

British Guild Of Beer Writers

Newsletter — November 2006

‘Innovation is a word many do not associate with the brewing industry. Yet without innovation **beer** would die. Porter, bitter, mild, IPA, stout and lager all came about because the brewers of yesteryear used the raw materials and technology of their day in innovative ways...’

Chairman Tim Hampson innovates on beer *inside...*

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The Chairman Reports...

INNOVATION IS a word many do not associate with the brewing industry. Yet without innovation beer would die. Porter, bitter, mild, IPA, stout and lager all came about because the brewers of yesteryear used the raw materials and technology of their day in innovative ways — and innovation remains central to the plans of Kentish brewers Shepherd Neame as a recent Guild trip showed.

Beer has been produced in Faversham for over 850 years, and it was with great pride that the company's managing director Jonathan Neame took Guild members and a group of MEPs around the brewery and told the story of this proudly independent family company and its wide range of award-winning beers.

We saw the innovative technology from another century — a wood-lined mash tun — where the hand-crafted Kentish ales, made with locally grown hops and barley and water drawn from an artesian well, start their journey to the glass. We then moved onto the modern Millennium Brewhouse — the starting point in the production of the company's award-winning lagers. We also saw the now unused steam engine that once powered the brewery, and were taken to the innovative state-of-the-art packaging line, which, with a little bit of help from two members of staff and a robot called Frank, can handle 300 kegs in an hour. A tutored tasting with each beer matched to a different food course gave us the chance to sample some of Shepherd Neame's acclaimed beers.

For innovation is much more than the use of the latest technology it also applies to how beer is served and drunk: beer doesn't have to be served in pint glasses, it works wonderfully with food and instead of a 40% brandy at the end of the meal, why not try a nip of Tercentenary Ale?

The staff at Sheps are clearly passionate about what they do, and enjoy their work. In a world where potential customers have so many other drinks to choose from and so many other alternatives for their disposable income, there is clearly much innovative thought being put into the brewing and selling of their beers.

The feelings of all of us were summed up by MEP Richard Corbett, who said Sheps are a forward thinking company, mindful of their past, but also aware of their responsibilities for the environment, sustainable production and the communities where their beers are sold.

October also saw the finals of the Tesco Drinks Awards. Now entering its 11th year (formerly known as the Tesco Beer Challenge), this award, widely recognised as one of the best routes to market for new beers, continues to grow in prestige and popularity. Forming part of the Tesco Drinks Awards, the Tesco Best Beer Award invites brewers, large and small, to create a new packaged beer for the British beer market.

The concept was developed by one of our members Richard Morrice, and this year over 200 entrants fought it out for the chance to be sold by the country's biggest supermarket. To win the competition brewers have to marry innovation with quality. And over the years brewers have tried countless new combinations of malts, hops and flavourings to produce new beers. Some have even challenged the idea that a British beer has to be crystal clear.

Some have worked, some have not. Some have been spectacular commercial successes and I'm sure that many of the new beers that clamour for space on bars and supermarket shelves, even if they were not a winning beer, were developed from recipes developed for the competition.

The Tesco Awards encourages real innovation in the brewing industry and challenges the art of the brewer, and its success can be measured by the fact that four of the top 20 premium bottled ales sold in the UK today started off life as Tesco Beer Challenge winners.

Brewing might be an old industry, but that certainly does not stop it being forward thinking and innovative — it has to be so if it is to survive.

TIM HAMPSON, CHAIRMAN

CALENDAR 2006/2007

Nov 26	Dark ale festival, White Horse, Parsons Green
Dec 7	British Guild of Beer Writers Awards & Beer Banquet, Millennium Gloucester Hotel, South Kensington

Jan 17, 2007 National Winter Ales Festival Manchester

Please send details of any relevant events to Adrian Tierney-Jones

Annual Dinner

MEMBERS SHOULD now have received booking forms for the Guild's awards and dinner — if you haven't please let Adrian Tierney-Jones know. This year we have moved to the Millennium Gloucester Hotel in Kensington, an impressive four-star deluxe hotel in the heart of Kensington — there is a special rate for members if they want to stay at the hotel, please call 0207 373 6000 and quote BGBW. The date for the dinner is Thursday, December 7 and this year celebrity chef Brian Turner is preparing the menu. With the price of a ticket remaining at £50 this is definitely a date not to be missed. There's a special offer for those companies wishing to book a table, with 10 tickets available for the price of nine.

Peter Ogie

A LETTER arrives from Guild stalwart Peter Ogie to say that he has hung up his beerwriting quill.

'I think it is now time for me to retire gracefully, at least while I can still lift a glass and express my opinions as a judge. The Guild was a godsend to me when I retired from my day job after 35 years, since it enabled me to have a soft landing, and stay within the industry, which has been my life, and to meet many people and experience situations I would otherwise not have encountered. As a committee member, I was able to contribute to the development and stability of our organisation.

'Please convey all my thanks to all the other Guild members for their companionship, conviviality and their ability to communicate their passion for our favourite tipple. Although I am resigning my membership I am still around for a chat, as a judge or just for a drink, so best wishes to all members and to the future of the Guild. Yours aye, Peter.'

Mikko Montonen

GUILD MEMBER Mikko Montonen in Finland was badly beaten up in Helsinki in October. He had written articles critical of the wine industry and alleged corruption and was attacked in the street. His publisher then received an email saying 'Are you satisfied?' Mikko told me on 20 October he was recovering well and the stitches were due to be removed that day.

ROGER PROTZ

Rob Haiber

MANY GUILD members will recall Rob Haiber, the American beer writer, who was a frequent visitor to Britain. He judged at the Great British Beer Festival on several occasions and became

famous for using a pencil torch to judge the colour of dark beers. Rob also attended one Guild annual dinner. Sadly, Rob died suddenly in mid-October and just a month or two after getting married. He contributed to several American magazines, including *All About Beer*, and was the author, with his father William, of *A Short, But Foamy, History of Beer*.

ROGER PROTZ

By the time I get to Denver

A STRONG British contingent once again enjoyed the delights of the Great American Beer Festival in Denver. The US craft beer market seems to be maturing at an incredible rate. While exhilarating American takes on IPA still dominate, the obsession with who can brew the beer with the highest bittering units seems to be losing its novelty. And maybe it's just my palate maturing to a style I love, but there seems to be a much greater breadth of flavour within the category these days, from very piney and grassy, through to extraordinary compotes of passion fruit, lychee, mango and pineapple. This beer style truly is the sauvignon blanc of the beer world.

This year the biggest buzz was around wood-aged beers, with brewers such as Goose Island and Brooklyn creating stouts and porters in particular that have been aged for two years and pour like engine oil. Heady stuff. And having mastered British and German styles to their satisfaction, the exploration of Belgian beer styles continues. Saisons, Dubbels and Tripels too numerous to mention proved delightful — recognisable as the styles they ape, but cleaner and crisper. We may soon be seeing more of these beers hitting our shores.

The British writers in Denver were invited along to various brewery tours and meet-and-greets with Vertical Drinks and James Clay, who are working together in the hope of bringing in mixed containers of beers in 2007. If we as writers get behind them when they arrive and they sell well, we soon won't have to travel 8000 miles to taste some of these remarkable beers.

PETE BROWN

Artistic Ale

BEER FUTURES is a night of beer tasting at the closing party of the world's first supergroup illustration exhibition Production Lines.

Art collective 4WALL have teamed up with Utobeer, Brothers Brewing Company, Fuller's, the Horseshoe in Hampstead and many more to celebrate brewing tradition, Bermondsey and Britishness. Hosted inside London's spectacularly pink and orange Fashion and

Textile Museum at Bermondsey Square on December 9, this is a brew with a twist. Examples of beers on offer for sampling and purchase include lambics, fruit beers, international beers, cask beers with 100% traceable British ingredients, classic British ales including London Pride and London Porter and creative, zingy, modern experimental examples from youthful forward thinking collectives. The whole event is teamed with readings and activities by Guild member Pete Brown, set against the backdrop of contemporary art. The organisers of Beer Futures promise to create a social mix like no other and expose something new to everyone. For more details contact Becky Jones at 07786 517877.

The Marquess Tavern

STANDING IN the heart of sleepy, suburban (and astonishingly affluent) Canonbury, N1, the Marquess Tavern is a gleaming, floodlit tower of a pub that, only six months after opening, has scooped Gastropub of the Year at the 2006 *Time Out* Awards. And even if the word 'gastropub' makes you reach for your special ANGRY pen (the green one), there's lots here to treasure. 'The pub is a homage to the more traditional style of English pub, with a focus on drinks and a restaurant in the back,' assures Will Beckett (son of Guild member Fiona Beckett). Will and his business partner Huw Gott opened the Marquess back in April with a clear mission to serve excellent food

LOOKING FOR A POEM
Echoes of the past
Hang in the air
Of Britain's oldest brewery,
An English oak mash tun
Still in use, a steam dray,
Sepia records, old posters,
East End hop pickers
Smile out from forgotten fields
And a Spitfire cockpit
Evokes glorious images.
Outside fields of barley
Seem to whisper as they ripple
And all round the hops hang
Naturally beautiful, church-blessed
All this coming together
To create this masterful brew,
This aromatic, taste tantalising beer,
It is 'poetry in a glass'
On National Poetry Day.
Les Baynton

and excellent beer. Ostensibly a Young's pub, as well as the full range of Young's draught beers there are regular guest ales and a regular 'real' perry or cider. Bottled beers include Fraoch Heather Ale, Meantime Coffee Beer and St Peter's Lemon and Ginger Ale. The Marquess also features over 50 malt whiskies, a wine list that includes English wines from Chapel Down and Camel Valley, and a traditional British menu which, at the time of visit, included home made pork pie with pickles, whole sea bass with potatoes and samphire and a fantastic 28-day hung fore-rib of beef. If, like me, you find yourself on the opposite end of town from the White Horse, this is an admirable consolation.

PETE BROWN

Leith's swaps wine for beer

A FOOD and drink matching evening is taking place at the Leith School of Food and Wine with Marc Stroobandt, beer sommelier for www.specialitybeermerchants.com and co-founder of the Speciality Beer Academy (along with Guild member Fiona Smith) acting as host. This happens on Wednesday October 25, 7pm-9pm; tickets are £40 each. A further date is set next year for March 13. For more information or to book tickets visit www.leiths.com or contact Fiona Smith at 07768 721455.

25 years for the White Horse

THE WHITE HORSE has been in the *Good Beer Guide* continuously for 25 years and Guild members are invited to the pub on the evening of November 1 to join Mark Dorber and Roger Protz celebrate the occasion. The event starts at 6.30pm.

Future visits

ASPALLS CIDER have offered a trip.
THWAITES have offered a trip for next year — to celebrate the brewery's 200th anniversary.
BARRIE PEPPER is organising a beer tasting of small brewers' beers in Leeds.
A TASTING of vintage Thomas Hardy Ales is planned.
OKELLS ON the Isle of Man has offered a visit. Originally planned for November it has now been provisionally rescheduled for February 20/21, 2007. Several have asked to be considered for this — if anyone else is interested please could they let me know and where they could place any stories. Also could you indicate which would be the best airport for you to use.

TIM HAMPSON

Universally challenged

The Guild team of Melissa Cole, Jeff Pickthall and Simon Jenkins, aided and abetted by a member of the Badger bunch, came a respectable third in the annual Hall & Woodhouse pub quiz, held at St Stephen's Tavern in Westminster last month. Winners were the *Morning Advertiser* team.

MC