To minimise the consumption of spirits, regarded as detrimental to the well-being of the colonists, the authorities encouraged the brewing of beer. Early in 1838 Governor John Hindmarsh allowed John Warren to build a brewery on the parklands near the River Torrens; the establishment of other breweries in Adelaide and nearby soon followed.

By the mid 1860s South Australia had more than 30 breweries spread across the settled areas of the colony; in the city were the Union (Rundle Street), Adelaide (Pirie Street), West End (Hindley Street) and Anchor (Morphett Street); there were breweries in Hindmarsh, Kent Town, Port Adelaide and Walkerville and Thomas Cooper’s small brewery in Norwood.

Managing fermentation in the hot South Australian summer was a challenge for many of the brewers.

One of the earliest in the country areas, Johnstons’ brewery at Oakbank, was established in 1843. Others developed at Port Augusta, Melrose, and Laura. Managing fermentation in the hot South Australian summer was a challenge for many of the brewers.
Separate malting companies also served the brewers. The silos of the former Barrett Brothers Maltsters at Kent Town were a well known landmark.

Many of the smaller breweries faded away and there was a gradual consolidation into several large producers. By the mid 1890s, the South Australian Brewing Company had been formed, and it competed with the Lion Brewery, established 1872 in North Adelaide but this closed in 1914, though its buildings still dominate Melbourne Street, North Adelaide.

Another major competitor was the Walkerville Cooperative Brewery which was taken over in 1938. Bigger breweries and better transport, especially railways, allowed beer to be easily transported around much of the state and small country brewers found it hard to compete. Springfield Brewery survived until the 1950s.

Today, only two major companies remain – West End/ Southwark (owned by Japan’s Kirin) and Coopers, which remains an Adelaide family company. Now there is a wide choice of local and imported beers, also beers from micro-breweries.