

British Guild Of Beer Writers

Newsletter — May 2006

‘Any chance of progressing to even the quarter-finals surely depends on the boy wonder’s miraculous recovery. So if he fails to make it and England go out early, the beer-drinking bonanza that brewers and publicans have been praying for disappears too.’

Andrew Pring muses on metatarsals *inside...*

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The Chairman Reports...

HOW MANY pints of beer Wayne Rooney's fourth metatarsal has cost Britain's brewers we'll not know for some while yet. But all of us looking forward eagerly to the World Cup — and that naturally includes all elements of the drinks trade — must have been dismayed when we saw England's talisman stretched off the other weekend.

Any chance of progressing to even the quarter-finals surely depends on the boy wonder's miraculous recovery. So if he fails to make it and England go out early, the beer-drinking bonanza that brewers and publicans have been praying for disappears too.

Even those who hate sport acknowledge national success is good for beer. England's cricketers helped shift a fair few extra barrels when they triumphed over Oz last summer, while early morning fixtures didn't stop the beer flowing when Jonny Wilkinson and Co overpowered the Aussies in what seems a lifetime ago. Amongst our top four brewers, InBev is the only one not to sponsor either football or rugby; it contents itself with the Stella Artois tennis tournament. Heineken has a massive presence in both football and rugby.

Ah well, let's hope when we meet for the AGM on June 27, after the group stage concludes, we'll have something in Germany to raise our glasses to. Get better quick, Wayne. The beer world needs you.

From one giant to another, and to someone who should be toasted immediately, Bobby Neame, celebrating 50 years with Shepherd Neame this month. As the spring edition of Sheps' excellent in-house magazine *Master Brewer* points out, Bobby has had a major impact on both his company and the trade over that half-century. Did you know it was his idea of launching a lager, Kingfisher, especially for Indian restaurants in this country? Or that he brought Hurlimann to this country? Or that it was he, with

Spitfire, who was responsible for one of the most non-PC ad campaigns in recent times?

Bobby's time at the helm has seen Sheps flourish and remain at the forefront of brewing and pub retailing. He's also been a very good friend to the Guild, and we wish him well as he embarks on his new ambassadorial role as president of the company.

One of the pleasures of beer writing is being invited to beer launches, and I and a number of other Guild members had one to treasure the other week. Peroni pushed the gondola out at a glitzy *La Dolce Vita*-themed event held at London's Design Museum, as part of a £4-million TV and cinema marketing push.

Highlight of the evening was the screening of its three-and-a-half minute ad based on Fellini's masterpiece. Laddish beer marketing it was not — and all the better for it. Your chairman politely inquired of the ad's Anita Ekberg lookalike actress if she enjoyed Peroni, and was delighted to learn that was indeed the case. Beautiful Beer indeed.

And talking of launches and beautiful beer, I greatly enjoyed the launch of Pete Brown's second beer book, *Three Sheets To The Wind*. A beer Baedeker, as I'm sure someone's already christened it, the book records Pete's peregrinations around various of the world's cities in search of beer. It's full of glorious nuggets such as his discovery while in Shanghai that the Chinese believe drinking is the wellspring of creativity. For as Tang Dynasty poet Li Bai noted: 'How many great men are forgotten through the ages?/Great drinkers are better known than sober sages/I only want to drink and never wake up.' Can Guild membership be offered posthumously? **Andrew Pring, Chairman**

The Secretary's round...

THE GUILD'S AGM is nearly upon us and it is hoped that as many members as possible attempt to turn up. As you will know, Andrew Pring is standing down and the committee has decided to recommend Tim Hampson for the post — but that is up to the members on the night to agree. We should also have news soon on the Guild seminar on the provenance of beer. As a committee we are aware of the lapse in time since the last one but hope that the excellence of the one planned will more than make up for this. There are other announcements planned in the near future which we hope members will be impressed by. *Moonlight becomes brew...* In the last newsletter Swiss member Laurent Mousson sent in his thoughts on the word biodynamic, which I had commented on when writing about Locher's Naturperle. Newly joined Guild

CALENDAR 2006

May	CAMRA's Mild Month
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
Aug 1-5	Great British Beer Festival, Earls Court

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

member Jeff Pickthall emails with his thoughts: "I've looked into this bio/biodynamic thing before. German and other Euro beers labelled 'bio' are indeed organic. 'Biodynamic' is a very different kettle of metaphorical fish. Rather than attempt to put it into my own highly sceptical words I direct you to www.biodynamics.com. I'm not certain, as I don't have a bottle to refer to, but I believe the Swiss beer in question does actually claim to be 'biodynamic' — hops and barley harvested by the light of a full moon, or some such claptrap."

Finally... as I wrote in the last newsletter, Sue Nowak's latest co-authored edition of *Good Pub Food* is out and I asked her to write a little about her flagship food and beer book (see below).

GUILD AGM

THE GUILD'S AGM is now officially called for Tuesday June 27, and we will be meeting once more at Young's excellent Brook Green Tavern. Andrew Pring is standing down as Chairman and at a recent meeting the committee decided to recommend to members Tim Hampson as the new Chairman. However, any members wishing to stand should let the Secretary know.

On the committee front, all members bar Andrew Pring have expressed a willingness to stand again, with Alastair Gilmour expressing an interest to stand for the vacant seat. However, any other members who are keen to be considered please contact the Secretary — 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. This is just to help with the organisation of any voting.

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

PIVO! PIVO! PIVO!

FORMER GUILD member Honza Kocka gets in touch to, firstly, rejoin the Guild, and secondly announce the launch of a new internet-based project for homebrewers: www.homebrewing.cz. He is also involved with a bi-monthly magazine, so if you can read Czech see www.pivar.cz for details. Finally, he has a request for members about a further online project that involves streaming videos and beer ads. This will feature video shots of beer festivals, beer tastings, homebrewing, beer gastronomy, pubs, breweries...just about anything that is beer related and has been taped. Naturally, he asks if members have anything he can use and if so is it possible to have copies for his project? He can be contacted at honza.kocka@centrum.cz.

THE BITTER BITE

SUE NOWAK WRITES... "Guild members will be cheered to know that the new edition of CAMRA's *Good Pub Food* is more beer focused than ever before. This sixth edition is jointly edited by myself and Jill Adam, longtime deputy editor of CAMRA's *Good Beer Guide*. It's 16 years since I edited the first *Good Pub Food* and the remit remains 'real ale and real food', featuring 600 pubs throughout the UK which excel at both. Though much has changed since 1990, this remains the only guide where entry depends on the quality of the beer as well as the food. One good change has been the growing popularity of pairing beer with food,

highlighted in individual entries and in a special report plus 14 pages of beer and cider recipes from pubs. The guide also takes on board the rise of the gastropub — indeed, the foreword is written by one of our newest gastropublicans, Jean-Christophe Novelli. On a personal note, I've been much heartened by the huge increase in publicans who source local produce (including ale from microbreweries) for their menus: 'the publicans who go that extra mile to cut food miles.' Sixteen years on, though, I'm relieved to find that however 'gastro' it gets, my appetite for a well matured cheddar and perfect pint of bitter is as keen as ever!" *Good Pub Food* (CAMRA Books), £14.99.

GUILD TRIPS

Moorhouse Brewery has invited the Guild to its brewery in Burnley on June 21/22 writes Tim Hampson. It is likely to kick off at lunchtime at the brewery — say 1.30pm — and later after a short break at our hotel there will follow an evening tour of some of the company's newly refurbished pubs. There are still three places left on the trip, so if anyone is interested please could they get in touch with me asap, also letting me know where they will be placing a story. It will be an exciting time to visit the brewery, as by the time of the visit the company should be able to provide an update on their future development plans. Also, there will be an update on upcoming pub acquisitions as well as on the continuing upward sales and new business that have led to investment in the plant over the past year. Guild members currently on the trip are Tim Hampson, Adrian Tierney-Jones, Melissa Cole, Chris Marchbanks, John Gray, Chris Freer and Les Baynton. If interested, contact tim@infopub.co.uk.

SEPTEMBER There is a possible invite from NE/ Yorkshire brewers to a beer & food lunch in York on September 26.

OCTOBER Tour of and tasting at Shepherd Neame on October 5 with a Hop Blessing at a local church on the next day. October 13 should see invites to press day of Beer and Food Exhibition, Harrogate.

● To be considered for any of the Guild trips contact Tim Hampson on tim@infopub.co.uk; please include details of where you may be able to place a story. Furthermore, if anyone has any suggestions for trips please let him know.

DIGGING DEEP IN DORSET

CONTROVERSY REIGNED during the recent Guild trip to sunny Dorset to meet with the fine folks at Hall & Woodhouse, the brewers of Badger beers. Tough questions were asked about mysterious Eastern European hops in the store, clear glass bottles and plans for a new brewery; but the most hotly contended point of the day was definitely raised at dinner as the guests splintered into fat vs. skinny chip factions!

However, culinary conundrums aside, the day yielded some excellent insights into the brewer's plans for the future and a look at how it has been performing in the past few years.

Having sold off its Panda Pops concern the company now has vast swathes of unused land and is looking to invest around £10m in a new

brewery site. Sad though it is to see historic breweries abandoned, it is obvious, even to the naked eye, that the current set-up is not as efficient as it could be and, with so much legislation facing the industry on energy efficiency and the like, it is obvious why plans to move are afoot.

The good news is that the brewery will be staying on site, using four acres of the 17-acre plot, and the company will be offering up the old Victorian tower brewery building for conversion to luxury flats and perhaps, as one Guild genius suggested, converting the coppers into some sort of Japanese-influenced pod living quarters. Mark Woodhouse also promised that many of the more historic brewing vessels would be saved and displayed in the new brewhouse.

The brewery has certainly been keen to embrace change over the past few years and the approach has paid dividends. In working hard to attract new drinkers to the ale category the company has produced such innovative brews as Blandford Fly, Golden Glory, Stinger — in association with River Cottage — and the award-winning First Gold.

From 1997 to 2005 the brewery saw a nine-fold growth in sales and now has five brands in the top 20 bottled beers in the UK. The company has also embraced all the benefits of modern technology to improve its marketing. A bi-weekly e-newsletter goes to a mailing database of 12,000 consumers and the quarterly surveys are responded to by nearly a third of those, providing the company with valuable consumer insight.

The brewery is also investing in its lager brand Hofbrau by following everyone else into the cold market with a striking new icicle-inspired font and some brand support for a World Cup promotion, including what is supposed to be a truly addictive on-line game.

H&W is also continuing with its established strategy of linking beer with food by publishing more recipe cards and searching for a replacement for the Dorset Knob, the traditional snack for local farm workers at the start of the day.

And that neatly leads me to a small review of the pubs we visited before dinner. The White Horse and True Lovers Knot, on the outskirts of Blandford, have seen just under £800,000 invested between them and, if a Wednesday evening is anything to judge by, it has been wisely spent. Although the extensions to the pubs have been to accommodate larger food operations, or rooms, they are still clearly establishments that welcome and even encourage drinkers with footstools at the bar and a good local feel to them. The Olive Branch in Wimbourne, where we had dinner, is an accomplished food pub with great friendly service and offerings that many a big city establishment would look on with envy.

Melissa Cole

A NICE BIT OF CHEESE...

HAD THE recent competition between wine and beer to accompany cheese also included cider, then I fear that members' favourite drink would have come a poor second. A good sharp, dry cider is the perfect accompaniment to cheese, cutting through the richness of the milk product. Now that wine has been

eliminated, perhaps we can have a proper challenge between beer and cider, for which I would be happy to supply some of my Royal County dry. Of course, if the challenge is refused, I shall know the reason why!

Roy Bailey

GUILD MEMBER OFFER

PETE BROWN'S latest book is *Three Sheets To The Wind*, an hilarious attempt to drink beer around the world. Publishers Pan Macmillan are offering Guild members the chance to get a copy of the book for £10.99, its rrp, but the price will also include p&p. All you have to do is call 01256 302699 and quote reference number I16. The details are: 1405049871 *Three Sheets to the Wind* by Pete Brown RRP £10.99. The offer will run from May 5, 2006 until August 31, 2006. It should be pointed out that customers can only use credit cards: Visa, Mastercard, Amex, so no Solo, Switch or Maestro cards; or they can send cheques made payable to *Macmillan Distribution* to Direct, Macmillan Distribution, Brunel Road, Houndsmills, Basingstoke, RG21 6XS, Hants. The code must be quoted by all customers on all orders.

SPECIALITY BEERS

NEW Guild member Fiona Smith, director of the F&B Partnership, and Marc Stroobandt, Master Beer Sommelier and Belgian Beer Ambassador, have joined with Cave Direct, importers and distributors of Speciality Beers to create www.SpecialityBEERmerchants.com, the UK's first website with its own e-shop and learning academy, which sets out to explain beer in a way that is simple, easy to understand and informative.

The site sees the launch of a new consumer-friendly classification for beer, coming up with 5 categories much the same as wine:

Wine = white – red – rosé – sparkling – fortified

Beer = white – blonde – amber– fruit/flavoured – dark

By improving consumer knowledge the site aims to inform, teach and demonstrate beer's wonderful diversity, thereby making people more happy and comfortable to shop and enjoy beer.

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The website is due to launch on May 23 at the Belgian Embassy in Cavendish Square. For more information please contact Fiona Smith on 07768 721 455 or e-mail Fiona@fandbpartnership.com.

GUILD WEBSITE

THE GUILD'S website has now been successfully running for over 12 months *writes Tim Hampson...* and we want to make it even better and are planning to continue to evolve and develop the site to enable it to be more meaningful as a resource for beer writers.

Some of the ideas being considered are a members' discussion forum, a showcase of members' work, industry news and links to key beer sites.

If you have any ideas on how to develop the site — please let me have your thoughts by emailing me at tim@infopub.co.uk.