

## THE DARWIN OF THE BEER WORLD



Photo by Good&Beautiful.com/American 1977

## REMEMBERING MICHAEL JACKSON 10 YEARS AFTER

By Tomm Carroll

The Great British Beer Festival, held annually in early August in London, celebrated its 40th birthday this year, and I was fortunate enough to be invited back to judge its Champion Beer of Britain competition. But August also marked a more wistful anniversary for British — and indeed all — good-beer fans: 10 years since the sudden passing of Michael Jackson.

Every summer, the British Guild of Beer Writers (of which Jackson was a cofounder) holds its Summer Party and pre-GBBF kickoff on the eve of the fest at Tattershall Castle — a pub/boat moored on the Thames not far from Parliament and Big Ben and across the river from the towering London Eye Ferris wheel.

“Michael did more than any other writer to put beer on the map and to bring it to the attention of a wider audience. He influenced the U.S. craft beer revolution,” said Roger Protz.

This year, the celebration was suitably preceded by a moving tribute to “The Beer Hunter” featuring slides, videos and heartfelt reminiscences from Blighty’s top beer scribes and publicans, as well as firkins of Jackson’s favorite real ales — Fuller’s Chiswick Bitter and Batemans XB Pale Ale. Some 130 guild members and guests from the U.K. and abroad were in attendance, including journalists, judges, folks in the beer trade — and even some MPs (Ministers of Parliament).

Hosting the remembrance was Jackson’s friend, contemporary and acclaimed beer writer in his own right, Roger Protz, who opened by saying, “Michael did more than any other writer to put beer on the map and to bring it to the attention of a wider audience. He influenced the U.S. craft beer revolution.” Protz then screened a clip from “The Best of the British” episode of Jackson’s *The Beer Hunter* TV series from the 1990s, in which Jackson uttered this CAMRA-ready truism: “You simply cannot have real ale without real pubs.”

Mark Dorber, a longtime friend and former owner of one of London’s best good-beer (cask and keg) pubs, The White Horse in Parsons Green — where Jackson was a fixture (“I wonacksondered when he might go home”) — talked about how Jackson convinced him to continue dry-hopping

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From left: U.K. beer writers Roger Protz, Adrian Tierney-Jones and Tim Hampson.

#### Michael Jackson from page 8

the Bass Ale at The White Horse “after Bass stopped doing it.” He added, “Michael would be thrilled with his legacy today. He was the Darwin of the beer world.”

“Belgian beer is that country’s best-kept secret,” Protz said, quoting Jackson by way of introducing a video message from Madame Rose Blancquaert, Belgium’s first female brewmaster from Brouwerij Liefmans in Oudenaarde, looking spry in her nineties. “I met Michael in 1974, when he visited Belgian breweries for the first time,” she recalled, explaining that he was very interested in how their beer was made. “I am grateful to Michael Jackson for what he did for Belgian beer — and for Liefmans,” she said. “It’s been a privilege for me to know him.”

Belgian beer sommelier and writer Ben Vincken, who assisted Jackson in compiling his *Great Beers of Belgium* guide, came across the Channel for the event. He offered two of his favorite quotes from the bard of beer: “There’s a quiet revolution going on, a quiet revolution of taste,” and, “In Belgium, a beer hunter can never rest on his barstool.”

Brooklyn Brewery brewmaster Garrett Oliver contributed a video in which he admitted gleefully, “Across the pond, we all took Michael’s advice about not being afraid of using hops!” And when it came time for him to package Brooklyn’s Sorachi Ace saison, he said he asked himself, “What would Michael do? So I refermented it 100 percent in the bottle.”

Fuller’s PR manager Georgina Wald, who provided the Chiswick Bitter for the event, described the first time she visited Jackson’s cluttered office: “It was books and stuff ... and beer!” Young British beer writer Matt Curtis, who never got the chance to meet Jackson (join the club), spoke of his vast influence on brewing (“five-and-a-half thousand breweries in the U.S.!”) as well as on Curtis’s own writing style (“Michael Jackson was a storyteller as well as a writer”).

The tribute entered its home stretch with two of the U.K.’s best-known beer authors,

Pete Brown and Tim Webb. Brown, a Yorkshireman like Jackson, said that they initially met at the Thornbridge Brewery in Derbyshire, tasting for the first time a beer made with Nelson Sauvin hops: “It was made by Thornbridge’s brewer Martin Dickie, now of BrewDog.” Brown later proceeded to read aloud from Jackson’s last piece of beer writing in 2007, his column for *All About Beer Magazine*, ironically titled “Did I Cheat Mort Subite?” in which he publicly revealed for the first time that he had Parkinson’s disease.

For his part, Webb concluded the prepared remarks with one of his favorite quotes from the man all were present to honor. “Michael had done the top six brewing countries in the first season of *The Beer Hunter*,” Webb explained. “He then said, ‘What am I supposed to do for the second season — the seventh to 12th best?’” A roar of laughter came from the crowd.

Many other accolades from audience members, as well as downed pints, followed before guild chairman Tim Hampson brought the tribute to a close. “Holding the Michael Jackson tribute added a different dimension to this year’s event, reminding us all of the extraordinary power that great writing can wield in raising awareness,” Hampson offered. “He would, I know, be enormously proud of the guild’s success, just as we are proud to be carrying on his legacy of bringing beer to a wider public.”

Indeed, the four-year-old London Beer City (think London Beer Week) — 10 days of events that surround the five-day GBBE, just as Denver does with the GABF — champions London and the U.K.’s own not-so-quiet craft beer revolution, which would not exist if it weren’t for Michael Jackson. A toast to his legacy! **CBN**

*Although he never got the opportunity to meet Michael Jackson, Tomm Carroll has been inspired by his writing as well as his passion for beer — and still has a bottle of Malheur Bière Brut (Reserve) Michael Jackson Commemorative Selection 2006 in his beer cellar. Contact him at beerscribe@earthlink.net.*

Photo by Tomm Carroll

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