

British Guild Of Beer Writers

Newsletter — November 2008

‘A recent trip to Barnsley and Sheffield emphasised that for some brewers the glass is neither half full nor half empty — but is overflowing. The Acorn Brewery in Barnsley and the Hillsborough Hotel — home to the Crown Brewery — hosted an excellent Guild trip.’

Chairman Tim Hampson watches the people get beery *inside...*

Chairman: **Tim Hampson**
Tel: 01865 245711; 07768 614283
tim@infopub.co.uk

Treasurer: **Paul Nunny**
paul@nunny.fsbusiness.co.uk

Secretary: **Adrian Tierney-Jones**
Woodcote, 2 Jury Road, Dulverton, Somerset TA22 9DU
Tel: 01398 324314
tierneyjones@btinternet.com

www.beerwriters.co.uk



The Chairman Reports...

BEER SALES have fallen 7.2% this quarter, compared with the same quarter last year. Following last quarter's 4.5% drop, according to the UK Quarterly Beer Barometer, published by the British Beer & Pub Association, these are gloomy figures indeed.

In total, 161 million fewer pints were sold July-September this year compared with the same period in 2007 — a fall of 1.8 million pints a day.

Beer sales in pubs, bars and restaurants are down 8.1% over the same period. The on-trade sold 104 million fewer pints during July-September this year compared with the same quarter in 2007 — down 1.1 million pints a day. Sales in supermarkets and shops have also declined, with a 6% fall July-September 2007, the first fall since the second quarter of 2007.

According to the BBPA the new figures are an indicator of the impact the credit crunch and looming recession are having on British households — worsening beer sales are a further sign of weakening consumer confidence and falling consumer spending.

Thankfully there is some good news. Sales of cask beer sold through the Society of Independent Brewers were up by 8% in the first half of 2008, bucking a general trend of falling sales in the industry.

These figures come from SIBA's Direct Delivery Scheme, which makes locally brewed beers available to the licensees of major pub companies, supermarkets and off-licences. Sales — of mainly cask-conditioned ale — from 352 brewers delivering their products to 3000 pubs through DDS increased by an average of 8% per pub during the six months from January to June this year, compared with the same period in 2007.

A recent trip to Barnsley and Sheffield emphasised that for some brewers the glass is neither half full nor half empty — but is overflowing. The Acorn Brewery in Barnsley and the Hillsborough Hotel — home to the Crown Brewery — hosted an excellent Guild trip.

Acorn was founded by Dave Hughes in July 2003 and is now one of Yorkshire's fastest growing breweries. His growth since opening is not measured in single digits as in this time production has moved from a 10-barrel plant to 20 in January 2007, and on the way it has won more than 40 industry awards.

So what is the secret of Acorn's success? 'Quality beer is key,' says Hughes, 'buy the best ingredients and offer pubs a good service, don't sell it too cheap but don't sell it too expensively. Work in partnership with the landlord. We need the landlord and he needs us. To be successful pubs have to look for a different angle — this could be beer and bar staff need to be properly trained.'

Beer at the heart of a pub's offering?

Hardly a revelation, but perhaps that is the difference between successful and vibrant brewers and pubs and the rest.

The visit to Sheffield suggested that it deserves to be renamed Britain's beer capital. It has a vibrant beer culture as exemplified by the Hillsborough Hotel and the many other fine bars, pubs and brewers in the city.

Our hosts took us around several pubs — all different in style — all busy and all putting beer at the heart of what they do. The licensees were filled with pride and passion about beers of all styles — and not just cask beer. The staff was knowledgeable about beer — there were beer lists and beer menus. The quality of the beer sold was beyond reproach.

No one grumbled about tax, red tape or consumer confidence. But they did talk about beer — and the excitement of brewing. They talked about ingredients and the different attributes varieties of malts and hops bought to beers. They made beer fun, aspirational and something to have pride in. It wasn't just a commodity it was beer — the drink of choice for the intelligent drinker.

CALENDAR 2008

Dec 2-6	Pig's Ear Beer Festival, Hackney
Dec 9-12	China Brew & Beverage 2008 Beijing
Dec 10	Joint Beer Group/BBPA 2008 Christmas party, House of Commons
Dec 11	BGBW Dinner and Awards,

Hilton London Tower Bridge
Jan 21-24 2009 National Winter Ales Festival
Manchester

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

Beer at the heart of a pub's offering — it shouldn't be a question it should be a statement of the obvious.

TIM HAMPSON, CHAIRMAN

PS I look forward to seeing you at this year's Annual Awards Dinner, which has the potential to be the best dinner the Guild has ever organised. So mark in your diary December 11 — Tower Bridge, Hilton, BGBW Annual Awards Dinner.

Danny Blyth

GUILD MEMBERS gathering at Thornbridge for the Lager Seminar were shocked to hear the sad news that Danny Blyth had passed away. Danny worked at CAMRA during the 1980s, where he was a features writer for *What's Brewing*. He continued writing about beer on leaving the Campaign, contributing to numerous trade titles including *Pub Business* and *Free House Owner*, as well as editing the *Publican's Handbook*. He was a Guild member until 2006, when his freelance work took him in new directions. Danny died on October 1 after a short battle with cancer. His vibrant humour and cheerful personality will be greatly missed by all who knew him. The Guild sends its deepest sympathies to Danny's wife, Collette, and was represented at Danny's funeral on October 10 by Iain Loe and Jeff Evans.

First Nottingham Robin Hood Beer Festival

AFTER 31 years of running a successful beer festival in the Victoria Leisure Centre, a former Victorian swimming baths on the edge of the city centre, Nottingham CAMRA was offered the much needed opportunity to expand the event this year by holding it under canvas in the grounds of the more centrally located Nottingham Castle. An increased attendance from around 7500 in 2007 to, perhaps, 10,000 was hoped for and more beer therefore ordered. But in the event the results were astonishing. Over four days in early October, almost 17,000 eager drinkers had the chance to sample in the region of 600 different beers sourced from all over the UK — probably a world record for the largest number of cask ales ever assembled at one festival. On the busiest day alone, over 6000 attendees resulted in the Castle gates being closed for a time, as not only had the marquees reached their capacity, but the entire Castle grounds were full as well! The fine weather certainly helped and, even after additional supplies were shipped in on Friday, the event was almost a complete sell-out, totally vindicating the

ambitious move to the new venue. The overall beer market may be in slow decline, but in these difficult times, it is obvious that well-crafted, tasty real ales still have considerable appeal to a broad spectrum of the drinking public.

John Westlake

Beer Academy and IBD news

THE BEER Academy has undergone a number of changes during 2008 and has now been incorporated into the Institute of Brewing and Distilling (IBD) as an operating division. Activity during the year has remained at a very satisfactory level with several hundred people attending the one day Foundation Course, a wide range of consumer tasting events at venues as diverse as the British Museum and the National Exhibition Centre, and high profile media events — the most recent on ITV3 where the tasting panel included Sooty! Please visit our new website at www.beeracademy.co.uk for news and stories.

If you are interested in our forthcoming study visit to Budvar Brewery, April 21-23 2009 then please contact Dan Cannas at dan.cannas@ibd.org.uk.

OTHER IBD ACTIVITIES

December 10, 2008: Marston's, Burton — talk by Professor Graham Stewart: A Career in Brewing
January 8, 2009: visit to Frederick Robinson's new bottling hall

January 19, 2009: Fuller's, tutored whisky tasting

February 10, 2009: visit to Harviestoun Brewery

March 12, 2009: visit to Copper Dragon Brewery

March 18, 2009: Marston's, Burton — talk on Old English Beer Styles

March 23, 2009: French and Jupps Maltings, followed by visit to the new McMullen's brewhouse

If any members of the BGBW are interested in attending then please contact Simon Jackson at simon.jackson@ibd.org.uk.

Hey mum, there's some funny looking men on the telly...

PICTURE THE scene: it's early evening, you're putting your feet up, you're eyeing-up what's on your beer shelf or maybe you'll pop out to the pub later. You put the television on — not for anything specific, you channel-hop. Hang on, some faces look familiar: yes, it's Guild members on the telly. Blimey. Whatever next? This isn't too far-fetched.

COPY DEADLINE FOR

NEXT ISSUE IS DECEMBER 3

Battle of the Brains, produced by Shine Ltd for BBC2, invited the Guild to enter a team in the second series. It will be filmed at Granada Studios in Manchester in December and broadcast sometime in the New Year. The quiz is described as 'in a game of intellect, nerve, strategy and skill'.

An application has been submitted and a match-fit team of seven will come from a squad of nine: myself, Will Beckett, Jeff Evans, Peter Haydon, Iain Loe, Phil Lowry, Ben McFarland, Mike Chapple and Tim Hampson.

Most teams belong to specific towns or regions; ours is unusual in its geographic diversity. This is providing some logistical head scratching, as each member needs to be auditioned by the producers before filming. Also, filming takes place in the Christmas lunches and dinners season: the Guild Dinner in London doesn't clash with filming but there are members with other commitments. The producer suggested: 'I suggest sending in your application form now, and forwarding on other details as they come through.' More news in next month's newsletter. Jeff Pickthall

Down on the canal

WATERSIDE PUBS is a lovely-looking guide to 150 of the best canal and riverside pubs in England and Wales. Filled with an array of appetising pub

photos, it is written and researched by veteran canal traveller and pub visitor Mike Lucas, who co-founded the Mikron Theatre Company, which took theatre around the country by narrow boat. It's a delightful book, filled with loads of pubs and information about the best places to have a pint whilst travelling by the transport equivalent of Slow Food. Given that a few Guild members have travelled by narrow boat (with at least one falling in a canal!), this is a pretty essential guide to have to hand by the tiller.

Waterside Pubs, Mike Lucas, Waterways World, £14.99 — for more information contact c.martin@wwonline.co.uk

Visits

There is still a small number of places left for Guild members for a trip to Sharps in Cornwall sometime in mid-January. The visit will involve a brewery trip, beer tasting and a beer and food evening at Rick Stein's seafood school. Interested students should let Adrian Tierney-Jones know if they want to go.

The Guild's lager seminar seemed to have touched a nerve. Roger Protz devoted his *Morning Advertiser* column to it last week and as a result Budvar are now talking of convening a European-wide conference of craft brewers with a view to setting up a SIBA-type organisation to defend true lager brewing. This is where the Guild is at its best, leading the debate rather than following.

South Yorkshire is God's own country — discuss

SHEFFIELD IS the country's real ale Mecca — just don't say as much within earshot of anyone from Derby. The two cities fight a fierce battle on a number of fronts, from the honour of having the largest number of different ales on tap at any one time to the rather more dubious privilege of being home to the UK's most dedicated beer tickers. But even Derby Ale King Les Baynton was impressed on the Guild's October trip to the Acorn Brewery in Barnsley and then the Hillsborough Hotel, home to the Crown Brewery and contender for Ticker Ground Zero.

In the People's Republic of South Yorkshire many drinkers don't even refer to 'real ale' — it's just the beer they've always drunk, unlike those southern shandy drinkers. Ten years ago the region was devastated when hand-pulled John Smith's and Tetleys — both of which had very high throughput at the time — were replaced overnight in most pubs by smoothflow versions. But now there's clear evidence of the cask ale revival the whole country is enjoying.

Guild members Tim Hampson, Barrie Pepper, Chris Marchbanks, Pete Brown and Steve Hobman accompanied Les. We started at Acorn with a buffet lunch where the award-winning Barnsley Bitter was almost overshadowed by the epicurean majesty of the pork pies procured from Percy Turner's in the nearby village of Jump. Barnsley Bitter had nationwide renown until John Smith's killed it off in the 1970s, but Acorn is brewing it again with the original yeast. Not content with merely resurrecting an icon, they're also brewing a different single hop variety IPA each month. The lads from Acorn are a friendly bunch and after the brewery tour they took us into Sheffield, where the pork pie frenzy was topped up by the Hillsborough Hotel's first ever beer and food matching dinner. On the strength of this one, they'll be doing many more.

The Crown Brewery sits in the basement of the hotel, and provides a constant flow of beers that meet traditional demands as well as expanding the frontiers of what beer in Yorkshire is supposed to be — brewer Stuart Ross saw a good deal on chillies in Morrison's recently, and bought a kilo to tip into his latest brew.

After dinner we toured Sheffield's top real ale pubs, each one a place where the credit crunch has yet to introduce itself. After a nightcap back at the Hillsborough, somewhat implausibly all Guild members were up the next morning to join Stuart mashing in. Maybe it was the lure of the full English breakfast...Pete Brown