

British Guild Of Beer Writers

Newsletter — Feb 2008

‘Victorian families when cooking a meal would turn to Mrs Beeton for advice on how to turn a pig’s trotter into a tasty treat. Today, when looking for inspiration from a chef or cook we turn to a Jamie Oliver, Brian Turner or a Delia Smith. So why do we use an industrial model created when Queen Victoria’s British army was fighting Boers in South Africa to judge today’s brewing industry?’

Chairman Tim Hampson on the S&N sale *inside...*

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The Chairman Reports...

I GUESS it should come as no surprise that Scottish & Newcastle has been hunted down by its predators Carlsberg and Heineken. For months the only thing that seemed to be stopping the deal going through was money. But now, the board of S&N, or Ampersand as it was famously dubbed after it had pulled out of brewing in Edinburgh and Newcastle, has agreed to recommend to shareholders a cash offer of £8 per share.

The offer, through the newly-formed joint venture Sunrise Acquisitions, will see Carlsberg take full ownership of Eastern European joint venture Baltic Beverages Holdings, as well as S&N's French, Greek, Chinese and Vietnamese operations. Heineken will own S&N's operations in the UK and Ireland, Portuguese, Finnish, Belgian, US and Indian operations.

'So is this the end of the British brewing industry?' a well-respected BBC radio journalist asked me. 'There can only be about 30 brewers left in the country. Tell me, do Whitbread and Wetherspoons still brew?' he continued.

The brewing industry does have a bit of a problem — in that most commentators and many consumers still view the industry as if it was still structured in the same way as it

was in the 19th century, while others do not seem to understand that pub companies do not brew beer. The companies that Messrs Bass, Courage, Whitbread and Young created, to name but four, have long moved on, but the legacy that they left still shapes the way we think about beer.

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So why do we use an industrial model created when Queen Victoria's British army was fighting Boers in South Africa to judge today's brewing industry? It must be time we applauded what is happening today. The British brewing industry has probably never been more vibrant and creative.

For some, in volume terms, it would be wonderful to return to the heyday of the 1970s. Then, over 40 million barrels a year were loaded onto brewers' drays; today it is under 30 million. But there is no going back.

However, 40 years ago supermarkets probably offered two types of bread — thin sliced and thick sliced white. As for beer, some might have sold a Watney's Party Seven or some bottles of Guinness or Mackeson but not much more.

Today, the choices, varieties and quality are much higher — more than 450 brewers ply their trade in the UK not 30. Many of these are adventurous creators and entrepreneurs who care about their local community.

I recently had to write an article about the Italian beer market — I was told by an Italian industry expert that the country only had

CALENDAR 2008

Feb 23-26	Pianeta Birra, Rimini
Feb 28	PubChef Food for Excellence Awards, The Dorchester. London
March 6-7	SIBA AGM and Conference, York
March 11	MA Top 100 Independent Multiple Retailers, Business Briefing, London
March 18	The Publican Awards, London
April 15-16	World Beer Cup, San Diego
April 24-26	Tuckers Maltings Beer Festival Newton Abbot

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

seven breweries. He didn't take into account the 192 micro-breweries that the country now has. Similar questions to experts in Denmark, Switzerland and France revealed that they too discounted the burgeoning micro brewing industry in their countries.

As the analysts rake through the bones of Scottish & Newcastle, let us raise a glass to the great brewing industry not just in the UK, but across the world. The world's top five — Anheuser Busch, InBev, Heineken, Carlsberg and SAB-Miller — are fabulously successful companies, with some wonderful beers, but there is another world out there too. While some might mourn for what has gone I want to applaud what we have now.

TIM HAMPSON, CHAIRMAN

Brown's Ale

THE WORLD of blogging has provided a whole new outlet for those passionate about beer, and seen the emergence of a new class of people who consider themselves to be beer writers. The only problem is that a trawl of blogs and internet review sites leaves you thinking the whole scene is a bit... worthy. People are falling over themselves to find gradations of flavour invisible to most palates in an attempt not just to put beer on a par with wine, but on a snobbish pedestal far above it. And anything a big brewer does is evil. And as you fall further down this particular electronic rabbit-hole, 'big' comes to include the likes of Greene King, Fuller's, Marston's, and even that well-known industrial mass-produced brand, Worthington White Shield.

When I started writing about beer I loved cask ale, but not exclusively. I was thirsty to find out more about American micros, but my knowledge of Belgian beer stretched as far as Stella Artois and Hoegaarden. But that didn't matter. As an ad man, what first fascinated me about beer was the way that, in research groups, even Stella would engage a marketing-weary audience more than any other product was capable of.

When I decided to find out why, I found out that beer is the most sociable drink in the world, and always has been. When we really admire someone, we say: 'He's the kind of guy you'd like to have a beer with,' not a cup of tea or glass of wine. The pub remains an environment where you leave the cares of the world at the door and

treat each other with respect, as equals, and beer is the soul of the pub, the reason why pubs are like this and wine bars are not.

The history of beer is the history of ordinary people. Beer brings history alive and makes you realise what it would have been like to be a 17th-century diarist or 13th-century pregnant woman, the strong birthing ale on standby for when labour began. Beer remains the most popular drink in the world. While customs and habits vary, the underlying truth of beer is constant — getting together to relax with friends, in a safe environment, kicking back and being your true self.

Like most beer fans, given a perfect choice I'd usually go for a resinous IPA, a spicy Belgian saison or vinous Imperial stout. But beer's beauty is its unparalleled scope, its amazing variety, and most of all its depth of meaning in the world; a meaning that goes far, far beyond what's in the glass.

Beer is a broad church, and I've realised that's what I love most about it. I am not saying writers who meticulously analyse flavour profiles of obscure micros and nothing else should start writing about beer culture or corporate marketing. I'm glad they do what they do and I find it very helpful. But I hope that those guys recognise they're dealing with just one facet of what makes beer the best drink in the world. **Pete Brown**

Roger joins the blogosphere

ROGER PROTZ has added a blog to his website www.beer-pages.com. It's undergoing trials at present but you can watch work in progress at www.beer-pages.com/blog.html.

Italy celebrates beer in Rimini

IN FEBRUARY the Italian seaside is just for the seagulls. However, this is the time when Rimini, which during summer is usually packed by tourists, changes its look into a fatal attraction for beer lovers. Pianeta Birra, the most important trade fair for the Italian beer market, will be held here from February 23-26. It's the 10th fair and it happens at a time where the good shape of the Italian market is testified by a growth of per capita consumption over 30 litres, an increase in imported beers and a fast growing trend for micro-breweries and brewpubs. Pianeta Birra will show the efforts of the big companies such as Carlsberg or Radeberger, amongst others, and the new flavours of the 192 craft brewers working

at the moment. Tasting sessions, such as events with new beers 'made with added grapes of Cannonau or Muscat', and press conferences will also enrich the four-day event — for more details see www.pianetabirra.com. **Maurizio Maestrelli**

Sainsbury's beer competition

TOWARDS THE end of January Sainsbury's announced today a major new competition to support the British brewing industry. Chris Craig, beer and cider category buyer, said that the objective was to encourage British brewers of all sizes to brew and market a new beer that would appeal to beer drinkers across Britain. 'There are a huge number of brewers out there of varying sizes who would love to get their product listed in supermarkets but haven't had the opportunity, or in some cases the information and support, to enable them to do it. Our competition is a really simple way to help brewers, and in particular smaller regional brewers, to get a listing with us which could lead to further sales opportunities if their beer sells well in our stores. Almost any beer can be entered and an expert panel of judges will pick the best 15 beers that will be sold in our stores in the summer. They will be looking for great tasting beer presented in a way that will encourage our customers to buy it. The two top selling brews will then go on to enjoy a minimum six-month national listing in Sainsbury's. We will agree a fair price with brewers before they enter and we will give the 15 finalists a guaranteed order for 5000 cases. It's a really simple competition which everyone will enjoy and which will give our customers something new and interesting to try.' Guild member Richard Morrice and his team will be helping organise and run the competition, so for full details call Richard on 08456 447660, or via email: richard@themorricepartnership.co.uk.

The birth of a brewery

THIS IS not so much an article (*writes Guild member John Simpson*), but more of a tip that other members might wish to pick up. I shall be reporting the story in my locally circulated E-newsletter and will eventually make it a page on my website, but it occurred to me that Guild colleagues who write regularly for the nationals might be interested in writing the story of a brewery from embryo to launch. Here are the details...

Real ale fans in the Adur Valley, West Sussex,

will soon be getting a new brewery. Its working title was the Adur Brewery and it had a progress-reporting blog. It has since been incorporated retaining the name Adur Brewery Ltd, and is likely to feature local associations in the names of its beers.

The brewer currently works in the software industry but is investing heavily to support a change in career. He and his partners have been working hard through the autumn to prepare the ground for a launch in spring 2008. They have tested and refined the recipe for their first brew — a dark 6% beer called Merry Andrew (which I can say from experience is excellent).

The name Merry Andrew relates partly to the brewer (Andy Dwelly) but also links to the word merry andrew, an old term for a clown or comedian. The word is thought to derive from Andrew Borde, a physician in Tudor times, who brightened his talks on medicine with numerous merry quips. He was born at Bordes Hill, quite close to the Adur Valley, which provides a local association for the beer name.

A best bitter recipe has also been finalised and has gone down very well with testers, including some who are not habitual bitter drinkers. A wheat beer recipe is now under test. A logo has been designed, of which the first variant picks up the Merry Andrew motif with the jester's cap. Other brews may show modified headgear relating to their names.

The launch was originally scheduled for May and the partners are waiting on planning permission for their premises prior to the installation of their kit — planned as a four-barrel plant from David Porter. However following discussions with Stumpy's Brewery (Southampton) they have now come to an agreement whereby they will hire the Stumpy's plant in order to make a first production run of Merry Andrew in February, which, after conditioning, should be available in March. For further information contact: Andy Dwelly, FDN Associates Ltd, Adur Business Centre, Little High Street, Shoreham-by-Sea BN44 3PF; tel: 01273 467527; andy.dwelly@safedataco.com.

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