

British Guild Of Beer Writers

Newsletter — February 2010



The Chairman Reports...

AT LAST finally some good news on beer production — as figures show that the UK has edged out of recession, beer sales are showing a stuttering resilience.

The British Beer & Pub Association's Quarterly Beer Barometer shows that while sales are still declining the rate of fall has dropped. For the last three months of 2009 sales were down 3.6% — the lowest fourth quarter fall since 2006. Last year overall sales fell 5.2% — an improvement on the 9.3% slump in 2008 and the 6.5% fall in 2007. BBPA chief executive Brigid Simmonds says these figures show a sector starting to claw its way out of a recessionary slump. The figures from the BBPA often seem in stark contrast to the experiences of the country's smaller brewers.

IT WAS 30 years ago that a group of 19 brewers met in a pub in Swindon and decided to set up their own association. Peter Austin had called a meeting of the country's micros to decide the way ahead. And rather than just be an informal gathering an agenda was drawn up and circulated. So it came to pass that on a freezing Saturday on January 26, 1980, Peter Austin, Ted Bishop, David Bruce, John Featherby, Nigel Fitzhugh, Patrick Fitzpatrick, James Lynch, Peter Ratcliffe, Anthony Taylor, Simon Taylor, Des Turner, Roger Walkey, Mark Wallington, John Watts and Simon Whitmore, all active brewers, plus Mike Brown, Simon Hoskins and Tim Chudley, who would soon start to brew, met in the skittles alley of the Cross Keys pub in Wootton Bassett, Wiltshire.

They invited the Brewers' Society General Secretary Ron Matthews to the meeting. He told them that under the rules of the Society no brewer could be allowed membership unless he produced more than 200 barrels a week or 10,000 barrels a year, which excluded all those present. However, he could offer them associate membership at £50 a year, but this, although it would give them access to some technical information, offered no place on the ruling council, no vote, and no official voice in the society's affairs.

Lunch was taken and as the Archers Best Bitter went down, the consensus view was that that the

Brewers' Society's offer of associate membership, described by James Lynch as 'little less than an insult', should be rejected.

As Peter Austin later wrote: 'We decided that there was a radically different trading philosophy between existing brewers with pubs, and the new entrants to the trade who were mostly without pubs. The difference was the view taken of the brewers' tie. The existing brewers wanted and indeed needed the tie; their business was founded on the tie, and it was essential to their prosperity.

'For the new entrants the tie appeared in a different light. It effectively barred around 80% of the retail outlets to our products, and although our members started their breweries fully aware of the tied house system, it came as a shock to many of them to discover the true amount of hidden tie in the free trade.

'It was this opposing view of the very basis of trading that would have made it dishonest for us to join a society, to which we were bound to be disloyal, if we wished to work for the changes that would make it possible for our businesses to succeed.'

And so SIBA was born and Peter Austin was voted the association's first chairman with the organisation fighting then, as it continues to fight now, for access to the market for its members' beers. Today, SIBA's membership now numbers around 450 and the organisation's aims are broadly the same as they were then: to promote the interests of smaller brewers and to help them to bring their beers to market.

Almost from the start, SIBA campaigned for a sliding scale of brewing duty, and there is no doubt that Progressive Beer Duty, introduced in 2002, has helped to bring about a revival in craft brewing in the UK. Guild member Peter Haydon (then SIBA's General Secretary) certainly deserves much of the credit for SIBA's tax campaign. Similarly, SIBA's Direct Delivery Scheme (DDS), launched in 2003, has put local beers into many pubs that would otherwise have remained closed to them. Around 1,800 pubs now source local beers through DDS. SIBA chief executive Julian Grocock says SIBA has achieved much to be proud of in its 30-year history. And figures from SIBA show an industry that is confident and not stuttering.

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There are certainly problems but SIBA members are in growth despite challenging market conditions. SIBA members are confident of, and investing for, further expansion. And they are ideally placed to benefit hugely from consumers' increasing engagement with localism.

Last year in marked contrast to the decline in volumes reported by national and global brewers, the local brewing sector grew by a total of 10% in 2008, and though the figures for 2009 are not yet available some sources are predicting growth again. We can all raise a glass to that.

Tim Hampson

300 Beers update

A NEW, revised and updated edition of Roger Protz's *300 Beers To Try Before You Die* has just been published by CAMRA Books (£14.99). 'The book has been overhauled, a few errors corrected, and new beers that have appeared since the first edition evaluated,' says Roger. 'Some beers from the first edition have had to go on the sad grounds that their breweries have closed. There's been a firestorm in Dortmund, once described as Germany's Burton-on-Trent. But now there's only one brewery left and it promotes its Pils above the iconic Dortmunder Export. In common with many German breweries, it's owned by the Dr Oetker pizza group and I feel nothing is safe in their doughy hands.'

'New IPAs appear every day like mushrooms at dawn. I'm delighted to have included Meantime's brilliant interpretation of the style. The main error corrected was the astonishing exclusion first time round of Het Anker's Gouden Carolus from Mechelen in Belgium. I visited the brewery last year and the beer is magnificent.'

'One of the main rejigs was to move the La Trappe beers from Tilburg from the Abbey beers section to the Trappist section now that the Koningshoeven monastery has been re-admitted to the International Trappist Association after a brief but too-close relationship with the forces of Mammon.'

The book, Roger stresses, is about the joys of beer. 'But I discovered one beer in Poland, Perla, that has a sad history. It was owned in the first part of the 20th century by the Zylber (Silver) family. When the Nazis invaded Poland they confiscated the brewery and sent the Zylbers to the ghetto or the concentration camp. After the war, the brewery was nationalised. It's now a private company but the Zylbers all perished. I raise a glass to their memory when I drink the beer.'

'As a result of cost restraints, there were limits to how many beers I could change and Australia doesn't get the representation it deserves. I'll save them for the third edition!'

Dark Star continues to grow

THE NEW Dark Star Brewery may have been more than a little chilly at its opening party on January 26, but the reception was warm for all the guests. It's the third home for the brewery, famous for its flagship beer HopHead, which started life at the Evening Star in Brighton in 1994 before moving to a 15-barrel plant at Ansty, West Sussex, in 2001. Its new home is 10 miles west in Partridge Green, where it will be able to brew 20,000 barrels a year.

The official ribbon cutting was conducted by Roger Protz, who praised the brewery as being a great example of the incredible progress being made by the craft brewing movement: 'It epitomises the stupendous growth of great craft beers and breweries, in just over 15 years they've gone from effectively a home-brew kit to a 45-barrel plant, which is the size of some of the regional breweries.'

Then a few words were said by head brewer Mark Tranter, including an announcement about an impending collaborative brew with Guild member Melissa Cole, before the party moved on to the brewery's pub the Stand Up Inn in Lindfield for a few more pints of Dark Star.

Go to work on an egghead

FOLLOWING THE Guild team's storming non-victory against a crack team of Oxford nerds on the BBC2 quiz *Battle of the Brains*, which was broadcast last March, we have been asked to enter a team for *Eggheads*. If you are interested in taking part please leave your details here: <http://tinyurl.com/ybwcyykk>. Once I've got an idea of interest and more information from the producers I'll make the full application. Pub quizzers, we need you now! Jeff Pickthall

Request from new member

CUMBRIAN BASED Nigel Tarn is one of the Guild's latest members and asks for advice, which is one of the benefits in joining the Guild. If you can help contact him at nigel.tarn@btinternet.com.

'Assistance required — I am putting together a premium coffee table book on what some of our great British micro breweries will offer us in 2010. I will be focusing on the highlights, back stories, brewery history and brews with vibrant full colour pictures. To fulfil this project this year I will need publishers, editors and photographers; if you can help please get in touch.'

A pub in a back garden

PETER HAYDON sends this letter that he recently received and I think it worth being made available to Guild members, contact me if you would like to see pictures of this extraordinary achievement and if you think you can help Peter van Wijk don't hesitate to contact him:

My name is Peter van Wijk. I am 58 years old and live in Sittard in Limburg, Holland. My wife and I have been visiting your country for more than 20 years now and from the first time I fell in love with it. The landscapes, castles, history and people are very nice. Because it is impossible to move to your country I decided to build an English Pub in my back garden.

It took me four years to build it in my spare time, but now it is almost finished and I use it for personal use on birthdays and in the summer and it includes a toilet and a double dart court. It is 4 x 8m.

During our holidays I buy a lot of things from markets, car boots sales and antique shops and also off the internet to decorate my pub with. At this moment I still can use all kinds of stuff I can stick to the walls or put it down. As you can see on the pictures I enclosed, for example I put labels from the beer bottles in small frames and also crown corks in small boxes I made myself. The Guinness lamp on the outside I bought on the internet, while I bought the Murphy's lamp at a market in Belgium. I am looking for another one on the internet.

I wonder if it is possible that you send me some things from your brewery, with which I can decorate my pub with. For example labels from bottles, crown corks, posters, pump clips or anything else you are willing to send, everything is welcome. Of course I am willing to pay for the shipping cost. I hope that you can fulfil my request.

Kind regards, Peter van Wijk, Dr. Poelslaan 36, 6133 XJ Sittard, The Netherlands. Tel: +31 6 22487535; e-mail : prlvanwijk@home.nl.

CALENDAR 2010

March 4-5 SIBA Brewing Conference
Stratford Upon Avon
March 29 April 5 Cask Ale Week 2010

April 10

World Beer Cup 2010, Chicago

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