

British Guild Of Beer Writers

Newsletter — May 2011



The Chairman Reports...

THE THAMES at Greenwich has seen many famous ships set sail. But, in recent years few journeys will have been as epic as the attempt to recreate the most heroic journey beer has had to make for 200 years — taking Imperial Stout from London to St Petersburg in Russia.

Setting sail on May 15, Tim O'Rourke's plan is to take 12 Imperial Russian Stouts, each produced by a different brewer, all the way to Saint Petersburg, where they will be judged in a beer festival on June 18 to find out which stout is fit for the Court of Catherine the Great. On the way, British cask beers will be promoted at festivals in Stockholm, Helsinki and Copenhagen.

But you don't have to go to St Petersburg to enjoy the beer. A festival of the Imperial Stouts making the journey to Russia is being held at the Dial Arch pub, Royal Arsenal Riverside, London SE18 6GW from 13-15 May.

Go to www.thegreatbalticadventure.com for more information.

IF MARK DREDGE'S energy could be harnessed there would probably be enough to power a small brewery. Later this month (May 20-22) he is organising the European Beer Bloggers Conference and several Guild members including Melissa Cole and Pete Brown will be taking part. The Guild has been given its own slot too, which will look at the future of beer writing in an era of electronic social media, where comment costs nothing and most writers do it for free. There are still places left at the conference, which should be an excellent way of networking, drinking and meeting some of the shining lights in the electronic media world. You don't have to be a

blogger to attend. But if you are interested in beer, its history, science, food and drink pairings and quaffing the odd malted brew there should be something for you. So if you want to come along and find out the answers to questions about beer blogging that you won't find on Google visit www.zephyradventures.com/bbce_registration.htm

Tim Hampson

Guild AGM details

THE GUILD'S AGM is now officially called for Wednesday June 8 at the Devereaux on the Strand (20 Devereaux Court, Essex Street, The Strand, London WC2R 3JJ); it will kick-off upstairs at 6.30pm with a buffet to be served at 8/8.30pm. I would like to thank Punch Taverns for their kind hospitality. Tim Hampson has indicated he is happy to continue as Chairman, but any members wishing to stand should let the Secretary know; while both Secretary and Treasurer are also happy to continue. At the time of writing, the majority of the members of the committee have signaled their joint intentions to continue (there is a maximum of nine members, including three officers); however, Zak Avery will be stepping down so there is place on the committee. At the moment, we have no contenders wishing to stand, so if you fancy a go then why not stand? If it tickles your fancy then let the Secretary know — and the time-honored procedure of nominations, seconding and then having a vote will be undertaken. 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. However, according to the Constitution any motions that members want on the agenda must be sent to the Secretary at least seven days before the AGM.

Finally, if you are coming please try and let the Secretary know so that he can tell the pub how many people they can expect for the buffet. If you have never been to an AGM before please make an effort, it's a chance to meet other Guild members and make your voice heard.

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Writing London's Best Beer

FELLOW BEER WRITERS will be familiar with the challenge of arousing sympathy in others for all our hard work. When I tell people that between November 13 and February 8 I visited 297 pubs, bars and other beer outlets in Greater London as research for my first book, *The CAMRA Guide to London's Best Beer Pubs and Bars*, they just think it sounds like the ultimate glorious riproaring pub crawl. Consider the reality, I feebly argue, of visiting 21 pubs in a 14-hour day with no more than a few sips of a half in any of them. In fact I spent more time travelling than in the pubs themselves — by every mode other than my own car, including bus, tube, train, tram, Boris bike and, just once, a taxi to extricate me from the rural extremities of the London Borough of Bromley. I'm grateful for being a keen and fast walker as this provided the most convenient mode for most of the trips.

Still, my underappreciated labours should not be in vain as I'm confident the book, published by CAMRA Books on July 4, is the most comprehensive guide yet written to craft beer in London. And it's also timely as at last the beer scene in the city seems to be on an upward curve. It's particularly encouraging to see a notably younger and very savvy crowd out enjoying fine beer in new pubs and bars like Cask, the Dean Swift, the Euston Tap, the Jolly Butchers, Mason & Taylor and the awesome Southampton Arms.

All these and around 250 other outlets are featured in the directory of places to drink, chosen to give a broad picture of the wide variety of top quality beer available in London — not only cask, but bottled and imported craft beers too. Then there's an extensive section on beers widely available in London, not only from the UK but from some other countries, with brief tasting notes, as well as pieces on London's general and brewing history and my take on the obligatory How Beer is Brewed section.

I'm delighted the London Brewers Alliance has sponsored the book, as the rebirth of London brewing is one of the most exciting stories it's been my privilege to tell. When Young's quit Wandsworth in 2006 only seven commercial breweries were left in the capital, of which only two were substantial producers of craft beer. But since early 2007 another seven have appeared, and many of the existing brewers have developed and grown substantially. The quality too is impressive — as one brewer told me, there's little point in brewing in London unless you can at least match the standard of Fuller's.

Some of the new brewers are truly extraordinary, like the Kernel, recently listed as one of the top five newcomers of 2010 by ratebeer.com. While we're still some way from reclaiming London's title as the brewing capital of the world, we Londoners certainly don't have to hang our heads in shame anymore when we're asked about our local breweries.

Inevitably the book is already out of date, and even before the advance copies arrive from the printer I've begun the process of putting updates online at desdemoor.co.uk. I'm already working my way through a list of over 50 other places that might conceivably have been included — not that I'm expecting any sympathy, of course.

Des de Moor

A cautionary tale of the ale

A FEW WEEKS ago, I received an e-mail from an editor at one of the glossy men's magazines. I'm working on a feature on beer and I thought you would be a good source for the article, she said. Can I call you this week? I can make it anytime and work around your schedule.

Of course, this is not the first such approach I've received in the two decades I've been writing about beer but I'm afraid that flattery no longer works and no matter how 'good' I would be to speak to about this, I've become seriously hardened to such invitations.

I've lost count of the number of times I've responded to this sort of request, thinking that the publicity will be handy and that something possibly, just possibly, may come of it. All too often, however, I've seen my knowledge and experience stolen by other journalists and gained very little for my considerable time and generosity. Sometimes there is not even a proper credit given for my input, in which case the sub editor usually gets the blame for leaning too heavily on his delete key.

Are there times when we should play ball in such circumstances? I think so. If you've a book to promote, for instance, it can be handy to offer a few quotes in return for a mention. But that's quite a different scenario from virtually giving the reporter the whole story and it is quite wrong for fellow journalists to expect this. If they feel up to writing a feature on beer, then let them do their own research. Let them visit breweries, talk to brewers and taste all the relevant beers. Why should they piggy back on the years of research we have done and the knowledge we have painstakingly acquired?

Is it just beer that this relates to? I can't believe so, but do wine writers face the same problem, I wonder? How often is Jancis Robinson asked to give away her in-depth knowledge for nothing? I think I know how she would respond if anyone did dare to suggest that (incidentally, I've also had one or two wine writers try it on, digging for information for pieces they were writing about beer).

I decided on a polite response to the offending e-mail. Great idea for a story, I said, and I can think of lots of good angles. If you're looking to commission me to write the feature just let me know and I'll get onto it straight away.

I'm still waiting. The editor who wanted so much help from me has not had the courtesy to reply. Jeff Evans

Beer Academy course

- 90 minute tasting (mild), White Horse, May 10
- How to judge beer, White Horse, May 19
- 90 minute tasting (beer & chocolate), White Horse, May 24
- 90 minute tasting (Old World vs New World), White Horse, June 14

CALENDAR 2011

- European Beer Bloggers Conference, London, May 20-22
- British Guild of Beer Writers AGM, London, 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