

British Guild Of Beer Writers

Newsletter – June 2006

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Outgoing Chairman Andrew Pring signs off *inside...*

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The Chairman Reports...

THIS IS THE last newsletter before the AGM, and it's also the last I will write as I'm standing down from the Chair. It's been an enormous honour to represent the Guild as its Chairman for the past three years, and I'm terribly proud to have been entrusted by fellow members with such an esteemed position. But I've increasingly felt other pressures are limiting my contribution. So it's time to let someone else work with our talented committee and steer the Guild through what are pretty challenging times.

The greatest of these challenges, it seems to me, is to secure the Guild's position within the inner circle of the beer and pub industry. We have to make sure every brewer of note in the country continues to want the attention and approval of the Guild and its members, in the way they have since the Guild was formed over 17 years ago.

The danger, as I see it, is that many brewers are becoming so focused on cost control and efficiencies and pleasing giant corporate customers that they lose the will and resource to engage with specialist beer journalists such as ourselves. In the struggle to survive at all profitably — and heaven knows, pub companies and supermarkets are making that very difficult indeed — I'm concerned that the Guild is becoming less and less relevant to Britain's brewers.

However, I don't want to be accused of bowing out

on a sensationalist note. Of course, many, many brewers are still only too delighted to invite us to sample their beers and learn what's going on in their companies. We only have to look back over the past year or two at all the marvellous Guild visits that we've been privileged to make to realise how much respect our members enjoy in this world.

But I also know that times are very hard for many brewers presently, and there are few indicators of rosy times round the corner. Some of our favourite brewers are really struggling to make the profits they used to — and in some cases are withdrawing from, or at least engaging less fully than they used to, in the social rounds that have long made this such a pleasurable industry to belong to. It's in this context that I sound my warning note about future Guild relevance.

The committee is fully aware of this shifting climate, and has undertaken a lot of strategic work on the way forward for the Guild. We want to share some thoughts about this with you at the AGM. We have no particularly radical proposals to put forward — because at this stage nothing radical is required. But we do think we must focus very hard on what our role is and what we do that still makes us important today. Your thoughts, of course, are crucial and will be eagerly sought at the AGM evening.

My own view, and I know it's shared by the committee, is that the Guild undoubtedly still has a massive role to play in the world of beer. But to demonstrate that, we need constantly to be involved with what is happening to brewing — and we need to be much more engaged in open discussion of the most relevant issues. To that end, I believe a new Chairman and a committee comprising a mixture of serving members and fresh blood will add new vigour to the debate.

I have every confidence that Tim Hampson — the committee's recommended choice for next Chairman — will do a splendid job. And if the members support this recommendation, I wish him the very best in what he will find is a very interesting and influential position.

As well as standing down from the chair, I'm also coming off the committee — for the same reasons

CALENDAR 2006

June 27	Guild's AGM, date and place Brook Green Tavern
July 12	All-Party Parliamentary Beer Group Annual Awards Dinner (PLEASE NOTE CHANGE OF DATE)
July 31	Guild's pre-GBBF reception, London @ the White Horse, Parsons Green

Aug 1-5	Great British Beer Festival, Earls Court
Sept	Launch of the Good Beer Guide
Sept 28-30	Great American Beer Festival
Oct	CAMRA awards lunch, date and venue to be confirmed

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

I mentioned at the start. This really is a time when the Guild needs every committee member to be contributing fully.

Finally, then, I'd like to thank my fellow committee members of the past few years for all their hard work and dedication to the Guild: more specifically, to Adrian Tierney-Jones, who has proved to be an outstanding and tireless Secretary; Treasurer Paul Nunny, who as well as being a true and fair representative of his accountancy profession has been a font of sagacity on so many issues; John White for great work in driving the Guild's website to international prominence; Pete Brown, for a masterly handling of our strategy review; Tim Hampson, for organising such stimulating visits; Larry Nelson, for unflagging enthusiasm and the boldness to relocate the Guild's annual dinner to more modern surroundings (details shortly); Kamini Dickie, for valuable insights into what's happening across the industry; and Martyn Cornell, for a professional beer historian's eye on all we've sought to do.

I look forward to seeing as many of you as possible at the Hammersmith agm in a few weeks time. As regulars will know, it's often the highlight of the year!

Andrew Pring, Chairman

The Secretary's round...

I HOPE TO be seeing many members at the Guild's AGM at the Brook Green Tavern in West London. As has been mentioned in the previous newsletter and above, Andrew Pring is standing down as Chairman and the committee has decided to recommend Tim Hampson for the post — but that is up for members on the night to agree with. If there is anyone out there who also wishes to stand please let me know.

On the committee front, there are two spaces, as, along with Andrew Pring, Martyn Cornell is also standing down. Both Alastair Gilmour and Melissa Cole have made clear their interest in wanting to stand for the vacant seats. However, other members keen to be considered please contact the Secretary — there is no stipulation in the Constitution to do so before the meeting, but if anyone else is interested in standing please let me know at least a week before the AGM. This is just to help with the organisation of any voting that takes place.

Any motions that members want on the agenda must be sent to the Secretary at least seven days before the AGM to be included.

THE DEATH OF HOEGAARDEN

IT WAS depressing to walk round the small Belgian town of Hoegaarden in May. I was there with fellow Guild member John White and we were in town to meet and interview Pierre Celis, founder of the Hoegaarden brewery and the man who revived the spiced white beer style of the Brabant region.

Most windows in the town carry a poster that says in Flemish: *Hoegaarden Brews Hoegaarden*. The people of the town want their brewery to remain. But InBev, the world's biggest brewer, plans to close it in the autumn. With astonishing insensitivity, it will move Hoegaarden White from a Flemish region to Liege, a French-speaking area 70 miles away.

The brewery is not failing. It brews one-million hectolitres a year. The move has everything to do with the determination of the bankers who run InBev to concentrate production at mega sites.

Pierre Celis, now in his 80s, tells the sad story of how his dream to revive spiced white beer has been killed by corporate greed. At one time there were 30 breweries in and around Hoegaarden producing the style. They started to close in the 20th century, unable to compete with Pils-type lagers produced by the likes of Stella Artois.

As a schoolboy, Pierre did some part-time work in the last brewery in Hoegaarden, Tomsin. It closed in the 1950s. A decade later, Pierre's friends encouraged him to brew some white beer at home. It met with such approval that he moved into a derelict factory in the town, brewed commercially and began to sell his beer throughout Europe.

In the 1980s the brewery was destroyed by fire. The banks refused to help Pierre. He accepted financial help from Stella Artois, who took a 40% stake in the company. Then Stella merged with Jupiler of Liege to form Interbrew and Pierre found himself under pressure to produce his beer more

cheaply. In disgust, he sold his shares to Interbrew — now InBev — and quit.

The *coup de grace* will be delivered in October. The bankers will have won but I will not be alone in refusing drink Hoegaarden again.

Roger Protz

See *July's What's Brewing* for a full interview with *Pierre Celis*.

GUILD TRIPS

SHEPHERD NEAME has invited the Guild to its Faversham home on October 5-6.

A beer tasting and tour of the brewery are planned for the Thursday, and we have been invited to a Hop Blessing at the local church on Friday morning. Anyone interested in attending should contact Tim Hampson on tim@infopub.co.uk and also let him know where they will be placing the story.

An extra dimension to the trip is that a group of MEPs has also been invited to the brewery on Thursday, and it is likely that we will have dinner with them — giving us the opportunity to discuss beer and brewing issues across the EC.

GETTING TO THE BONES OF THE MATTER

UNDER THE auspices of Brewers of Europe, leading medical and scientific experts, plus members of the brewing industry, came together in Brussels at the beginning of May for the 4th Beer and Health Symposium. They gathered to share the latest scientific evidence that responsible beer drinking can play in a healthy diet and lifestyle.

The good news is that beer is good for us in moderation, especially for our bones. Furthermore many of the health benefits of moderate beer drinking are unique to beer because of its ingredients such as hops and malted barley and, of all the alcoholic drinks on the market, beer is also relatively low in alcoholic strength.

'This medical conference stresses that new evidence is emerging around the alcohol and health story,' said the chairman, Professor Jonathan Powell of the Medical Research Council Human Nutritional Unit in Cambridge. 'The media and public tend to focus on wine. However, the emerging evidence is the real benefits are related to the alcohol itself and so the positive story also relates to other

drinks such as beer that have other nutrients and properties which can also be beneficial in terms of health. This Conference is about redressing the balance.'

Previous studies have shown silicon found in beer can help strengthen bones. New research at King's College and St Thomas' Hospitals in London has found that the ethanol in the beer inhibits the hormones known to cause weakening of bones that can lead to osteoporosis. The beneficial effect is the same as, if not better than, that of calcium.

The results of a controlled study show, said Dr Ramon Estruch of the internal medicine unit at Barcelona University, that people who drank beer in moderation were less likely to develop coronary heart disease than those who drank other drinks.

'Not only do the beer drinkers have better protection from heart attacks,' he said, 'but there is supporting evidence for beer's cardio-protective effect and its help in altering the ratio of beneficial high-density lipoprotein cholesterol to the pernicious low-density cholesterol, along with beneficial changes to the platelets and the amount of fibrinogen present in the blood, both factors in clotting.'

Good news too for those who think beer is fattening. Talking about beer and weight loss, Professor Arne Astrup of the Department of Human Nutrition at RVA University in Copenhagen destroyed the myth of the beer belly. 'Glass for glass, beer is less fattening than apple juice or milk,' she said. The beer belly is the result of associated factors such as continual snacking, unhealthy eating and lack of exercise.

So no need to feel guilty — drink up, it's doing you good!
Guy Thornton

NEW MEMBERS

LATEST MEMBERS to join the Guild are Fiona Beckett, author and journalist who coined the memorable phrase 'beer and food is the new rock'n'roll'; Steve Thomas, the author of the magisterial and encyclopedic *Good Beer Guide to Germany* (have it to hand for the World Cup) and John Conen, author of *Bamberg and Franconia: Germany's Brewing Heartland*. Unsurprisingly, he specialises in the beers and breweries of this region.