

HEROLD BŘEZNICE CASTLE BREWERY

Březnice, Czech Republic
Established 1506

The brewery in the town of Březnice has a long history dating back over 500 years. Březnice as a settlement dates from the 1300s, but the brewery was first chronicled in history on the occasion of its sale between noble families in 1506. In the early years of the 16th century, the owner of the castle which the brewery had been part of for several hundred years, Vaclav Zmrzlik (literally 'frozen one') of Svojsin sold the castle and his entire estate to the Supreme Scribe of the kingdom of Bohemia, Zdenek Malovec of Chejnov and Vimperk for 4,500 Bohemian grosschen.

In 1531, Jan Malovec assigned the brewery to his brother Petr Malovec. Unfortunately, Petr Malovec participated in an upheaval against the King, Ferdinand 1st; his property was seized and passed on to the family of Loksans. Ferdinand Loksan donated the brewery to the burgers of Březnice, except for rights and privileges related to it. In the urban chronicle of 1586, an entry reads that white beer (made of wheat) as well as bitter beer (made of barley), were brewed in the brewery. In 1618 the properties of the noble family of Loksans were confiscated because of their participation in the unsuccessful upheaval of the Czech nobility against the Austrian Emperor.

In 1623 the Březnice estate was bought by the Royal Attorney Pribik Jenisek of Ujezd, who made a point of improving the brewery. In those days the brewery's net income was 72,000 grosschen and the brewery supplied beer to 5 pubs in the neighbourhood.

In 1720 the brewery was modernised and extended almost to its current size, including construction of the baroque chateau that today accommodates the Malthouse, Brewhouse and offices of Herold Brewery. Eight years later, in 1728, Count Vilem Albrecht Kolowrat Krakowsky inherited the estate of Tochovice, Hradiste and Březnice. In the years 1749-1756 the brewery flourished and brewed 770-1200 barrels of beer a year.

In 1831, after a period of bad years in which there were very poor crops resulting in serious lack of barley, the brewery earned very little profit and was leased to several lessees until 1876.

After the death of the last member of the Březnice branch of the Kolowrat family, the family of Count Palffy of Erdode held the Březnice estate. Count Palffy built a new boiler plant with a higher stack and refurbished the lager cellars and cooling premises in 1900-1901. In 1903 a new well was dug out in the castle park because the water source used until then had become insufficient. In 1906 it was decided to build a new model plant in which machines replaced manual processes, as the Czech nation was in the forefront of industrialization in Central Europe. The brewery actually generated its own electricity, and after 1920 a new bottle washer was installed, semi-automatic bottling was introduced, a modern malt grinder was installed and the lager cellars were expanded. The malting plant housed in the baroque structure was repaired as well as the large wood-beamed halls for malt drying and storage.

In those years the brewery was well known for its famous 18* dark beer called "Garnet" of superior quality. Between 1930-1935 the brewery's sales amounted to 20,000 hectolitres of beer per annum, and the brewery became known for its quality, and was nicknamed the "Storkery" (*Capovar* in Czech from *cap* and *-ovar* ending of *pivovar*, Czech for 'brewery'). The brewery had 25 employees.

The brewery remained operational for most of the war years and between 1940-1944 it brewed approximately 15,000 hectolitres of beer per year. However, the beer was very weak, usually 3-4*. In 1944 the German air force utilised most of the malt plant as a warehouse called "Elbag" for aircraft spare parts and about 20 young people, mostly students, were forced to work there.

After World War II, the castle, plus the estate which belonged to it, together with the brewery and the malt plant was seized by the State from its last aristocratic owner, Count Palffy, who was believed to be a Nazi collaborator. The brewery was managed by a so-called State's Administrator and on December 15, 1945 the brewery was assigned to the Municipality of Březnice. However, the financial conditions of the brewery were weak without the benefit of private ownership, and had resorted to brewing only very weak beer for

the industrial and agricultural workers. The Březnice Municipality operated the brewery until 1948 when after the communist coup it was assigned to one of the larger beer-producing national enterprises. Since then it was subject to various assignments among the large national enterprises, including Prague Breweries led by Smichov and even Western Bohemian Breweries centered at Plzeň. In 1960 it finally anchored with the Central Bohemian Breweries – Velké Popovice, national enterprise. Being a small enterprise it suffered from the disinvestment typical of communism and was assigned to brewing mainly the weaker, younger beers for other industrial enterprises.

In the years following the Velvet Revolution in 1989 many changes in the organization of the industries took place in the country and beer production was no exception. The brewery, in the course of reorganizations and changes of ownership structures, was maintained as the property of the Research Institute of Malt and Brewing, which had been transformed into a joint-stock company with shares held by many breweries of the country. During this time the Institute revived the excellent traditions of Březnice beer, increasing output, winning several prizes both in the Czech competitions and internationally, including ‘Best Beer’ for its outstanding black lager (13 degrees Plato Schwarzbier) at the Stockholm International Festival in 1996 and 1997. During this time Herold was exported to England, Germany, France, Sweden as well as other formerly communist countries where Czech beer is the acknowledged king of beers.

As part of its reorganization into a normal business organization mainly selling its services, the Institute decided to sell the brewery, as they had no resources to invest as needed to protect and build on its excellent tradition. This process, however, took some time and it was not until 1998 that a group of Americans, who had been working in the Czech Republic purchased the brewery and commenced on its revival and reorganization. The primary goal of the investment was to make both a local and international success of the excellent Herold lagers produced in the classical methods of the Czech brewing tradition. This plan focuses on the unsurpassed quality of Czech beer brewed from highest quality local ingredients by Czech Brewmasters, acknowledged internationally as leading experts in the industry.

The name Herold actually only dates from the fall of communism, under which of course the need for trademarks and intellectual value was denied. The name was selected from the symbol of the herald, or spokesman of the king, seen on a coat of arms present at the brewery and the Březnice castle. Because the brewery has historically been an integral part of the castle and the name has virtually the same meaning in most northern European languages, the new owners felt it remains appropriate. This is also a tribute to the 500 years of shared history with their aristocratic antecedents as the brewers of Březnice.

Since the advent of new ownership, the brewery has added several prizes to its name, including the Czech national prizes in 2000 and 2001 for its unique Bohemian Black Lager, as well as 3rd prizes for its light and premium golden lagers, garnering notification as the ‘most successful brewery’ at the competition. During the first two years of new ownership, Herold was the fastest growing brewery (although it remains amongst the smallest commercial breweries) in the Czech Republic and gained a significant presence in the capital city of Prague. New packaging has opened exports to the UK and the USA, and the labels designed for the latter gained a first and sixth prize in the national competition for beer labels. Herold has revived the traditional ‘Stork’ brand under an exclusive arrangement with a large customer in the US and plans to upgrade its domestic packaging in 2002 with similar success.

This progress emphasizes the essential mission of the Herold Brewery – to produce excellent traditional Czech beer. In the last 20 years, scores of small Czech breweries have disappeared from disinvestment, mismanagement and competition from the dominant breweries. Herold, however, has revived and revered traditional Czech brewing, hand turning its own malt and using only Saaz hops and well water from the park on the castle estate. Although Herold’s growth may be limited by tough competition in the Czech market, its reputation for quality and the opportunities afforded by educated international markets in Europe, the UK and USA should make Herold an original addition to the wide world of quality beers.

The larger breweries are now largely foreign-owned by the largest multinational brewing corporations, or still state-owned, and have used price wars and ‘rationalization’ to industrialize their processes or close other breweries under their control.