

British Guild Of Beer Writers

Newsletter March 2012



NO GILDED words of purring pleasure this month from the Chairman I am afraid due to various work commitments on his part. However, on his behalf I would like to thank those who made it to Burton for the Guild's seminar earlier this week, as well as thanking the speakers for their time with a special thanks for organiser Harry White. Even though I couldn't get to it, I am told it was an excellent event (see new member Steve Lamond's account of it below) with plenty of information to chew on, plus the odd beer or two. If like me you couldn't make it, then do make an effort to attend the next seminar we organise. I know I shall. **Adrian Tierney-Jones**

Life in a materials world

STEPPING OFF the train and onto the platform at Burton you're immediately hit by the infamous 'Burton snatch' – that slightly eggy sulphurous aroma that informs you of your arrival in the home of pale ale. A visit to Shobnall Maltings is first in store and the sheer capacities it can cope with are astounding, especially to those of us who have only been to a traditional floor maltings before.

Early evening arrives and all and sundry assemble in the Burton Bridge Inn where many pints are sipped and interesting conversation ensues. As a new Guild member I'm made to feel very welcome and am soon introduced to far too many people to remember — I was glad of the name badges the following day! We're joined by local MP Andrew Griffiths who ably conducted us around Burton's choicer hostelrys, finishing in the Burton Old Cottage before heading for a great dinner in a local restaurant.

Emerging slightly bleary eyed the following morning I head to the William Worthington suite in the National Brewery Centre.

It's a lovely old-styled meeting room, with wooden panels and chandeliers. We're treated to talks from six very knowledgeable individuals on malt and hops and how they interact to form the finished product. I think even the most informed attendees will have taken some new knowledge away from the day.

Another highlight was the chance to try William Worthington P2 Imperial Stout served from the cask. A stonker of a beer, full of red berry flavours and rich chocolate, a little sourness in the finish helps to lift it off the palate. Certainly a treat. All in all a great two days mixing good beer, good company and interesting talks and I'd recommend people go along to the next Guild event whenever it may be! **Steve Lamond**

Run a more profitable pub

CHEERS NORTH EAST, the monthly magazine and brainchild of Guild member Alastair Gilmour, has teamed up with Edward Theakston Associates to offer a brilliant day-long training and advice session for publicans and staff. It's on Wednesday April 11 at the White Bear, Masham, North Yorkshire, at a special introductory rate of £50 per delegate. The day will feature strategic planning, cellar layout for optimum efficiency, staff training techniques, operational improvement, and piles of advice and initiatives that help make money at one end and stop it running out at the other.

'It's possibly the best £50 a pub operator could ever spend,' says Alastair. 'It's amazing value and Edward Theakston's sessions cater for everyone, whether they've just come into the business or been around for years and think they know the lot.'

'Edward is a member of the renowned brewing dynasty though not involved in day-to-day beer-making, but one thing's for sure, he's an

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inspirational coach and a terrific motivator who knows the licensed trade inside out.'

For full details and/or to register an interest email edward.theakston@edwardtheakstonassociates.co.uk or call 01677 460171 Alternatively, call Alastair on 07930 144846 or email alastair.gilmour@hotmail.com for more information. Rooms are available at the White Bear, the T&R Theakston brewery tap — visit www.thewhitebearhotel.co.uk.

London hop shoot festival

AN UNUSUAL ingredient will appear on London menus over the weekend of April 27-29. Members of the London Brewers' Alliance will be supplying hop shoots to the pubs, bars and restaurants they supply and challenging chefs across the capital to incorporate these tasty little spears into a variety of imaginatively created dishes.

Hop shoots are part of a number of plants that have picked up the pseudonym 'Poor Man's Asparagus'. This group includes samphire, salsify, Good King Henry and Alexanders; plants that were once eaten much more widely than they are today. The name suggests how they were traditionally prepared; fried in butter and, with a little salt, served straight from the pan.

On April 27 Members of the London Brewers' Alliance will visit the Kentish hop farm of Chris Liliwhite to gather hop shoots and then will race back to London to distribute freshly cut shoots to anxiously waiting chefs, eager to give even the most widely travelled foodie a taste sensation they are unlikely to have tried before.

The idea behind the Hop Shoot Festival is to remind Londoners of the historic connection between the city and the land. For centuries London was the brewing capital of the world. East Anglia produced and still produces the world's best malting barley and Kent still produces some of the world's finest hops. London's brewers relied on both these regions for the ingredients required in huge quantities to slake the thirsts of generations of drinkers.

The Hop Shoot Festival is a celebration of that renaissance, a recognition that we are living through an exciting period in the long history of brewing in London and a reminder of the continuous nature of the relationship between town and country. Participating places include the Bull, Highgate; the Euston Flyer, Euston; The Victoria, Bayswater; Duke's Brew & Que, Hackney; Horseshoe, Hampstead; the Draft House, Battersea, Clapham and London Bridge; Old Red Cow, Smithfield; the Clifton, St Johns Wood; Crown & Anchor, Chiswick; White Swan, Twickenham; the Botanist, Kew; Ben's Canteen, St John's Hill. For more information contact Guild member Peter Haydon at brewery@florencehernehill.com.

Smooth floe

GUILD MEMBER and award-winning landlady of the Bricklayer's Arms in Putney Becky Newman is taking part in the North Pole Marathon on April 5. The race is run on ice floes, floating on the Arctic Ocean, in temperatures of around -30c°. She is hoping to raise £10,000 for Headway, a local charity that helps victims of brain injury. 'I re-opened the Bricklayer's Arms back in 2005 as a direct result of my sister's sudden death from a brain haemorrhage,' she says. 'Although I didn't know about Headway at the time, I have since discovered that they do the most amazing work with victims of stroke, their families, and in particular with children who have lost one or both parents to brain injury-related deaths.' Guild members wishing to support Becky can either go to the pub and donate in the collection tins or pick up a sponsorship form, or google 'Charity Giving', then type in 'Becky Newman' to find her page and make a donation. The race receives considerable international TV and newspaper coverage so Becky says she is also 'happy to wear company logos in return for an extortionate fee!'

Free for all?

I'VE BEEN a Guild member on and off over the years. Since we set up Dwink, I admit I've focussed on spirits and cocktails and Ben (McFarland) has taken the beer limelight. But I keep my hand in and occasionally write bits or hold talks on the subject so it's nice to keep an eye on how the industry approaches writers.

I recently did a bit of consultancy for a large regional brewer which threw up an interesting issue, one that Ben advised me is not a first. The brand asked me to write up the consultancy job for their website free of charge. The written account wasn't part of the job in question, indeed it seemed like an after thought, but when I asked for money for the work I was told they didn't have a budget.

They did say that by running the write up they would be able to market me and what I do to their thousands of subscribers, which seemed attractive but I argued that to write a piece for them still took up my time. To do the job properly I would need to craft a decent

CALENDAR 2012

- 7-8 March SIBA Annual Brewing Conference Stratford-upon-Avon:
- 7-9 March London Drinker Festival, Camden
- 21 June, BGBW AGM, the Clachan, London
- 6 December BGBW annual dinner and awards, London, venue TBC

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

piece of work, since it's not in anyone's interest to bash out a few careless words.

What worried me slightly is that it was a rule for the brand not to pay writers contributing to their site and yet a few established writers seemed to be on there. This made it a little difficult to demand money for my expertise and it shocked me to think people would use their talents to endorse a brand for nothing.

So I'd advise members that writing for brands for now is not constructive if you earn your living through the craft of writing. I've been slogging away at journalism for nearly 15 years and in that time I admit I've had to take opportunities that rewarded me badly. But at 35, with ten years of specific drinks writing experience and having been editor of one of the leading industry magazines, I do not expect brands to ask me to write on their corporate site for nothing. And the only reason a brand might think this an acceptable approach is because other people agree to it.

Yes the exposure is important, these sites have a lot of subscribers and it's nice to think your name is out there, but masses of subscriber data is even more reason to expect them to have a budget. We shouldn't let the ego be massaged. Our names as writers can give credence to their brand values and in most cases writing is all we have to earn a living.

Copywriting, corporate gigs, marketing spiel, brand blogs whatever you call it isn't the most satisfying work but I know if I can earn a bit from the brands then I can justify writing for magazines I like or my own site for a little less. Take away a pay structure and suddenly we have to consider who has the most subscribers, which could prove massively detrimental to independent drinks writing. And every single member who agrees to write something for nothing makes it difficult for the struggling writers to earn a living.

It's not just writing, it's judging as well, PR companies and brands seem to think the 'honour' is all ours when we turn up for free and give them a day of our time along with a considered, professional and experienced appraisal of the beers. Seems like a smashing deal for them, not so good for us.

Even if you're a blogger and this is a second job, if a brand approaches you they respect your opinion which means you have a little power. This is something the brand should respect with some financial reward.

After all, if we as drinks writers don't value what we do then who else will? Is drinks writing a hobby? Or is it a profession? **Tom Sandham**

A taxing issue

IS IT ME? Politicians have a breathtaking ability to totally misunderstand things and make stupendously wrong decisions. Makes you want to yell at the TV and radio and, sad to relate, I often do. But two things

dear to my heart seem to raise them to the highest plateau of mind numbing wrongness, public transport and alcohol. To say that our public transport policy couldn't be more wrong is an understatement but here is not the place. And as for alcohol, well, where do we start? What is the claimed problem?

It seemed to start with so called binge drinking, the sight of mainly young people, often smart, falling about our streets on Friday and Saturday nights. Aha, alcohol fuelled was the cry, so let's sort that out and all will be well. Nobody thought to ask why, mainly sensible young folk with good careers and their lives ahead of them, feel to need to go out and get hammered.

So let's tax it more. Despite everyone seeing it as fuelled by cheap vodkas, lagers and pitchers of this that and the other, oh no, let everyone pay. Just because binge drinkers wouldn't know a good beer if it bit them, let alone be seen drinking one, those of us who enjoy a decent pint in a pub have to stump up as well. Just as everyone would pay if the blunt instrument of a minimum price per unit were to come along. Ah yes, the unit system, something to allow the preaching of safe limits. OK, but why have such a preposterous one. I looked at a poster one day, most of the drinks would never pass my lips, and some drinks were half or points of a unit. I couldn't work it out sober.

And worse, taxation is being used to force people into drinking weak beers and price them out of stronger ones. A binge drinker would never go near an 8% beer in a million years as everybody knows, so again we all have to pay. And surely a weak beer will lead to more drunks. I remember the weak bitters of the South Wales coalfield and able to be drink 10 pints at a sitting. And the very last thing we need is landlords compounding the felony by refusing to serve stronger beers. Are you going to ban wine next, and single malts? By all means warn people but don't drive them away with blatant market distortion.

I recall a senior politician of the age being asked why the government took such a strong line on drugs. Her reply was illuminating, 'if we'd realised the harmful effects of tobacco and alcohol we'd never have allowed them, we aren't making the mistake a third time'. Maybe that's the real agenda. Or is it just me? **Roger Davies**

Wheat watchers

GUILD MEMBER Louise Ashworth recently took first place in the Ninkasi Nectar Competition, which was an initiative to encourage more women to both brew and sample beer. It was set up by fellow Guild member Jane Peyton in collaboration with Sara Barton from

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Brewsters Brewery in partnership with Divine Fairtrade Chocolate. Louise's winning entry was a wheat beer with raspberries, inspired by Divine Dark Chocolate with Raspberries. Second place went to a stout with raspberries, cardamom and black pepper and third to a golden ale with chestnut honey and thyme. Louise, who used to work at the Campaign for Real Ale and is a member of Dea Latis, said: 'through my involvement at CAMRA and Dea Latis I have long tried to encourage more women to try beer and the numbers have been increasing. However the latest stats from CAMRA show that still only around 32% of women have ever tried real ale. I am very interested in trying to encourage more women to try beer without being patronising and this idea is to produce a beer which isn't just aimed at women but can be widely appreciated by women. The working name for the new beer is Wheat Watchers which is obviously a play on words and, as many people know, beer is actually less calorific than wine.'

Beer Academy news

THE BEER ACADEMY launched its How to Judge Beer course in 2011 and it has proved to be very popular across a wide range of delegates. Some delegates are using the course to 'verify' their competence to take part in beer competitions as judges, others to start the journey to becoming judges and others simply widening their understanding of how beer palate and aroma are assessed. In this context the course is a prerequisite of the learning pathway of the Beer Academy Beer Sommelier programme — which again is creating much interest with the third assessment day planned and fully booked! For more information about all the Beer Academy courses visit www.beeracademy.org.uk and sign up for the newsletter.

THE BEER ACADEMY is celebrating National Stilton Week (15-21 April 2012) with a tasting on April 17 with Beer Academy Sommelier Nigel Sadler co-presenting with Nigel White from the Dairy Board on an evening of Beer and Cheese matching in celebration of the week. This 90-minute event will feature six beers, ranging from local beers to some continental beers all paired with six British cheeses, hand picked by Nigel White. There are only 20 tickets available so to avoid disappointment, book today! It's held at the White Horse, Parsons Green, tickets cost £27.50 and for more information call 0207 499 8144 or email dan.cannas@beeracademy.co.uk.

Other Beer Academey courses

March 8, How to Judge Beer, White Horse, London

March 13, One Day Foundation Course, the Beer Academy, London

March 13, 90 Minute Tasting, Scotland vs England, White Horse, London

April 3, One Day Foundation Course, the Beer Academy, London

April 3, How to Judge Beer, Moorhouse's, Burnley

April 5, How to Judge Beer, White Horse, London

April 5, How to Judge Beer, Cross Keys, Leeds

April 10, 90 Minute Tasting, Around the globe in 90 minutes, White Horse, London

April 10, How to Judge Beer, Marston's, Burton

April 17, 90 Minute Tasting, Cheese & Beer celebrating National Stilton Week, White Horse, London

Sainsbury's Beer Competition hits spot.

SAINSBURY'S ANNOUNCED a new 'improved', beer competition in January. Key improvements for the 2012 Sainsbury's Great British Beer Hunt are a greater number of regions, the ability for brewers to decide whether to enter their beers regionally or nationally and the opportunity to sell beer and other 'breweriana' to Sainsbury's customers at the Meet the Brewer exhibitions within the regional events.

With four weeks to go until the Competition closes over 150 brewers of all sizes and located across the U.K. have requested information packs and the entries are rolling in.

Richard Morrice, the event organiser is delighted. 'I have run beer competitions for years and I get a real buzz out of it. The response to this one has been phenomenal — Sainsbury's really understand the best ways of developing the premium beer market and this is a clear endorsement of their knowledge.'

Richard is contactable on 07836 697660 or richard@peopleenergies.com.

Other news

• GUILD MEMBER and longstanding CAMRA staffer Iain Loe is set to hang up his pub guides and statistical handbooks and retire from the Campaign's headquarters at the end of March. As CAMRA's Research and Information Manager, Loe's 23 years with the Campaign have seen him become an invaluable source of beer and pub knowledge and a hugely respected figure within the industry.

Loe joined CAMRA in February 1989 just a month before the Monopolies and Mergers Commission report into 'The Supply of Beer' was published, changing the whole structure of the brewing industry. Soon after, in 1990 he initiated the setting up of the European Beer Consumers Union — the federation of national beer consumer groups across Europe to give beer consumers and pubgoers a voice in Brussels and Strasbourg. Despite retiring, Loe hopes to maintain his interests in the brewing industry both in the UK and beyond, building on his wide knowledge of the brewing industry, and will still be available for consultation. He will also be blogging at www.beerandpubsloedown.blogspot.com.