

# British Guild Of Beer Writers

Newsletter — March 2011



## The Chairman Reports...

**BREWING IN the UK has never more exciting. More beer styles are being brewed than at any other time, while there is great creativity as brewers search for new flavours and aromas and others develop imaginative food pairings. For instance, late last year, Rupert Ponsonby took this to new and uncharted heights with his pairings of once-cooked, twice-cooked and even chocolate covered pork scratchings with beer.**

The SIBA Local Brewing Industry Report 2011 paints a picture of a vibrant industry. According to the report — based on a survey of just over half of SIBA's 463 members — local beer volumes grew by 8.8% during 2010, compared to an overall decline in the UK beer market of 3.9% (British Beer & Pub Association's 'Beer Barometer'). Brewers starting in business last year contributed a 1.3% increase, meaning 'like for like' sales rose by 7.5%.

The diversity of SIBA members' output is startling; with 2500 cask beer brands brewed year-round, 3500 seasonal ales and 1750 bottled brands. Given that in 1976 there were just over 300 cask ales, it's clear that local brewers have reinvigorated the sector. And it's not just the cask sector: it is great to see so much media coverage of the new wave of flavoursome keg and bottled beers.

But vibrancy is not the same as profitability. BBPA's chief executive Brigid Simmonds told me that brewers on average were only making a 1p a pint profit. The figure was calculated by Oxford Economics as part of its work for the BBPA's budget submission. With profits at such a low level the future of some brewers has to be in doubt.

After the sale of Sharps to Molson Moors I had a conversation with an industry analyst who spends his day trawling through company reports. His view was quite clear — most of the companies (large and small) were chasing volume and not profit. And certainly without Progressive Beer Duty (PBD) many companies would move quickly from apparent health to the financial sick bed. This is backed up by SIBA's report, which says most of its members believe their brewery would fail if PBD were withdrawn.

But with the beer market declining by nearly 4% last year it is probably safe to bet that there are some large regional and national brewers who would be happy to see PBD consigned to the dustbin of good ideas. At a local level they argue PBD unfairly distorts the market.

We have an industry that is jam packed with passion and flair. Jobs are being created and investment is being made in new plant and equipment. Money is spent on exciting marketing. But the line between success and failure is narrow — and like it or not brewers need profits if the vibrancy of the industry is to continue. **TH**

## Ale by sail

BARTRAMS BREWERY is the latest brewer to sign up to make the five-week epic sea voyage to St Petersburg in Russia. Brilliant Beer's Tim O'Rourke is the man behind the Ale4Sail Great Baltic Adventure, an ambitious attempt not just to recreate a once hazardous sea voyage but also to promote British cask beers at festivals in Stockholm, Helsinki and Copenhagen. The plan is to take 12 specially brewed Imperial Russian Stouts, each produced by a different brewer, all the way to St Petersburg, where they will be judged at a beer festival on 18 June to find out which stout would have been fit for the court of Catherine the Great.

Organiser Tim O'Rourke says he is still looking for people to crew the Thermopylae Clipper that will undertake the journey. He says: 'the passage will take five weeks with stopovers in a major city

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every Saturday when we will be able to change crew. There will be stops at intermediate ports on the way round.' Interested? For further details book online at [www.thegreatbalticadventure.com](http://www.thegreatbalticadventure.com) or contact [tim@brilliantbeer.com](mailto:tim@brilliantbeer.com).

TH

## **Snap. Hoppy.**

AS A NEWER member than most and as an ex-brewer and as a drinker, I want to remind my wordy associates about the importance of good images to accompany their fantastic articles. In fact, I'm going to go as far as to suggest you initiate new photography to suit your purposes. There are so many homemade, bad or average photos of beer and beer culture — we've all seen them and, with the best intent, some of you will have used them or even produced them. It's important to appreciate that in the same way that you sculpt your sentences and fashion your phrases (you can see why I don't write) my job as a photographer is to breathe beauty into each frame of the beer world, the same kind of beauty you feel the moment you find that perfect beer in front of you. The more visually stimulated beerophiles amongst you will notice that we are out there trying to do this. Photography is a language. I realise there are a plentiful supply of images provided by some of the producers, but by commissioning a photo or a series of images, you can get stimulating, bespoke and creative photos that intensify your words. Good partnerships between writers and photographers are winning combinations as a good photographer can shoot exactly to match a story. From a writer's point of view, the best thing about a good image is the power it holds over the innocent punter — it will stop them and hook them in: 'that's nice photo... what's this about?' Whatever it is you write next, remember that. Imagine your words on the page beneath a lovely photo... If you want photography, ask someone for it. It doesn't have to be expensive; professionals can work to a budget and in some cases, for expenses only and as long as they get a credit (and maybe some beer!). Some newer ones will even do it for free because they want something interesting to shoot. Whether you are a writer, a brewery, a pub, an association — whatever, please feel free get in touch and let me know what you think at [www.billbradshaw.co.uk](http://www.billbradshaw.co.uk).

Bill Bradshaw

## **The Last Drop: England's Surviving Brewery Heritage**

A DAY-LONG conference will be held at Burton-on-Trent on Saturday March 12 to launch a report on England's brewing heritage. The event will be spent looking at the report's findings for breweries, their archives and recommendations alongside three case studies. It will be jointly presented by the Brewery History Society and English Heritage in the Worthington Suite of the National Brewery Centre. The fee for the day, which includes coffee, a buffet lunch, tea and a copy of the SHIER Report on disc, is £24. See [http://www.breweryhistory.com/2011\\_Conference/2011\\_Conference01.htm](http://www.breweryhistory.com/2011_Conference/2011_Conference01.htm) for full details, or email: [Conference@BreweryHistory.com](mailto:Conference@BreweryHistory.com).

## **Strawberry fields forever**

MY LIFE has come full circle. In the mid eighties, when I was a newly legal beer drinker, my friends and I revered a special pub. We'd already worked out (or been educated) that good beer was what we should drink. Occasionally, when we could get our hands on a parental car and an abstemious volunteer, we'd go to the Masons Arms at Strawberry Bank. There we drank tremendous cask ale and dabbled in foreign exotica. I vividly remember our first experience of a Liefmans fruit beer. 'Fruit ...beer?', 'fruit...beer?' we intoned incredulously.

The guru behind the Masons Arms was Nigel Stevenson, known to many Guild members through his later work with James Clay. We were in awe of Nigel. And a little bit scared; especially when he told off my friend for climbing through the gents window attempting to avoid the "scuse me, 'scuse me" through the crowded pub.

Fast forward quarter of a century and, for one night only, I'm going to be the Masons Arms resident beer guru. I'm co-organising a beer dinner with Dave 'Hardknott' Bailey, and local beer fans Neil Bowness and Alex Routledge. We've decided on a seven-course taster menu of classic British dishes each paired with a beer from the more innovative members of the UK's craft brewing world. I will give an introduction to the dinner and each course will be presented by me or by one of my cohorts. I'll be emphasising that there are few works of reference for beer and food matching and that our event will hopefully add to the greater communal flavour knowledge. Chef Dave Gribble has already prepared some trial-run tasters and I can safely say we have some treats in store.

The dinner is on March 10 and costs £35. Contact me of go to [www.masonsarmsstrawberrybank.co.uk](http://www.masonsarmsstrawberrybank.co.uk) for more details.

Jeff Pickthall

## **Playing the Dane**

I AM just about to nail down a bookstall at the Copenhagen Beer Festival ([www.beerfestival.dk](http://www.beerfestival.dk)), which runs from Thursday 26 to Saturday 28 May. In sharp contrast to CAMRA, the Danish equivalent, Danske Ølentusiaster (or DanØI), move fast and are extremely efficient and welcoming. Cogan & Mater will hire the stand but could I put out a call for some volunteers to show up and help me man it? People will need to be willing to get themselves there and find accommodation — Denmark is expensive — and to commit to doing a few hours of selling books and meeting the public, so it would not be a simple jolly. In contrast to GBBF, Carlsberg have a big presence there and put on an

### **CALENDAR 2011**

- CAMRA members weekend/AGM, Sheffield April 15-17
- European Beer Bloggers Conference, London, May 20-22
- British Guild of Beer Writers AGM, London, venue to be confirmed, June 8
- Pre-GBBF event, venue to be confirmed, Aug 1
- Great British Beer Festival, London, August 2-6

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

impressive show with the very best of their 'craft beer' range. They might be willing to sponsor a visit but I will not have time to organise that. The festival has a great atmosphere, is well organised and I guarantee all attendees will find 100+ new beers that will knock their socks off. All assistance gratefully received. If there are any Guild members et al who would like to commit to a substantial presence I will be happy to supply entry tickets and beer tokens but cannot risk financially beyond that as I have no idea how many books I might sell. Any Guild members with publishers who would be willing to supply books at 40% discount or better I will be happy to correspond with. The locals mostly read English but are generally as anti-advertising and sceptical as specialist readers everywhere. All assistance gratefully received. Contact me at BelgiumGBG@aol.com. Tim Webb

## Live Lager

THE LAUNCH of a new lager in the UK is rarely a source of much excitement for the beer-writing community.

Yet when the beer is from Budvar and is the first live yeast beer to be exported from the Czech brewery in living memory, it's probably worthy of comment.

The krausened lager makes up about 5% of the brewery's production, and is sold at just a select few dozen outlets across the Czech Republic. It caused such a stir when it made an appearance at GBBF a couple of years ago that Budvar has now started shipping limited quantities to the UK.

Having first tried the beer at the Tower Bridge Draft House in December, Roger Protz and I travelled to the Czech Republic in February to see it in production. Former brew master Josef Tolar talked us through the process, explaining that it undergoes precisely the same brewing, filtration and long storage process of the standard Budvar Original. Only as it is decanted into keg is it blended with a newer, green beer — essentially unfiltered, unpasteurised hopped wort — which contains living yeast and kick-starts a secondary fermentation process in the keg.

It is a process steeped in Central European history, even if the details are somewhat lost in the mists of time. 'Krausened beer is a very old style,' said Joe. 'It was common in Austria, Germany and Bohemia but we have no details of precisely how it was made.'

The green beer is sweetish, cloudy, bitter and soporific: 'Like Horlicks with hops,' Roger reckoned, before we pressed a reluctant Joe to reveal quite how much of it is added in the krausening process.

He wouldn't say, but it's enough to make a difference. 'The secondary fermentation gives it a fuller taste,' said Joe. 'It's possible for those of a sensitive palate to recognise the addition of the yeast,' rather throwing down the gauntlet to see if the beer writers were up to the task.

Drinking the two beers in isolation, I'd probably find it impossible to tell them apart — and certainly there is no discernible difference of colour or opacity. But tasting them side-by-side the slightly fuller, sharper taste of the krausened beer reveals itself. The sweetness of the green beer disappears during the secondary fermentation, creating a beer which is dryer, slightly more bitter and a notch more full-flavoured, giving the impression that it is rather stronger — though the

secondary fermentation actually has no significant impact on the strength.

It is no accident that the UK has been chosen as the first country outside the beer's homeland to take the beer: 'Your real ale pubs have the perfect conditions for this, and the expertise in handling live beers,' Joe explained. With a shelf life of around six weeks — at least one of which is spent with the keg sitting in the cellar at 6-8°C — Budvar only entrusts the beer to outlets where they're confident it will be well cared for.

The northern launch of Budvar Yeast Beer is at the Lancaster Beer Festival in March. Simon Jenkins

## The hunt is on

SAINSBURY'S ARE proud to announce their third national beer competition — The Great British Beer Hunt. Their two previous competitions rewrote the rulebook and were hugely successful with hundreds of beers being entered. They created a mass of good PR for the participating brewers, which benefited them specifically and the industry as a whole.

The Premium Bottled Ale market is showing sustained organic growth and Sainsbury's are committed to doing their part to develop the category.

This year sees a number of major developments to help make an even bigger impact: There are four regional heats where Sainsbury's customers aided by a panel of expert judges will select a total of 16 beers — four from each region — which will go through to a national in-store competition which will run over three weeks in the Autumn. At these regional heats Sainsbury's customers will rate the beers and have a chance to meet the brewers in a convivial exhibition area. The brewers will be able to meet members of the Sainsbury's team. The two top selling beers from each region will go through to the Grand Final in late September where two beers will be selected to go into national distribution for six months starting pre-Christmas.

Once more Guild member Richard Morrice and his team at People Energies are managing the competition. He is excited about the opportunities that the competition brings to brewers nationally. 'Once more Sainsbury's have gone the extra mile to create a competition which takes into account the needs of smaller brewers. The openness and transparency of previous years remain but new powerful features have been added such as regional heats and the opportunity for brewers to meet local Sainsbury's customers and members of the Sainsbury's team. We are on hand to help every brewer as the competition unfolds and we will work hard to answer every question asked of us. This is a very clear example of a major supermarket making a major investment in the brewing industry. I hope that some British Guild members will be able to help judge the Competition at its various stages.'

There is a website — [www.sainsburysbeerhunt.com](http://www.sainsburysbeerhunt.com) — which gives all the details and Richard will be pleased to provide any further information that you require. [richard@peopleenergies.com](mailto:richard@peopleenergies.com) or 07836 697660.

**DEADLINE FOR THE NEXT ISSUE IS  
MARCH 29, 2011**



## ***The Beer Academy and the Beer Bloggers Conference***

COME AND see The Beer Academy at the Beer Bloggers Conference on May 20-22. Venue: The Brewery, Chiswell Street, London EC1Y 4SD. Here is the event programme: Friday, May 20: Noon Registration and meet the sponsors; 2pm Conference Content details coming soon; 6:30pm Dinner at The Brewery courtesy of MolsonCoors; 8:30pm Evening Party — details coming soon.

Saturday, May 21: 9:30am Conference Content — details coming soon; 11:30am Lunch on your own at local restaurants and pubs; 1:30pm Conference Content — details coming soon; 4:00pm Live Beer Blogging; 6:30pm Dinner at Wells & Youngs pub; 8:30pm Evening Party — details coming soon.

Sunday, May 22: 11:00am Brewery tour and lunch at Fullers; 2:00pm Conference finish; 4:00pm Optional: Arsenal at Fulham football match, last game of the season, tickets extra (*and display of the Premiership Trophy- Ed*). For more information visit <http://beerbloggersconference.org/>

## ***Birrificio del Ducato is Italian Microbrewery of the Year***

Birra dell'Anno is the most important craft beer competition held in Italy and one of the best resources to understand the explosion of real beer' in Italy. The list of participants of the 2011 edition has increased a lot to 82 breweries and 386 beers in different styles including chestnut ales, wood aged beers and special fruit beers (some of them with wine grapes). The competition was organized by Unionbirrai ([www.unionbirrai.com](http://www.unionbirrai.com)) in collaboration with the annual Beer Fair in Rimini (February 19-22) and was a real triumph for Birrificio del Ducato ([www.birrificiodelducato.it](http://www.birrificiodelducato.it)) who won five gold medals and the special prize of Brewery of the Year. With these results Birrificio del Ducato ended an extraordinary year after winning medals in the International Beer Challenge 2010, World Beer Cup 2010 and European Beer Star 2010. Maurizio Maestrelli

## ***Beer: write an ode to its joy and win 2k***

OXFORD BROOKES University and Wells & Young's have come together to offer the £2000 Bombardier Beer prize for writing on 'the joys and jolliness of beer'. Bombardier Beer and Oxford Brookes University today announce the launch of a new competition with a £2000 cash prize offered for the best piece of writing about beer and its role in society. The competition is open to anyone who writes about beer — or aspires to do so — from mainstream journalists and the top names of the beer-writing world, to young bloggers and as-yet-unpublished enthusiasts. The judges are asking for a piece of up to 1500 words on the subject of beer's role in society, or as writer, food critic and competition judge Charles Champion puts it, 'the joys and jolliness of beer', and beer's role as a social lubricant. 'We're not looking for technical writing, campaigning tracts or extracts from guidebooks,' continues Champion, 'beer is the most

sociable drink in the world and doesn't get fair recognition. This prize is an attempt to help change that.' As well as Champion, judges will include Paul Wells from Wells & Youngs who are sponsoring the prize, Donald Sloan, the Chair of Oxford Gastronomia at Oxford Brookes University, and Guild member Pete Brown. The closing date for entries will be Friday April 1, 2011. The winner will then be announced at the 2011 Sunday Times Oxford Literary Festival on the evening of Friday April 8, during a dinner and reception at the Oxford Malmaison Hotel. For full details on format of entries and submission process contact Razia Nabi ([rnabi@brookes.ac.uk](mailto:rnabi@brookes.ac.uk)).

## **AOB**

### **FROM COGAN & MATER**

'CAMRA has confirmed that Cogan & Mater Ltd can run a bookstall at the Great British Beer Festival. More details should be available soon. As yet we do not know the size, location or cost of the stall. It is hoped to be able to act as a meeting place for Guild members and somewhere that can showcase the best of British beer writing.' Tim Webb

### **FROM THE PLR**

'Even though it is more than 30 years since the Public Lending Right Act was passed that gave authors, and other contributors to books, the right to receive a payment when their books were borrowed from public libraries some authors have still not heard about PLR. At a time when many writer's earnings have dropped due to reduced advances and royalties, it is a shame that some may be missing out payments they are entitled to. We would be grateful if you could pass information about the Scheme to your members so we can make sure that everyone who is eligible to register is aware of the Scheme. Anyone wanting more information can visit our website [www.plr.uk.com](http://www.plr.uk.com) or telephone 01642 604699.'