

British Guild Of Beer Writers

Newsletter — November 2005

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Andrew Pring takes a ferry across the Mersey *inside*...

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The Chairman Reports...

NOT LONG to go now until the Awards Dinner at Ironmongers' Hall (December 7), and I hope you've got your tickets sorted. I'm really looking forward to what's always a great evening. For me, it's like Christmas coming early, what with the fabulous food and beers, the friends (thankfully no relations) and the giving of glittering presents to the journalists who triumph on the night.

All that's missing is a blast of Slade singing 'So here it is, Merry Christmas'. But the committee's not keen on this, so the wassailing will just have to be accompanied with a bit of a cappella if the mood so takes you.

On a more serious note, what will make this year's awards an especially noteworthy evening is that the Guild will be making one of its rare Lifetime Achievement Awards. As you know, these are highly prestigious – the highest honour we can give – and I don't think you'll want to miss being there to pay your own respects to this industry legend.

Two people who I know for sure will be there, rising in acclaim that night, are Ajmail and

Sudarghara Dusanj, the brothers running Cain's Brewery in Liverpool. They are very generously sponsoring the Regional Writer of the Year award this year – the first time they have done so – and I know how much they're looking forward to the evening because they told me so as we sat in John Lennon's favourite pub, the Philharmonic, in Liverpool last week.

I was up there for my first trip to Cain's, and it was an amazing experience. The brewery is an incredible building – a terracotta palace, as the Dusanjs call it – and if you've not been before, I highly recommend a visit. Ajmail and Sid, as Sudarghara is mostly known, are very happy to host a Guild visit, so we must organise one for next year. The brothers are two of the nicest blokes you could meet, and they're also highly impressive. The way they've turned round a large loss-making operation in under three years is testament to their business skills, and their marketing excellence. Oh, and the beer is rather good too, particularly the new lager, which is cold stored for three months (as suggested by Roger Protz, from whom the Dusanjs sought advice when they were considering going into lager).

It goes without saying, that we're all looking forward to seeing our other sponsors that night, too – the Inbev team behind the new Artois Bock launch, and the people at Shepherd Neame, both new sponsors – and, of course, our old friends from Budweiser Budvar.

I understand there will be quite a few friends from abroad with us at Ironmongers, which is a good reminder of the international dimensions of the Guild. As you also probably know, that pan-national aspect of our existence is also

CALENDAR 2005/2006

- November 16-17** Brewing Research International (BRI) course:
Introduction to Brewing
- November 26-27** Old Ale Festival at the White Horse,
Parsons Green
- November 29** Celebration of UK beers to mark the UK's
Presidency of the EU. Jointly hosted by the
British Beer Club in the European Parliament,

BBPA, SIBA and CAMRA. Brewers of Europe
House, Brussels. Info: Robert Humphreys

December 7 Annual Dinner and Awards, Ironmongers Hall

December 14 All Parliamentary Beer Group, Christmas
reception — House of Commons

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

reflected in the fact that we sponsor the International Speciality Beers Award at the Brewing Awards, which have just taken place in Munich. This year's winner, in case you failed to spot it, was the excellent Schneider Weisse. Be nice to get hold of some for the Awards reception: we'll see.

Still to make a decision on whether we should allow smoking on the evening. Given the way it's going, the government would prefer us not to. Most beer lovers would say they can taste the beer better in a smoke-free environment. That's my view. What's yours?

Finally, more good publicity for beer. There was a fine piece on the Beer Academy in the Saturday *Telegraph* the other day, complete with picture of yours truly looking suitably studious as beer was sampled. The *Food Programme* had a full 12 minutes on beer last week. While wine doyenne Jancis Robinson is about to publish her first-ever newspaper article on beer. The Revolution (non-Watneys, natch) rolls on!

Andrew Pring, Chairman

Rocky Mountain High

THIS YEAR'S Great American Beer Festival once again celebrated the extraordinary diversity in beer, pushing our definition of what it can actually be much further than this writer had ever imagined.

In one corner of the vast Denver convention centre, the Oregon Brewer's Guild were showing us their Sahti, a Finnish beer brewed with juniper branches in the mash tun and sparged through a freshly cut juniper log and needles. Brewed with bread yeast, it's never boiled and has to be drunk within two weeks. And in the opposite corner of the room was Bud Light.

The American obsession with quantifying and categorising meant that there were 69 different categories of beer being judged in the competition. You may well argue that the notion of there actually being 69 beer styles is daft, and somebody at the Brewers Association agrees. This year, for the first time, six overarching styles of craft beer were introduced as a way of navigating the market. Hourly presentations from the stage outlined the history and characteristics of the styles, so that heavily badged beer geeks and baseball-capped Denver jocks could both develop

The Secretary's round...

DON'T FORGET THAT the Guild's annual awards dinner is nearly upon us and there are still a few tickets left. As you all probably know by now it is on Wednesday December 7, once more at the Ironmongers' Hall. This year, we are trying a bold new move away from the traditional seating arrangements (no, that doesn't mean hammocks or bean bags). As I, along with several others on the committee, are currently working with the caterers, I can honestly say that we are in for a treat, while there are a wide variety of beers available on the table and before and after the dinner. Some will be old friends, others surprises. As Andrew says opposite, this is always a great highpoint of the Guild year and we hope to make it an enjoyable event (especially for those lucky award-winners).

This will be the penultimate newsletter for the year. I hope to get one out not long after the dinner, so that Santa can have something to read after he's done all his work.

a genuine appreciation of what, by any standards, must be the most exciting beer scene on Earth today.

Having perfected pale ales and IPAs and pushed the obsession with IBUs as far as it can scientifically go, the leading craft brewers are now exploring Belgian styles and working with wild yeasts. Interestingly, they're still shying away from anything resembling the most extreme lambics and gueuzes, but they're brewing some great sour ales. The only thing missing in the US is a low ABV session beer — everything good starts at 6%. This is the next challenge, the next big thing, according to Charlie Papazian, the GABF's mastermind. If you go to Denver next year, expect to try a whole bunch of efforts to master the last remaining style unconquered by the Americans — real ale.

The English scene was the original inspiration behind this extraordinary celebration of beer, and England was honoured when Michael Jackson was presented with a Lifetime Achievement Award. The audience could not have been any more ecstatic if his gloved namesake had moonwalked across the stage to pick up the gong.

Pete Brown

Directory

PRODUCTION OF the Guild's Directory is now approaching its frenetic climax, so if you have forgotten to send in your renewal form (and cheque, of course) please do so now. Several members have decided not to rejoin, but I also know of some who have promised me their renewal forms but haven't yet sent them in. If you are one of these please get in touch, as November 18 is the very final cut-off date. Dutch-based website writer Ron Pattinson is the latest new member to join and get in just under the Directory's deadline.

House in the country

To celebrate its first anniversary, the Thornbridge Brewery, based in the grounds of Thornbridge Hall, just outside Ashford-in-the-Water, Derbyshire, is hosting a beer dinner on December 1 with Roger Protz. Members of the Guild visited the Hall earlier this year and were bowled over by the sumptuous surroundings and good beer, so this is well worth a visit. Tickets are £35, to include a four-course dinner and beer. Details: 01629 640617.

Green Beer

BRITISH brewers have a pretty good story to tell when it comes to the environment, writes *Tim Hampson*. Most of the raw materials are grown in this country, while the energy used and water needed to brew a pint is a lot less than it was 20 years ago. Adnams have now taken

a commitment to the environment a step further. The company has announced plans for the construction of what is possibly Britain's greenest warehouse and it should make a fantastic story for anyone wanting a feature idea. The brewery's new distribution centre in Southwold, Suffolk, which will be operational from September 2006, is the first commercial building in the UK to be constructed from environmentally friendly and highly sustainable lime hemp blocks and will include both a 'living' green carpet on the roof and a reed cleansed waste water system. It is built in an old gravel pit which means that most of the building will be out of view.

Shop!

Guild members Jeff Evans and Tim Hampson were recently both guests of Teddy Maufe, owner of The Real Ale Shop, Branthill Farm, Wells-next-the-Sea, Norfolk (www.therealaleshop.co.uk). The pair were invited to this outstanding shop, currently CAMRA's Best Independent Retailer 2005, for its second Octoberfest. Appropriately the competition had a Nelson/Trafalgar theme and they judged Fox Brewery's Nelson's Blood Bitter, flavoured with rum, to be the overall winner. Runner-up was Lady Hamilton's Tipple from Tipple's Brewery. In the spring, the shop, which has only been open for 18 months, won the *Eastern Daily Press*' 'Plough to Plate' Award (sponsored by DEFRA) for its initiative in highlighting the link between malting barley grown on this farm and the ales on the shop's shelves.

Beer From The Coast

With a strapline like that the party of seven Guild members knew they were in for a treat when meeting the Adnams directors in October for an update on their development plans for the Southwold brewery.

Jonathan Adnam (Chairman-elect) explained that the growing demand for their two main draught beers (Bitter and Broadside), plus seasonal specialities, needed the final link in the production plant to be installed. This new fully-automated four-vessel brewhouse, developed by German manufacturers Huppmann, follows the installation of fermenters and associated yeast handing equipment put in over the last five years.

The new brewhouse, which is due on stream in 2007, will allow a flexible approach to raw materials, processes and beer types with

improved energy and resource utilisation for sustainable long term production. On a similar issue, Andy Wood (Managing Director-elect) described the building of an environmentally friendly new distribution warehouse — taking the increased brewery throughput to an edge-of-town 85-acre former gravel pit (see story above).

The group, Roger Protz, Adrian Tierney-Jones, Tim Hampson, Melissa Cole, Ian Hornsey, Richard Morrice and John White, then had a tour of the brewery led by brewer Fergus Fitzgerald, smelling and chewing the hops and malt, sniffing the fermentations and ducking the scaffolding where the new brewhouse will go. Before leaving the site we were privileged to be given a preview by Steve Curzen (Marketing Director) of the marketing and brand development plans for the 2006 campaign (we are

sworn to secrecy). This culminated in a valuable round table discussion with the Adnams team of the difficulties (smoking) and competitive pressures (access to market) that the writers saw challenging our industry.

Later on in the evening, several local Suffolk CAMRA members and writers joined the group for a tasting of five Adnams draught and bottled beers hosted by Roger Protz at the Sole Bay Inn. This event included Flagship, a dark, tangy smooth and spicy draught ale brewed to commemorate the bicentennial of the Battle of Trafalgar. Adnams' Sole Bay Brewery pre-dated Nelson's victory and the investments seen by the Guild at Southwold confirm a most encouraging view for the next 200 years. The renaissance of cask beer continues.

Chris J Marchbanks