

British Guild Of Beer Writers

Newsletter June 2011



WITHOUT FEAR OF CONTRADICTION, I can say that the Guild has never had more members or been financially stronger. At last year's AGM, I outlined the challenges the Guild faced because of the growing success of the awards, dinner and other activities. The committee has started to address these challenges and held a planning day earlier this year, to which every committee member gave up their valuable time to attend.

Rightly, it was decided that we should put a strategy in place before rushing headlong into new activities. However, it is clear that we do need to think carefully about how we invest the Guild's money in activities that promote our aims and objectives, while safeguarding our funds and goodwill built up over the years.

To begin we went right back to the principles of the organisation laid down by those that founded the Guild. It all began in 1988 and the founding principle of 'improving the standards of beer writing and extending the public knowledge of beer' is as relevant now as it was then. However, not undertaking change is not an option either.

Points that will be included in the Guild's future direction:

- Increase standards and understanding of beer amongst the membership — this could include developing a beer taxonomy and the facilitation of training courses, such as the How to Judge Beer course offered by the Beer Academy.
- Increase member confidence — starting to implement stage one will increase confidence and, albeit not overnight, we will notice it in the conversations we have, and the work that comes out.
- Introduce ideas — what can we do to ensure editors want to commission articles on beer? The aim here is to increase column inches and increase the spread of titles with articles about beer.
- Share names of Guild members and local breweries — we probably have the tools available to do this, but need to do it more effectively.
- More stories and of a higher standard — there should be a slow increase in the number of articles/column inches/titles as a result of the activities.
- Increase interest in membership and in beer — the increasing profile of a co-ordinated approach will gently increase the appeal of belonging, drawing other beer writers to join and particularly breweries, who see their competitors getting all the free PR.
- Increase membership fees in line with value created — the actions above will take hard work and whilst the impact will be longer lasting, it is unrealistic to think that this level of gratuitous input is sustainable.
- A Guild for serious writers — increasing

CHAIRMAN: Tim Hampson Tel: 01865 245711; 07768 614283 tim@infopub.co.uk

TREASURER: Paul Nunny paul@nunny.fsbusiness.co.uk

SECRETARY: Adrian Tierney-Jones Woodcote, 2 Jury Road, Dulverton, Somerset TA22 9DU
Tel: 01398 324314 tierneyjones@btinternet.com

www.beerwriters.co.uk

the fees will have the effect of reducing those members who do not gain value from the Guild and this should be seen as a positive body promoting excellence in its field.

I hope the next committee will take on the task of implementing elements of the strategy. Some elements are already being put into place. An event management company is helping with the running of the annual dinner. With more than 200 people now attending the dinner, it is no longer practical for volunteer members to take manage every element of the event. However, the key elements of the dinner — the theme of the menu and the beers chosen remain firmly under the Guild's control.

The organisation of the awards will be outsourced — recently we have relied on the goodwill of the current Beer Writer of the Year to undertake much of this work including finding judges and booking hotel rooms for them, coordinating meetings, ensuring all winners attend the dinner and ordering tankards. It is no longer practical to do it in this way. I also expect that the committee will have to look at the Secretary's honorarium, which has remained unchanged for many years.

Of course with the expenditure of extra money comes increased responsibility. It will be down to the committee to ensure money is spent in a fair, open and accountable way and of course the wider membership who will be able to scrutinise our audited accounts at the AGM.

Beer and Literature festivals One idea I would like to throw into the pot, which I believe fits in well with elements of the Guild's strategy, is a series of beer and literature festivals in pubs. Last year's Hay Ale and Literature Festival could be the model for such events. Working with pubs regionally we could organise three or four a year. Already, a pub in Sheffield is keen to be involved. The pub takes on the burden of organising an event, the Guild would pump prime it by paying for some PR to support the event locally and members would have the opportunity to be invited to speak at the events and hopefully sell some books. Finally our AGM is taking place on June 8 and members will take the opportunity to engage in the conversation about the Guild's future direction.

Tim Hampson

A Plea

I AM studying for an MA in photography at BCU in Birmingham. As part of it and my main piece of work is a thesis surrounding the village church and its interrelationship with the village pub. Has any Guild member written or photographed anything to do with this topic? If so could I look at the work and perhaps use it as part of this project. Please contact me at [steve.sharples@mac.com](mailto:sharples@mac.com).

Steve Sharples

Norwich city of beer

THE WELCOME sign as you enter Norwich tells you it's a 'Fine City'. Well let me tell you, it has some damn fine ales, too. Norwich City of Ale, opening at the end of May, was an 11-day homage to local brewers and their excellent beers. This was a beer festival with a difference. Instead of one big venue, the beers were spread out among 31 pubs around the centre of Norwich, with varying numbers at each site.

The event was first mooted at last year's Norwich Beer Festival and Dawn Leeder and Phil Cutter took up co-chairmanship, getting 36 brewers on board, and enlisting the support from the likes of the city's CAMRA branch, the *Norwich Evening Press* and Community Pubs minister Bob Neill.

I was only able to be there for a couple of days, but the festival showed off Norwich, its beers and pubs perfectly. A launch party — itself a mini beer festival, with live music and local food — was attended by author and *Good Beer Guide* editor Roger Protz, who told a packed St Gregory's Arts Centre: 'Norwich is setting the pace. I hope other towns and cities do what you're doing to boost our beautiful beer. This is a brilliant initiative between brewers and publicans to put cask ale on the map.' He then went on to say how important it was to stress the role of both local and regional papers, which gave the events daily coverage.

Two of the pubs I visited couldn't have been more different. The Plough, in the city centre,

CALENDAR 2011

- British Guild of Beer Writers AGM, London, Deveraux on the Strand, 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

is the tap for Alburgh brewery Grain, small but perfectly formed, where my pint of choice was the 4.8% best bitter Redwood. At the Fat Cat Brewery Tap there was a wider range, with several beers on handpump and more racked up in the cellar. The full Fat Cat range was complemented by a dozen or so guests.

Other towns and cities watch and learn. This could be the template for the beer festival of the future.

Darren Norbury

Help

THE GUILD is looking for your help at the Great British Beer Festival. Longstanding member Tim Webb of Cogan Mater, who publishes some excellent beer books, including *Lambicland*, *Around Bruges in 80 Beers* and *Around Brussels in 80 Beers* wants the support of members to help in running a bookstall. Fresh from a successful visit to the Copenhagen Beer Festival where he managed to sell lots of British beer books to a foreign language audience he has decided to take a stall at the Great British Beer Festival in London August 2-6.

The financial costs involved are quite substantial, but he is determined to make the venture work and it will be a fantastic showcase for beer writing and members of the Guild. However, he needs staff to work on the stall — it needs three people at all times and I am sure he would like to hear from other publishers and authors who might be able to help with stock, book signings and promotion of the stall.

Tim says: 'I think it would be very good experience for numerous Guild members to work selling books. Meeting the public when they interact with the product is eye-opening.'

Contact Tim on BelgiumGBG@aol.com if you think you can help in any way.

Beer Bloggers Conference

THE INAUGURAL European Beer Bloggers Conference took place in London May 20-22 and saw over 70 bloggers, writers, brewers and brewery staff attending for a series of talks, tutored tastings, brewery visits, good food and good beer. MolsonCoors, Adnams, Badger, Shepherd Neame and Brains greeted the flow of conference attendees by pouring beers and having the chance to talk with them

before Scott Wilson, MolsonCoors' Director of Public Affairs, started the weekend off by describing beer bloggers as the vanguard of beer media and urging the room that all beer should be celebrated. Peter Haydon discussed the history of porter in London, which was very appropriate given that we were sitting in the old Whitbread Brewery. David Sheen from BBPA ran through a series of fascinating stats about British brewing. Pete Brown, Melissa Cole and Mark Fletcher then discussed the dos and don'ts of beer blogging.

Trying to ensure a mix of content that can be of general use to online writers, the next session was about identifying off-flavours and FlavorActiv presented six spiked samples of beer and described what the problems were and how they were caused. Next, thankfully, we were able to drink fault-free beer before a dinner hosted by MolsonCoors where Steve Wellington spoke about his career before announcing his retirement; the standing ovation he received will last a long time in the memories of everyone who was there.

The evening belonged to Pilsner Urquell who recreated a scene from Pilsen and poured unfiltered and unpasteurised Pilsner Urquell, which was flown direct from the brewery. This was an unforgettable experience.

Saturday started with Dave Bailey (Hardknott Brewery), Fergus Fitzgerald (Adnams) and Mark McLean (Brasserie de Brunehaut) talking about how they use social media as breweries. Then our international friends — Darren Packman (BeerSweden), Alessio Leone (Hoppy Hour, Italy) and Arnoud Paternot (Bestetotnutoe, Netherlands) — discussed the beer blogging scene in their respective countries. BrewDog's Martin Dickie talked about the growth of the brewery, before the Guild's Tim Hampson and Pete Brown discussed the Future of Beer Writing. The Beer Academy gave us a selection of beer and food matches to chew over before we moved to one of the craziest hours of the weekend: Live Beer Blogging (imagine speed dating bottles of beer...).

**DEADLINE FOR THE NEXT ISSUE IS
JUNE 25, 2011**

Wells & Young were the hosts for dinner as we headed in convoy, led by hop-pickers on stilts, to Dirty Dicks pub. Ben McFarland and Tom Sandham, plus brewery representatives, made for a great evening of beer and food, which also included a snail race and a personalised message from the Bombardier (played by Rick Mayall — Bang On!). The evening was spent at Camden Town Brewery where beers from Camden, Williams Bros, DarkStar and Marble were poured alongside Rogue and a selection from Czech Republic, Italy and Sweden.

We spent Sunday at Fuller's with a brewery tour followed by a fascinating discussion from Derek Prentice on the ingredients and aging of beer, before we tasted the aging process in action with some Vintage ales and Brewers Reserves, poured alongside a delicious Sunday lunch. Fuller's sent everyone off in the highest of spirits and capped the weekend in the best possible way.

An amazing weekend in which we felt the importance of online beer writing, enjoyed many informative and interesting talks, met new and old friends and drank lots of excellent beer. Thoughts are already turning to 2012.

Mark Dredge

THE AMERICANS have been on our turf many times before and so they came over in May to run the first European Beer Bloggers Conference (ably assisted by collaborator Mark Dredge). As with most things European that are held in the UK it was really a British event with a light smattering of non-Brits. But although light in number they added greatly to the debate. They also outnumbered members of the Guild.

As a conference about beer writing this was surprising. Most Guild members make their living, or part of it, from writing about beer. In contrast, many pure-bloggers are simply pursuing a hobby. So, did some members see themselves 'above' such an event (unless they were called upon to present) and would therefore learn little from it? Or are they not in it for the love? Or maybe they thought it was a waste of a weekend and that the sponsors involved would make it too unpalatable to

their fierce independence. After all, who needs MolsonCoors preaching to them about their 'great' beers?

I admit having slight reservations but these were short-lived as all the sponsors and brewers over-delivered. Pilsner Urquell, Wells & Young, Fuller's and Camden Town were among those who made it one of the most enjoyable weekends I've had in some time. Like most Guild members the offer of free beer is not exactly a draw — but they all gave much more than that.

Post-Conference, I now ponder whether it was maybe favourable to have only a limited number of Guild members present. It meant it wasn't competitive, it wasn't about hierarchy. It was solely about the love of beer and — although I'm not a socialist — good old comradeship working towards spreading the word of beer.

Cheers to Mr Dredge, the sponsors, and the Americans, who will certainly be welcomed back next year by this particular Guild member, unless the BGBW sends them packing and launches its own similar event — and recruits some more 'amateur' bloggers along the way.

Glynn Davis

News

FORMER *PUBLICAN* journalist Matt Eley has a new job. After leaving *The Publican* he joined Inapub (www.inapub.co.uk), which exists primarily to help pubs get to grips with new media and how to make the most of it. He has been developing a new B2B editorial led website for licensees, which is now live at www.inapubnews.co.uk. He would like to know what people think of it and wants PRs to start sending him media releases at matte@inapub.co.uk.

Beer Academy dates

- **June 14, Old World vs New World Ales, White Horse London**
- **June 16, One Day Foundation Course, Beer Academy London**
- **June 21-22, Two Day Advanced Course, Beer Academy, London**
- **June 29, Exciting Essex, The White Hart, Essex**

Go to www.beeracademy.co.uk for more details