

British Guild Of Beer Writers

Newsletter — March 2010



The Chairman Reports...

THE TELEPHONE alarm exploded in the darkness of my sleep. It was 5am. I was grateful that at midnight I had decided not to have 'just one more beer'. Blandford was quiet as I stepped into the street, where Hall & Woodhouse's brewer Toby Heasman stood — bright eyed and bushy-tailed.

He too had shunned throwing caution to the wind and turned down one more beer, but still for someone who too had had less than five hours sleep he seemed very cheerful. 'Best night's sleep I've had in weeks,' he confided, before admitting that with a young child at home, a night in trade, and of course a final beer in the hotel's bar, was far easier on his metabolism than the constant disruption of early morning feeds. Next stop the brewery, which at 5.45am was active — we were there to mash the first brew of the day.

Great changes are planned for Hall & the Woodhouse. A new brewery is to be built and planning is in hand for the installation of a new £5 million brewhouse. But for now the scene in the mash tun room was much as it has been for 100 years. Today, Hofbrau was being brewed. The malted Tipple barley had been crushed in a mill installed in 1899, and as the heated liquor from the brewery's own well mixed with the grist there was that marvellous elemental moment as the warmth of the water started to release the goodness and sugars in the malt — and the air filled with the soft aroma of Ovaltine and the swirl of steam. Once every town of any pride would have had its own brewery and the aroma from the local family brewery would have been commonplace.

Brewery worker Ian Mitchell moved smoothly between the three mash tuns with the confident assurance of someone comfortable with their role — he is the third if not the fourth generation of the same family that has worked at the brewery and probably knows every nook, cranny and rivet within it.

His grandfather, who put in the 55 years in the brewery, had probably worked in the same room, as his father of 83 still does when he takes tours

around the brewery. Guided by art and craft rather than the read-out on a computer monitor Ian turned valves and pipes ensuring the correct flow and the right temperature of the liquor into the 'new' mash tuns. Nearly one hundred years old, they were commissioned in 1914, not here in Dorset, but in Northamptonshire at the Phipps Brewery, in Northampton. Phipps was a company that lost its way in the 1950s, fell into Watney's embrace in 1964 and closed in 1974.

Ever the eye for a bargain and mindful that they had to invest in the future, Hall & Woodhouse bought these still usable tuns, shipped them across the country and somehow shoehorned them into the brewery, but nobody seems to know how. More than 40 years later they were still learning their keep — just.

As we walked up and down the well-worn stairs where early morning brewery workers had gone about their tasks ever since Queen Victoria sat on the throne, the need for change was ever apparent.

The coppers are really showing their age — they too had a distinguished career in other breweries before putting in a collective 150-or-so-years for Hall & Woodhouse. On one the cladding is removed but no craftsman can be found to repair it, for fear of splitting it asunder. On another the copper is so thin and fragile a finger can almost be pushed through.

Tired and worn they might look, and in under 500 days they will be finally retired, but my host Toby promises that for their last brew they will gleam and shine as if brand new. That is going to require a lot of elbow grease by someone! I don't know if objects can be proud, but they should be for the service they have given.

'We are building for the future,' says Mark Woodhouse, the brewery's soon to be chairman. 'We are making an investment that will last us 100 years. We are not looking for an expensive Rolls Royce of breweries, but a Ford Mondeo, something that is fit for purpose, affordable, which will serve us for us a long time.'

Hall & Woodhouse is currently looking at responses to its invitation to tender for the new brewery, which will be built across the yard from its current site. Work will commence on-site in October, with the new brewhouse in action by the autumn of 2011. Of course the copper and wood

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will be replaced by stainless steel and computer telemetry, but the water for the liquor will still be drawn through the Cretaceous chalk downs as it is now. And Toby says he is determined that the new brewhouse will still be hands on. The art, craft, skill and science of the brewer will not be lost.

'Hall & Woodhouse has been brewing Badger ales for over 225 years,' says Mark, 'and this development ensures we will be doing so for many more generations. I believe an investment of this magnitude also demonstrates our ongoing commitment to brewing and to the continued growth of our bottled and cask ales.'

Hall & Woodhouse's beers have an illustrious recent past — the brewery has twice been awarded World Champion Beer with Tanglefoot and Badger First Gold at the International Brewing Industry Awards and have a record five Tesco Drinks Awards under their belt; they were introducing innovative flavours in bottled beers long before the current wave of microbrewers were even in existence.

Not bad for a company regarded by some as a sleepy family brewer.

Tim Hampson

Beer book corner

JUST A quick note to let everyone know about my first book, *500 Beers*, co-published by Quarto and Apple in the UK, has just been released. Perhaps unique amongst the current crop of beer list books, there being no suggestion that the reader should die after completing it, the book is designed to plant a seed of curiosity in the beer novice, and hopefully nurture that curiosity into an interest, and on into healthy obsession. It covers everything from the ubiquitous (draught Guinness and Heineken) to the esoteric (Sam Adams Utopias and New Glarus Belgian Red). It includes chapters on ingredients, brewing, finding and buying beers, and a smattering of food matching. I wanted it to be a book that a novice could understand, but also a book that a beer lover could also find something of value in.

It was commissioned in early 2009, on the back of my winning the Guild's award of Beer Writer of the Year. I'd actually been in discussion with the publisher prior to this, but I'm sure the golden tankard helped seal the deal. As a first-time author, I took a flat-fee deal for it, and so can happily endorse cut-price sales via Amazon (other bargain websites may be available). Happily, it's also being published in the United States by Sellers, and has already been sighted as far afield as New Zealand. Sadly, I've yet to receive a copy myself from the publisher, so if you've seen it (or perhaps you already own it), please do let me know what it's like.

With a pleasing symmetry, it has just under half the beers of the forthcoming *1001 Beers*, edited by the secretary, and retails for about half the cost. Whether this means it will sell twice as much, or half as many, remains to be seen.

Zak Avery

Twissup in a few breweries

EVERY DAY I share beer with people around the world thanks to the internet. These virtual pints are blogged or twittered throughout the ever-growing online beer community.

Messages about what someone is drinking, discussions about the industry, links to the latest blogs or just general chat about nothing important are in constant motion on Twitter. Through this, virtual friendships have been built, but these people largely existed as avatars, lacking a sense of the person behind the screen name. So Twissup was born: a combination of a 'tweet-up' (people from Twitter meeting) and a 'piss-up' (no explanation needed). It was about meeting in real life to give a personal side to the world of beer blogging.

We chose Sheffield as the inaugural destination as it's a great beer city; small enough to explore in a day but big enough to make that day diverse and interesting. There were three brewery visits (Crown, Sheffield Brew Co and Kelham

Island, organised by Alex Barlow), along with a handful of excellent pubs and a bucketful of excellent beer for the 30 attendees, who included writers, bloggers, brewers and a variety of Twitter users.

The trip was fantastic, better than any of us hoped for and there was a buzz about it for days. It was the combination of great people, great beer and great places that made it. It wasn't just a glorified piss-up; it was a chance to meet people, build connections, drink in new pubs, try new beers and to have a laugh and I think the online beer community has been strengthened because of it. As for the future... there will be more! We've discussed going to Burton once the Brewing Museum is open (possibly the next trip), there's Manchester, GBBF, even Belgium. And, of course, everyone is invited and the more the merrier (you don't need to tweet or blog to attend, you'll just need to read them to find out when and where we're going). Virtual pints together are good, but those shared can be priceless.

Mark Dredge

The Guild takes a trip to Wales

THE GUILD is arranging a visit to South Wales for members on Wed/Thurs 26/27 May. The draft proposed programme is: **Wed, May 26:** 1.45/2.00pm, meet at SA Brain, The Brewery, Crawshay Street, Cardiff CF10 1SP for a tour of the brewery, discussion with brewery executives on the local South Wales beer scene followed by a beer tasting; in the evening a visit to some Brains hosteleries in Cardiff to chat and sample the ambiance with the Brains staff. Overnight at a local Cardiff Hotel hopefully at a special price (tbc). **Thurs, May 27:** early start to visit one or two local craft breweries up the valleys, meet, discuss and taste with their staff their beers, local priorities and successes. Detail of this programme to be finalised. Disperse early afternoon in Cardiff. Numbers will be limited and will be on a first come first served basis: please let Chris Marchbanks know if you wish to attend at cjmarshbanks@aol.com — or on 01283 561626. The deadline for contacting him in 5 May, 2010.

Editorial help wanted

FOR THE past few years, the *New Imbiber* has been ticking over nicely with Steve Hobman sharing the editorial duties. Now he is moving on and I'm hunting for a replacement. *The Independent Imbiber*, as was, began in the early 1990s as a forum for beer-spotters (tickers). Since then, the scope has broadened considerably while many of the fanzine functions have been taken over by the internet. The magazine remains extremely small in every sense but pays for itself. Apart from contributing articles, Steve's main task has been to provide background information on new breweries. For a writer wishing to learn more about these new breweries, the post offers the best possible opportunities for getting and keeping in touch with them. To anyone interested in replacing Steve, who will be happy to answer questions on what he does (shobman@rhinopr.co.uk; 01829 250502), I should say duties are eminently negotiable. There are six issues a year, with most of the work done in the two weeks before the production deadline. Anyone interested, please contact me at ronaldatkins1@aol.com or on 01273.486787.

Ronald Atkins

CALENDAR 2010

Beer Academy courses for March, see

www.beeracademy.co.uk/courses/ for more details

March 29 April 5 Cask Ale Week 2010

April 10 World Beer Cup 2010, Chicago

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