

British Guild Of Beer Writers

Newsletter — May 2007

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Chairman Tim Hampson challenges UK brewers *inside...*

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The Chairman Reports...

THERE HAS probably never been a more exciting time to drink beer than now. Once upon a time most of us would have been content with a glass of bitter, no doubt excellent but still a glass of bitter, or maybe a drop of mild if we were lucky. The new wave of British craft brewers have often sought to imitate these wonderful British styles — be it a bitter, mild, stout or porter they too produce some great brews. Indeed these days Britain's brewers will often imitate styles from overseas — and draw on their experience of drinking beers in Belgium, Germany or even America.

However, a recent conversation with an American writer made me think about whether Britain's brewers could do more to push the boundaries of taste, aroma, colour and even strength of beer. In America some call such innovative brews extreme beers — we're talking about such marvels of the mash tun (and lords of the lauter) as Imperial IPAs and Brown Ales, Kaiser lagers and Sam Calagione's infectious Worldwide Stout. North American brewers are no longer content to copy the great beer styles of Europe, instead of reinventing they are creating their own.

Every conceivable ingredient has been used: wild yeasts and beer blends (or even cocktails), while beer has been stored and conditioned in just about every type of wooden barrel available. The imagination of these brewers knows no bounds. Even more excitingly it seems to have worked for the US craft brewing movement as it continues to grow while the US media is becoming increasingly hungry for new beer

stories. Perhaps there is a lesson that can be learnt here as we all look for different outlets for stories about beer.

Most new beers in this country are made from barley malt (Maris Otter, roasted, chocolate, crystal etc) and hops (Goldings, Fuggles, Northdown etc). All noble ingredients, all with a good story to tell, but how often can we tell what is essentially the same story? Where is the mystery, the excitement of anticipation in trying something radically different. When did you last approach a new beer with the same thrill as you approached the latest Beatles/Sex Pistols/Oasis/Arctic Chimps (delete where applicable) single?

Many brewers are content to brew to the same standards, which are undoubtedly consistently high, but perhaps more should try to do something different in small batches. If it works drink it, if it doesn't well not much has been lost — and if it is drunk and becomes popular it could become a new classic and members of the Guild will be the first to write about it.

Brewing with new ingredients would allow brewers to express their passion for their craft and their passion for innovation and exploration. This approach could attract the attention of the public — be they beer drinkers or not, who could be persuaded to drink some of these beers.

Later this year Adrian Tierney-Jones is organising a Guild seminar on wood-aged beer (the provisional date is October 1st). The event will be hosted up at the Thornbridge Brewery, who are with their wood-aged porters and now a barley wine are very much at the cutting edge. Garratt Oliver has promised that he will be involved, while brewers participating so far include Thornbridge, Fuller's and Innis & Gunn. Others, who have experimented with wood, will be asked. There is even talk of a few bottles of American wood-aged beers being present on the night.

I am sure the beers we sample on the day will be extremely good beers, but already my appetite is whetted because of the stories I am sure can be written about the beers, and through this embrace an even wider audience into the world of beer. Details of the event will be published in a

CALENDAR 2007

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| May | CAMRA's Mild month |
| May 30-June 3 | Mondial de la bière 2007 Quebec, Canada |
| June 14 | BGBW AGM, Star Tavern, Belgravia |
| Aug 6 | Pre-GBBF reception, location TBC |

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| Aug 7-11 | Great British Beer Festival, Earls Court |
| Dec 6 | BGBW Annual Dinner & Awards, Millennium Grosvenor Hotel |

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

future newsletter, but I can guarantee now that it will be a must-attend event.

In 2009 the Guild will be 21 years old, and Roger Protz rightly prompts me that we should do something to mark the occasion. Roger was the convener of the very first meeting of writers who came to form the Guild and he would like to get together as many original members, Beer Writers of the Year and former chairmen (or chairwomen) of the Guild as we can. It sounds a great idea to me, but if any other member has a thought on how we can mark the occasion please do get in touch.

TIM HAMPSON, CHAIRMAN

The Secretary's Round

THE GUILD'S AGM is now officially called for Thursday June 14 at a new venue, the Star Tavern in Belgravia, where the evening is kindly sponsored by the pub's owners Fuller's; the time is 6pm for a 6.30pm start. Apparently, this is the pub where the Great Train Robbers planned their heist. Tim Hampson has indicated he is happy to continue as Chairman, but any members wishing to stand should let the Secretary know. At the time of writing, all current members of the Committee have indicated a willingness to present themselves for re-election, but once again any other members expressing a wish to be considered should let the Secretary know. There is no stipulation in the Constitution to do so before the meeting, but if there is anyone interested in standing, please let the Secretary know at least a week before the AGM. Any motions that members want on the agenda must be sent to the Secretary at least seven days before the AGM.

Congratulations go to Roger Protz and Alastair Gilmour who have both been shortlisted for the Glenfiddich Food & Drink Awards. Roger is up against Alastair (and Simon Difford) in the Drink/Bar Writer category, while Alastair also has a chance in the Regional Writer section. Is this the first time two beer writers have been up for an award at the same time? Good luck to them.

New members

NEW MEMBERS joining in the last month are Phil Lowry, Chris Pollard, better known to Belgian beer aficionados as Podge, Emma Currin and Maureen Heffernan. Meanwhile, rejoining the Guild is Brian Gates, who will be known to some members as the knowledgeable beer buyer at

Tuckers Maltings beer shop and also a driving force behind the historical beer creations of Teignworthy Brewery, who brew on the site of the Maltings. Brian leaves Newton Abbot at the end of April for life in London where he will be setting up as a consultant offering his considerable service to craft brewers, importers, retailers and wholesalers who wish to take a more specialist approach to bottled beers.

What the Dickens!

BARRIE PEPPER gets in contact to say that he has a new book due for publication. *The Inns of Dickens* is a listing of 166 pubs that either appear in Charles Dickens' works or have a real connection with him and include in most cases appropriate selections from his work. There are also essays on the inn in Dickens' day and beers of the period, plus illustrations by Christine Jopling. If any members feel they can place a review then the publishers will be pleased to send you a review copy. Contact Mike Parsons of Heritage House Press on 0113 286 0819 or mmikethebook@aol.com (yes there are two ms at the beginning). Members of the Guild are also invited to the launch of the book at Whitelocks, Briggate in Leeds city centre on Saturday, May 19 at 12.30 pm.

The Rake's progress continues

SPECIALIST BEER BAR the Rake has come runner-up in the *Observer Food Monthly* awards. The awards, voted for by the public, saw Pintxo People in Brighton pip the capital venue to the post, but that hasn't put a dampener on the delight of co-owner Richard Dinwoodie. 'It's an amazing accolade as we'd only been open three months when voting closed. It's really great to see a specialist beer bar getting such prestigious national recognition and it goes to show the public don't go to cocktail bars on a regular basis, they go to enjoy a beer, and it would be nice to see national food and drink writing reflect that more.' The Rake can be found at Winchester Walk, SE1 9AG and contacted on 020 7407 0557.
Melissa Cole

Capitol entertainment

A FULL HOUSE greeted Roger Protz on April 14 in Washington DC when he delivered a one-hour lecture on the history of monastic brewing to associates of the Smithsonian Institute. More than 130 people crowded into the Brickskeller Tavern, the biggest audience the Institute has

had for one of its special events. The lecture was followed by a tutored beer tasting and a matching of beer with cheese. The cheeses, including several British varieties, were flown in specially for the event, though a sample of Wensleydale failed to turn up: 'It was all eaten by Wallis and Grommit,' Protz quipped. As well as such legendary European beers as Orval and Samichlaus, a new abbey beer, Monks' Ale, from New Mexico, was available at the event along with another interpretation of the style from neighbouring Baltimore, Clipper Brewing's Holy Sheet, a beer Protz suggested that should not only be sipped carefully but enunciated with even greater care. Coverage of beer in the US is improving. New magazines are hitting the bookstands (such as *Beer Advocate*) and American beer writer Greg Kitsock has a regular column in the *Washington Post*.

Ale at home

EVEN THOUGH cask ale belongs in the pub, there are some drinkers who, through where they live or other reasons, have to do their drinking at home — this is where Cellarmandirect.com comes in. This is a service where the beers of craft brewers are available in 5-litre mini-kegs with built-in taps — up until now it was only Charles Wells who experimented with this mode of dispensation. This is your chance to drink real ale at home and the steel kegs can also be recycled. I tried a keg of Inveralmond's Fia Fail, a creamy and smooth Scottish ale with a spicy Fuggles nose, a malt-driven palate that includes Mocha coffee, espresso beans, chocolate and vanilla, before its long-legged supermodel of a finish. Superb. Other breweries featuring include Mordue, Country Life and Exe Valley. For further details contact Nick Mason or Ed Stearns on 0151 239 5052. **ATJ**

Craft brewing in the Midlands

HIDDEN IN the Midlands — cradle of the industrial revolution and brewing — great tastes and traditions continue to develop. With the help of the Craft Brewing Association and tucked away upstairs above the Brunswick Brewery and pub in Derby, the 3rd Midlands Craft Brewing Festival was held on March 31, 2007. It was another outstanding success when over 100 entries in five classes from 51 countrywide home craft brewers resurrected old styles, created new ones and reinvigorated the tired — all done with the passion of professionals.

The champion brew was a gloriously hoppy

Double Hop Golden Bitter from Ron Allison of Newark, a quaffing bitter of OG 1042 — which confirmed the old adage that you can get excellent flavour at a moderate gravity. The Special Beer class was a Tripel Gold Belgian Triple, a real mouthful of flavour from Peter Fawcett of Sleaford. The whole occasion was a technical tasters' beerfest with the beer judges writing their comments on the bottle/cask labels for all to see and discuss; it was also an opportunity to judge the judges' views face to face and taste the beer with the brewer. The event included equipment and book sellers with a technical presentation before closing with the prize giving by the Guild's James McCrorie, who founded The Craft Brewing Association in 1995. Details of the Association and all their events can be found on the website www.craftbrewing.org.uk — another very professional aid to better brewing.

Chris Marchbanks

Text advice

DURING THE *Daily Telegraph/Cask Marque* Best of British Beer Awards competition (*Paul Nunny writes*) Cask Marque offered consumers a text messaging service to locate their nearest polling station (obviously a Cask Marque pub). Over the week's promotion over 4000 people used the service. Following on from its success, in the future we are able to offer a similar service for consumers looking to find their nearest Cask Marque pub. All you have to do is enter Cask followed by a full stop and your postcode, then send to 83211 and within 30 seconds you are sent details of your two nearest outlets. Cask Marque will promote this service through the media as well as at consumer events such as beer festivals and the *BBC Good Food Show* as a way of introducing consumers to pubs which serve great beer.

The *Daily Telegraph/Cask Marque*

Best of British Beer Awards were also announced recently — these were cask beers that drinkers voted for in their local Cask Marque pub (of which 2000 acted as 'polling stations'). The winning beers were St Austell's Tribute (South West), Harvey's Sussex Best Bitter (South and South East), Fuller's London Pride (London), Greene King IPA (East), Wadworth 6x (Wales & West), (Marston's Pedigree (Central England), Black Sheep Bitter (North East), Taylor's Landlord (North West and Yorkshire) and Caledonian Brewery's Deuchars IPA (Scotland).