

SHADOW OF FOUR FATHERS

With Father's Day approaching, **Chris Canty** talks to fifth generation brewer Tim Cooper and his father Bill about the family business...

For Tim, some of his earliest childhood memories took place at the brewery. "I used to go there on Saturday mornings, when it was a bit quiet and play in the cellars," he says. "I still have a strong recollection of the aroma from the wooden barrels. I guess the smell of beer is my first memory."

Bill on the other hand remembers Tim riding a go-cart down the hill at the brewery, just like he himself had done 60 years before. "The go-cart didn't have any brakes. It was a 100 metre slope and there was a ramp at the top that made us go even quicker. Thankfully there aren't any hills at the new brewery for the kids."

Interestingly, despite being a family business, Bill says that everybody in the family must go out and work for someone else before they get a job at Coopers.

"Going straight into the family business can be a trap," he says. "It's easy to fall in love with the product, but we have to be smart. I was a cow and sheep farmer before Coopers, and Tim became a doctor."

Tim says that the best advice he ever received was when his father told him to get another profession in 1973. The beer market was unstable and there wasn't any guarantee the business would survive. After dabbling in mechanical engineering he then studied medicine and became a successful cardiologist in the UK. Yet a passion for beer and an enjoyable year studying brewing at the University of Birmingham, eventually led him back to Adelaide.

Tim insists however that the two professions are alike in some respects. "There are in fact some similarities to cardiology and brewing," he says. "An understanding of fluid dynamics and chemical engineering does come in handy."

Tim says that working at the family business has been a great decision. "There is mutual respect, long serving employees, humility, and a real sense of belonging. When we built the new brewery in 1999 there was a sense that the newer generation were really creating something," Bill agrees.

"I think too many people these days work for 5 years then leave as if they were just a commodity," he says. "Here we have something that we all love."

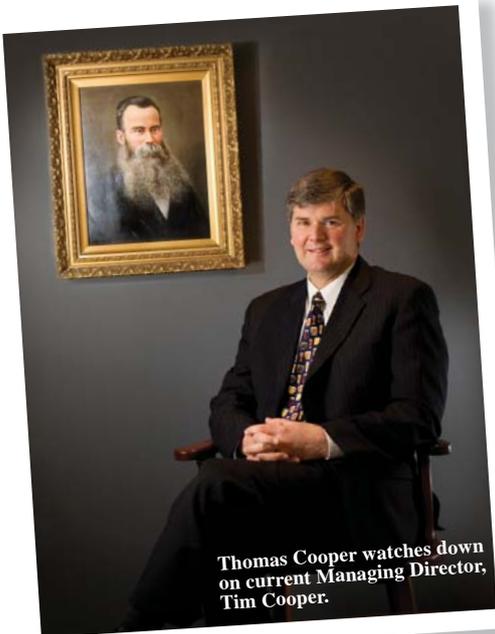
When Lion Nathan attempted a hostile takeover a few years ago, it was the family that stood together despite being offered huge sums of money. "It wasn't just about saving the company. It was also about saving our name."

Tim shares the opinion insisting that he had a "custodial responsibility with 150 years of history and heritage at stake."

An obvious source of pride is their home brewing kits, which are available all throughout the world and are especially popular in Scandinavia, where beer prices are high. When the question is asked if they think the kits are creating the next generation of family brewers, Bill and Tim both laugh. "I wouldn't go that far," Bill says. "But it's nice to know that we have helped amateur brewers throughout the years who have a real interest in beer."

Tim says he is humbled by their popularity. "When we have Coopers Club nights, I get many enthusiastic home brewers tell me how the kits started their love of the craft," he says.

Rest assured, it is safe to say the Cooper's beer, as it has always been, is in the right hands and will continue to be for a lot longer yet.



Thomas Cooper watches down on current Managing Director, Tim Cooper.



Tim Cooper and his father, Bill, share a beer in front of the brewery.