

British Guild Of Beer Writers

Newsletter February 2013



WHERE WAS health and safety? 'Die!' yelled the wild-eyed Scotsman as he swung his claymore. It hit the low ceiling with a loud clang, before nearly cleaving a table in half. But, the deed had been done and the 'great chieftain of the pudding race' was split in two.

I was in Edinburgh along with other Guild members, who had been invited to a Burns night supper at the Caledonian Brewery, and the haggis was being addressed.

Fire has done much to shape the history of the brewery. It was a fire that killed George Lorimer Snr at the Theatre Royal in 1865. His son George used his inheritance to found the Lorimer & Clark Caledonian Brewery in 1868 along with his friend Robert Clark.

The rest of the story as they say is history. Well not quite. On George's death the company was bought by the Sunderland based Vaux brewery, which kept it going until 1986 when production was transferred south of the border.

The flames that heated the brewery's direct-fired copper were in danger of being extinguished forever. However, a management buyout led by head brewer Russell Sharp kept the dream alive with the formation of the Caledonian Brewing

Company. As in all things brewing, history never runs in a straight way. Fire once or rather twice again played an important part in the story of the brewery as two infernos severely damaged the building. The brewery's maltings buildings, though unused, were destroyed by fire in 1994 and another fire in October 1998 destroyed one of the three original coppers, one of which was installed in 1869.

Thankfully, phoenix like Caledonian has always reasserted itself as a brewer of fine ales and as part of the repairs a new yeast room; cask-racking system and new tanks were added.

In 2004, the brewery site and production facilities were bought by Scottish & Newcastle following their closure of its McEwans Brewery in Fountainbridge, Edinburgh. At the same time, several former shareholders and directors of the pre-2004 business joined together and formed a new Caledonian Brewing Company (CBC). The company owned the Caledonian brands and operated the brewery site on behalf of the owners.

And given that nothing seems to stand still for long — in January 2006, CBC bought Harviestoun Brewery, makers of Bitter & Twisted and the legendary Old Engine Oil.

By 2008, S&N was locked in a three-way takeover battle with Heineken and Carlsberg. In 2008, S&N bought the

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remaining shares in CBC to take full control of the company. Then, with the takeover of S&N, Heineken now owned CBC. Harviestoun was not part of the takeover and was retained by Caledonian's shareholders to run as a separate concern.

Fears are often expressed for the future of a brewery once a multi-national company, especially one that specialises in the production of ales, owns it.

And given that Heineken's main brand is a pale 5% lager, which is brewed in more than 40 breweries around the world, such fears could have some justification. But there is fire in the belly of the management team at Caledonian, and the Heineken family have declared that the Caledonian is their favourite brewery to visit, for here they can see hands-on craft brewing of the highest order.

Today, the fires still burn bright and hot under the brewery's three direct fired coppers, which the brewer claims is the reason why a hint of burnt caramel can be detected in the beers, which we drank at the Burns supper.

With dinner finished, our wild-eyed, claymore swinging cicerone returned and proceeded to recite in full the *Tam o' Shanter*, a narrative poem written by Robert Burns in 1790.

Like a manic Tommy Cooper, he told the story of Tam, a farmer who gets drunk with his friends in a pub and then rides home on his horse Meg. In a mixture of Scots and English our narrator plays the part of witches, warlocks and even the devil playing the bagpipes. We get sprayed with water — the narrator drops his trousers, but eventually Tam gets safely home, though poor old Meg does lose her tail.

The following day we visited Harviestoun, a heartening example of the success of Britain's new brewers. Life started with a five-barrel plant in a barn on a farm in Dollar in 1983, when it was founded by Ken Brooker, but it has now moved to a purpose built brewery in Alva, near Alloa and is producing more than 10,000 barrels of beer a year. Ken is now retired but Stuart Cail, who joined the company in 1995, brews his beers and managing director Chris Miller oversees the whole shebang. The company's ethos is to brew beer with flavour,

aroma and passion. Best known is Bitter & Twisted, which is distinguished by rich grapefruit and lemon notes.

The company was keen to show off its new visitor centre and beer store. Here we saw barrels of Ola Dubh Ale, a strong, gloopy and viscous beer that was slowly maturing in wooden casks from Orkney's Highland Park distillery. First the cask had contained sherry then whisky and now it was the turn for beer. And while we talked and took photographs, the wood was quietly and assiduously doing its work of adding soaring whisky notes to the beer. **TIM HAMPSON**

With thanks to Stephen Crawley, Guild member and managing director of Caledonian, who arranged the trip.

NEWS

A SPECIAL batch of Craft Beer Rising Festival beer will be brewed in partnership with brewpub The Lamb Brewery. There's a whisper that it's going to be a black IPA with a hint of horseradish. Follow the story on www.facebook.com/craftbeerrising.

Re-established in 2012 from its 1790 origins, the Lamb Brewery in West London is one of London's newest ventures bringing artisan beers to the high street.

Craft Beer Rising is an adventurous new London beer, music & street food event. Guild members are welcome to come with a guest to enjoy the press and experts session on Friday February 22, 11am-6pm. Email Guild member Su-Lin Ong, who is also on the event team, sulinong@slo-london.co.uk. If you can't make that session, a few complimentary tickets are available for other

CALENDAR 2013

- Beer Innovation Summit, Burton-upon-Trent, Feb 12
- Craft Beer Rising, London, February 22-23
- SIBA BeerX, Sheffield, March 14-16
- BGBW lecture on beer and health, White Horse, London, March 21
- European Beer Bloggers Conference, Edinburgh July 12-13
- Great British Beer Festival, Olympia, August 13-17

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

times. The guest list will close after Feb 18. More details: www.craftbeerrising.co.uk.

INSPIRED BY the success of Budvar's unpasteurised Yeast Beer in the UK and a comment by Roger Protz that it would reach brewing perfection if only it were completely unfiltered, Adam Broz, Budweiser Budvar's brew-master, returned to the drawing board at the end of last year with brewer Ales Dvorak (the designer of Budvar's dark lager) to see if they could brew a version that would achieve Protz-perfection. They have done it and this new treat for beer enthusiasts will be widely available in the UK from February completely superseding version number one.

By being completely unfiltered as well as unpasteurised, Budvar's revamped Yeast Beer raises the bar considerably. Being unfiltered means that it becomes a little hazy in appearance, a bit like a good wheat beer. Nowadays the hazy look being regarded as a bit cool and fashionable has led some brewers to induce it. Not so Budvar. Broz emphasises that the Budvar Yeast Beer hazy look is produced by a completely natural action of the yeast and is not the result of adding alien substances like pectin. Budvar's Yeast Beer will now, he says, take drinkers a major step nearer to Budvar's ultimate goal of making their beers taste in the bar as pristine as though they have just been drawn in the brewery cellars.

'2013 PROMISES to be another exciting year for real ale and we invite you to come awaken your taste buds this spring at our third annual *Over the Hop* beer festival, March 22-24. This year the White Horse on Parson's Green hopes to present the finest selection of hoppy blonde, golden, pale ale and IPA beers currently available in the British Isles. Featured darker beers will make appearances for those less convinced by the lighter side of life. Weather permitting the ever-popular BBQ will be fired up, and, as expected from The White Horse, the beer quaffing will be accompanied by live music on Saturday evening. Our *Over the Hop* beer festival pays tribute to hops, this traditional and celebrated

ingredient, and also showcases the new and interesting ways in which different hop varieties have been used by innovative brewers in recent times. For more information and updates please contact alex@whitehorsesw6.com, or 0207 736 2115.'

CORPORATE MEMBER Thornbridge is the subject of a fascinating book celebrating beer and food called *Craft Union*, whose subtitle *Matching Beer with Food* says it all. It's a gorgeous looking book that features recipes (some from Guild members), beer tastings, thirst-invoking photographs and a general sense of beery goodness. It's the first book from a British craft beer to explore this fascinating area. Priced £14.95, you can find more details about it at www.thornbridgebrewery.co.uk.

GUILD MEMBER and Derby CAMRA Winter Festival Chair Gillian Williams gets touch to say that the 12th Derby CAMRA Winter Beer Festival runs from Wednesday February 20 to Saturday February 23 at The Roundhouse, Derby College, Pride Park, Derby, DE24 8JE. This event is a prelude to the 2014 CAMRA National Winter Ale Festival (NWF), which is moving from Manchester to Derby. The 2013 Derby Festival has over 300 real ales, real ciders and perries, continental beers and meads (honey wine). Located in the beautiful and historic Roundhouse, just across the road from the Pride Park exit at Derby Railway station, this is a Festival well worth having a look at. The ticket-only trade session runs on Wednesday February 20 from 2-4pm. For trade tickets please contact: winterpublicity@derbycamra.org.uk. See www.derbycamra.org.uk for more details.

Lost in Lowdham

CHRIS ARNOT will be talking about his book *Britain's Lost Breweries and Beers* (Aurum Press) at the Lowdham Book Festival's Winter Weekend in Nottinghamshire. The date: Friday March 1. Time: 7.30-9pm. Venue: The Old Ship Inn on Main Street, Lowdham. Chris will also be touching on his other current book, *Fields of Dreams: grounds that football forgot but the fans never will*. Beer and football: what more could a man want to

talk about on a Friday night? But Chris is adamant that he won't be researching *Fifty Shades of Sepia* any time soon.

Pod people

GUILD MEMBERS Sam Hill and Sophie Atherton are launching a monthly pod cast called *The Beertalkers*. The programmes will have a different theme each month and will feature interviews, or guests, and 'on air' beer tastings relating to that month's theme. The pilot edition of the show poses the question 'Is beer posh?', and includes an interview with St Austell Head Brewer Roger Ryman and tastings of two potentially posh brews. Hungerlust blogger Sam and journalist and beer sommelier Sophie are aiming the pod cast at current and future beer-lovers and hope it will especially appeal to those who want to hear about their favourite drink while they're on the move. Visit www.thebeertalkers.com to download the pod cast (from Jan 29) and share your views on what's being discussed in each programme on Twitter @thebeertalkers.

Innovation in a vacuum

SAT IN the pub I overheard fellow Guild members talking about a Beer Innovation Summit (www.beerinnovationsummit.co.uk). Obviously this sounded of great interest to me. It was the first I'd heard of it,

I shall endeavour to find out more, I assured myself. There has been a lot happened over the last few years creating possibly one of the greatest UK beer eras ever. There are now more breweries, a greater range of products and ever more interesting things happening in the beer world. Many of us would say that this is partly due to the number of new breweries springing up, all trying to find their own little niche. I probably need to go to this summit.

Brewing is an interesting craft. On the one hand significant science and technology can, and is applied, to the production of beer. Indeed, a consistent product, as is required to build a major brand, requires levels of quality assurance that can only be achieved with major technical skills and the backup of laboratory facilities. The contribution big

brewing business provides in developing beer technology cannot be ignored.

However, many of the most enterprising brewers flourish in a less constrained, lower capital investment niche. In this case the freedom to develop more risky products that appeal to a narrower field is very important indeed. Freedom from the constraints of brand managers and bureaucratic systems is what creates and encourages the creative flair required to be innovative.

Unfortunately, as it happens, the Beer Innovation Summit slipped between my memory neurones, perhaps partly due to some form of synaptic chemical disruption caused by intoxicating liquor on the day in the pub. I simply forgot to find out more. When I finally saw the details I was not surprised to see a number of major beer producers contributing and generously providing sponsorship. But I was shocked at the lack of microbrewery involvement. Brewing is a broad industry. To not include any speakers from the very small breweries seems at best to be misunderstanding what is driving beer innovation.

I am disinclined to spend the attendance fee and all the extra travel and subsistence to attend this top-heavy summit. I simply cannot risk many hundreds of pounds on the chance of it truly being the damp squib we think it will be. I expect many more Guild members will also feel the same. I hope enough balanced writers do go, ones I can trust to tell it how it really is, and perhaps they will prove me wrong. **DAVE BAILEY**

Beer Academy events

- 90 Minute Tasting, Beautiful Belgian Beers, 12 Feb, White Horse, London
- One-Day Foundation Course, 19 Feb, The George, Bristol
- How to Judge Beer, London, 21 Feb, White Horse, London
- Beer & Food Matching, 26 Feb, Old Red Cow, London
Go to www.beeracademy.co.uk for more information.

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FEBRUARY 26. 2013**