still bore its Pils image. The brewery was still associated with Stella Artois, a name that had acquired negative connotations in the Netherlands.

At first they only produced one type of beer bearing the name 'Koningshoeven'. In early 1987, they began bottling 'Dubbel' and 'Tripel', and this was followed in 1992 by the 'Koningshoeven Blond'. Draught 'Dubbel' had already been introduced in 1986. The 'Koningshoeven' range differs from 'La Trappe' owing to the use of a different yeast culture.

In 1987 production of the original 'La Trappe' with which the brewery started up in 1980 ceased and was replaced by two other beers: 'La Trappe Dubbel' and 'Tripel'. The 'Dubbel' was new, while the 'Tripel' was a heavier



version of an existing beer. In 1985 'De Schaapskooi' decided to begin exporting. Together with John Martin from Belgium, the beer was distributed throughout the world.

Four successful Trappist beers

In 1989, just one year after it was decided to fully modernise the brewery, an external consultancy firm was called in to examine the future opportunities and risks facing the brewery. The main theme running through the conclusions of the survey was that the brewery needed to change course completely as far as its market approach was concerned, moving from a passive commercial policy

to an active sales and marketing strategy.

In mid-1990 Peter Peeters became the manager, the first lay manager since the end of the nineteenth century. He aims to develop the only independent special beer brewery in the Netherlands to achieve a turnover of forty thousand hectolitres in the year 2000. Peter Peeters has this to say: "A number of steps have already been taken to strengthen brand image of 'La Trappe' on the market, such as changing the house style in 1991 and the introduction of the 'Quadrupel' seasonal beer. In 1992 the commercial machinery was strengthened. 'Enkel' was launched in 1993, which means that the 'La Trappe' range currently consists of four beers, 'Enkel', 'Dubbel', 'Tripel' and 'Quadrupel'. As we brew Trappist beers, the types of beer



are given on the label in Latin (respectively 'Angulus', 'Duplus', 'Triplus' and 'Quadruplus'), as well as being indicated by one, two, three or four crosses. In the experimental phase of the Enkel beer, it was also produced with a completely blank label, following in the footsteps of the 'Westmalle Extra'.

From 1 January 2000 the 'Enkel' will disappear and be replaced by the 'Blond', so as to be more in line with market demands."

The brewery also markets its Trappist beers in pitchers. "This is mainly because Tilburg as a carnival town is known as 'pitcher town'," Peeters explains.

The future of the Trappists?

This whole story shows that 'La Trappe', the only Trappist brewery outside Belgium, has its own, modern strategy and does not plan to continue to operate on a small scale, as the Belgian abbeys do. "That's quite right", says Peter Peeters, "And it has already caused quite a fuss. Our Belgian colleagues think we are too commercial. But what can you do?"

The future for Trappists is far from rosy! The number of monks is falling constantly and we do not have any monks at all working in our brewery now. This is why from 1999 onwards we have joined forces with Bavaria. The monastery simply cannot continue to support the brewery and distribution has always been our big problem. Bavaria can help us here.

Peeters continues enthusiastically: "Our beers are fully fledged Trappist beers, whatever anyone else might say. We may not fulfil all the criteria of the Authentic Trappist Product' label (because of this commercial dimension) but we are still a member of the association. This is why we are removing the label from our products from 1 December onwards, although we are also doing this because we think there are already too many logos."

The beers

The four 'La Trappe' beers are all high fermentation products and are available throughout the year. The 'Quadrupel' is especially promoted in the autumn and winter months as a winter beer.

Tasting notes by Filip Verheyden

'La Trappe Blond'

(This is the only beer that is not fermented in the bottle)

Alcohol content: 6.5% Vol. Alc.

Bottle volume: 30 cl (standard volume in the Netherlands)

(crown cap)

Colour: clear blond to pale amber and fairly lasting white head.

Aroma: pure aroma including flowers, malt and a slight hint of yeast. Very fresh.

Taste: very smooth initial taste that gives way to a subtle, fine centre. Pronounced taste of malt and pleasant hops bitterness in aftertaste, with hints of malt, honey and coriander. A perfect thirst quencher with a marvellous body!

'La Trappe Tripel'

Alcohol content: 8% Vol. Alc.

Bottle volume : 30 cl (also available in 50 cl pitchers and 75 cl bottles) (crown cap)

Colour: deep, warm, amber and fairly lasting white head.

Aroma: very complex aroma with hints of green fig, plums, prunes, caramel, coriander and a slightly animal smell. Very special and captivating.

Taste: fully confirmed in the taste. Pithy initial taste that gives way to a strong, alcoholic centre. Hints of plums, honey, and spices. Marvellous body giving way to a lasting aftertaste that is bitter but pleasant.

'La Trappe Dubbel'

Alcohol content: 6.5% Vol. Alc.

Bottle volume: 30 cl (also available in 50 cl pitchers and 75 cl bottles) (crown cap)

Colour: deep reddish brown and turbulent light brown head that disappears fairly rapidly.

Aroma: fairly closed aroma that releases hints of caramel, coffee (roasted), aniseed and liquorice when the beer is swirled. There is also a touch of fresh orange peel.

Taste: pleasant, slightly bitter initial taste with hints of coffee and caramel, that gives way to a fairly smooth centre. The bitterness comes pleasantly to the fore in the aftertaste, with hints of coffee and a slightly roasted touch. Heart-warming and yet not too heavy thanks to a pleasant degree of acidity, which lends the beer freshness.

'La Trappe Quadrupel'

Alcohol content: 10% Vol. Alc.

Bottle volume: 30 cl (also available in 50 cl pitchers and 75 cl bottles) (crown cap)

Colour: dark brown but fairly clear colour and light brown head that disappears rather rapidly.

Aroma: very complex aroma dominated by malt and yeast and including caramel, coffee, chocolate, roasted malt, biscuit and apple (yeast) supplemented by aniseed and liquorice.

Taste: same as aroma. Pithy initial taste that gives way to a very complex and alcoholic centre. Hints of caramel, chocolate, aniseed, liquorice and other spices. The aftertaste is very peppery (owing to the high alcohol content) and particularly lasting. A heavy but delicious drink...!