

British Guild Of Beer Writers

Newsletter — April 2008

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Chairman Tim Hampson issues a challenge *inside...*

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The Chairman Reports...

BURTON ON TRENT is one of the greatest brewing towns the world has ever seen. Within it is the Coors Visitor Centre, the United Kingdom's premier museum dedicated to brewing — and, as you will probably have heard, Coors has said it is to close the site at the end of June.

Coors acquired the Carling and Bass brands, and all of their holdings, including the museum, as part of a £1 billion deal in 2002. In addition to the museum on Horninglow Street, the Visitor Centre has the Brewery Tap pub, a gift shop, meeting rooms and the wonderful White Shield microbrewery. Everything but the microbrewery will close. The complex employs 34 workers and 55 volunteers.

The Visitor Centre, formerly known as the Bass Museum, was set up in 1977. Its galleries include an exhibition on how beer is made, a collection of vintage vehicles used for transporting beer and an interactive display about Burton's history. It should not close without a fight.

As writers we would lose an invaluable, unique and irreplaceable resource — and the public would be denied the only real large-scale beer tourist attraction in the country. The collection is priceless and inimitable.

Coors said it cannot sustain the £1 million a year it is losing on the site — but it must be persuaded to delay the closing of the site at the end of June or the opportunity to create a

viable visitor centre and museum under a new management will be gone.

The collection of artefacts should be kept with the archives. Nothing on its scale exists anywhere else in Britain. Burton is the natural place to keep it.

Burton and the museum are intertwined and it is essential that we try to preserve the heritage, not only of the brewing industry, but also of the town itself.

The people of Burton are united as never before, fighting to save the brewery — but they cannot do it on their own. The closure of is a matter of national interest — indeed it should be a matter for international concern.

Many interested parties have come together to campaign for the brewery to be saved, but the group will need months not days to save this precious national asset. Local MP Janet Dean has put together a large and impressive group of people intent on saving the site. A working group has been established, which the Museums Libraries and Archives Council leads, with the aim of looking at various options for the site.

But even to draw up a list of possible ideas will take weeks, not days, and then to attempt to achieve the necessary funding will take months not weeks.

Coors says that it will mothball the site — but its unique collection of brewing vehicles, including the Ale 1 number plate, will need maintenance work, so the temptation to place these vehicles under the auctioneer's hammer sooner rather than later will be massive. And there have already been offers made for the centre's three beautiful and gentle shire horses.

The county archives services has indicated it will take responsibility for the annals, which are not just a unique record of Burton, Bass, Interbrew and Coors, but a window into brewing

CALENDAR 2008

April 15-16	World Beer Cup, San Diego
April 24-26	Tuckers Maltings Beer Festival Newton Abbot
May 28-June 1	Mondial de la bière, Quebec
June 13-15	Beers of the World Live NEC, Birmingham
Aug 5-9	CAMRA Great British Beer Festival, Earls Court, London

Sept 12-14	First European Beer Festival, Copenhagen
Oct 10	SIBA Local Brewing Business Awards
Dec 10	Joint Beer Group/BBPA 2008 Christmas party, venue TBA

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

and its contribution to the economy, society and culture of the British Isles. But they will be moved out of Burton to who knows where?

Time is needed so that campaigners can engage in a constructive dialogue with national bodies that might support a national museum.

It is crime to let the museum go — it would be disgrace if we turned our back on this one-off opportunity to establish a national museum of brewing and it would be a tragedy if this wonderful museum's epitaph simply says 'closed because of indifference in 2008'.

Coors says it is committed to find proper homes for the archives and artefacts, but has not decided what to do yet. Much of the museum is a listed building and Coors says it has no plans to seek a planning change of use for the site to convert it to housing. Coors would be very happy to talk to anyone who would be willing to look at the site to run it as a museum.

But time is of the essence and Coors UK board needs to show it has the courage to change a decision.

What can we do? Write and write again, write leaders on it, write to Coors, write to politicians, write in your blog, broadcast about it, tell anyone who you think can help that they too must do something. Tell everyone about the threat to the museum and call on Coors to delay closing it until alternative ways of running it have been discussed.

We take our beer seriously in this country — let's show how seriously we take it by being part of a movement that establishes a national museum of brewing in Burton on Trent.

TIM HAMPSON, CHAIRMAN

Beers of the World goes Live

Beers of the World comes to life in June 2008, bringing its first premium international beer show to Birmingham's NEC. Running alongside the BBC Summer Festival, Beers of the World Live will showcase beer in a stylish environment with sampling as the core of the event, alongside great food and beer pairings, masterclasses, live stage presentations and themed educational zones. There will also be an on-site delivery service where people will be able to order any beers they want to enjoy at home. It is open 12-6pm Friday-Sunday June 13-15.

Trips

THERE IS a trip to Springhead Brewery on May 14 — there are still some places left so please contact Adrian Tierney-Jones if you would like to go.

The Arrogant Bastards come to town

TWO GREAT brewing traditions were happily married at Shepherd Neame's brewery recently, and the fruits of the union are a privilege to behold. For their recently launched international real ale festival, Wetherspoons invited Greg Koch and Steve Wagner (brewmaster and head brewer respectively), of Stone Brewing in San Diego, to supply a cask ale. But sending a cask-conditioned ale from the West Coast of the States — was that going to work? Of course not, which is why the brewers packed a bag of Centennial and Simcoe hops and came to Kent to brew Stone California Double IPA.

I had the first taste of the beer while talking to Mitch at the launch of the festival. It's utterly beguiling: the hoppy punch that you only really taste in North America, countered by the smoothness and depth exclusive to cask-conditioned ale.

It slipped down distressingly easily. In the space of time it took for Mitch to tell me what a thrill it was for him to brew at such an illustrious old brewery, I noticed I'd sunk half a pint, and casually asked what strength the beer was.

'Well, we had to compromise,' replied the man I suddenly remembered was responsible for beers such as Arrogant Bastard and Ruination, 'so it came in just over 7%'.

Not a lunchtime pint then...

Pete Brown

An invitation from Barrie Pepper

I REACH 75 on April 25 and my dear wife is taking me away for the weekend with, we hope, our five children and six grandchildren. However I want to celebrate this big occasion with my friends particularly those in the Guild. So, all members of the Guild (and their partners) are invited to a party at the New Roscoe, Sheepscar, Leeds on Saturday May 3, from 12 noon until it finishes. There will be a couple of special ales, some good, hearty Yorkshire grub and real music.

COPY DEADLINE FOR NEXT ISSUE IS APRIL 26



We have a quorum: Guild committee members at Budvar with brewmaster Josef Tolar (left); the other member of the party, Mark Dorber, was hiding...

Budvar special *Several Guild members recently visited Budvar — here are three different views of the trip from Budvar's man in the UK Denis Cox, plus Pete Brown and Adrian Tierney-Jones.*

TO INVITE a party consisting entirely of members of the British Guild of Beer Writers to your brewery, especially those in the Guild's janissary inner core, is fraught with danger for the public relations person. These guys know their business as nobody else does and, a bit like a crack Customs and Revenue team descending on your accounts, they are going to be able to read your brewery like another set of books.

Chewing this over with my opposite number at the brewery, Petr Samec, we also wondered whether, being just a provincial Czech brewery, located in what for big-brewing and big-marketing sophisticates would be the boondocks, we would be corporate enough for these expert visitors. Let's have a presentation we said. All smart arse marketing folk do those and we'll fit it into the programme and we'll cut the brewery tour to the bone.

This is where it went wrong, or, if you like, went right. Budvar's Brewmaster, Josef Tolar, insisted on personally conducting such a high power group around his brewery. What we had forgotten is that just as Josef never cuts any corners in his brewing he doesn't cut any when conducting his brewery tours either. Given a band of unusually clued-up experts who bombarded him with questions he became even more expansive than usual — the result was that there was no time for the presentation but a great time 'and a very intelligent one' (Josef's words not mine) was had by all in the Budvar brewery restaurant. At least nobody is going to accuse us of professionalism. **DC**

I WON THE Budvar Travel Bursary in 2006 but was too busy to take my trip last year. The nice people at Budvar allowed me to defer, and go on the trip this year instead.

I visited the brewery in 2003 as part of the journey that became the book that won me the prize, so it all feels a bit circuitous. I'm sure my glowing account of Joseph Tolar and his obsessive attention to quality in that book had nothing whatsoever to do with me winning the prize.

Mr Tolar is still the same, and there's the same pursuit of excellence. What's different is that there's now a similar level of quality in presenting a public face: the new visitor's centre and museum obviously cost millions — and while Mr Tolar grumbles that he makes the money and the marketing guys spend it, it can't fail to bring people to this sleepy Southern Bohemia town and engage them more deeply in the brand.

For instance, the hydraulic-and-video-screen-based lift that dramatises the depths plumbed to reach Budvar's famed underground water source was so convincing that our esteemed secretary really believed we had gone 350 metres below the earth.

But if such showbiz flair leaves you cold, I'd argue it's still worth the 90-minute plane ride and ensuing two hours in a coach to get there, simply for the point at which you descend

into the chilly cellars (you really are underground this time, Adrian) and taste the unfiltered, unpasteurised beer straight from the lagering vessels. It's so perfect; I had trouble drinking it because I couldn't stop grinning after the first taste. That moment is worth whatever effort it takes to win the Bursary. **PB**

LONG AFTER returning from Budvar I still dreamt of the crisp and fresh unfiltered Original that emerged from out of the brewery's lagering tanks; the hint of bitter lemons dancing a tango across the tongue accompanied by a crisp biscuity maltiness ending in a lengthy bitter finish still haunts me. To drink this noble and elegant beer at the ur-source is one of those great life-affirming moments. I also kept a picture in my head of the monumental brewing hall, a silent space of burnished copper with just the hiss of machinery in the background. One man stood at a computer terminal as brew master Josef Tolar took the Guild team around. The aroma of the mash hung in the air, tantalising taste buds and setting us up for the magical experience of experiencing the beer straight from the lagering tanks. It all began so prosaically. A meet at a Wetherspoons in Heathrow, all the paraphernalia of checking in and checking out, the flight with *Ma Vlast* playing as we came into land at Prague airport, and then the long road trip south to České Budejovice. The magic kicked in as soon as we arrived at Maly Pivovar, a Budvar-owned hotel that used to be a brewery. In the UK, we are used to brewers selling off the family silver for hotel chains where the fittings seem to come from Primark, but this particular establishment was stylish, understated and comfortable. Next day was the brewery trip under the tutelage of Josef Tolar. First of all, a breakfast beer sharpened the palate and then it was into a lift for a momentarily confusing trip (or not), followed by a meander through the history of this splendid brewery. Later in the day we broke bread and drank beer with Tolar and various officials from the brewery, including General Director Jiri Bocek. A very large half duck was served to several in the party, while the ubiquitous Czech dumplings also took centre stage. The day happily wound on its way accompanied by golden glasses of sparkling Budvar, while brewer Ales Dvorak joined us in the evening at České Krumlov — a magnificent castellated old town full of narrow, mysterious streets and imbued with a tingling, evocative wintry feel of Bohemian magic and mystery. Winning an award is always exciting, especially with an accompanying cheque, but it's even more gratifying that the Budvar Travel Bursary throws in a trip to the brewery as well. It's little touches like this that motivate and enliven the all too often lonely journey that beer writing can be. Long may Budvar fill my dreams. **ATJ**