

British Guild Of Beer Writers

Newsletter — November 2009



The Chairman Reports...

TIME IS short, but there is still time to book a ticket for our annual dinner and awards presentations.

The entries for the Beer Writer of the Year have been received, the judges have met and their decisions are made — but the only sure way of being the first to find out who will be acclaimed as the Beer Writer of the Year for 2009, and win the inaugural Michael Jackson Gold Tankard Award, is to be at the Hilton London Tower Bridge on December 3.

For the last couple of years the numbers attending the dinner have been increasing — it is now a must-attend event for many people with a love for beer, who are drawn together by the lure of good conversation, the company of friends and the marriage of a imaginative menu with great beer.

With more than 160 people expected to attend, choosing a menu that can satisfy all is impossible — and devising a menu that is challenging, and yet can be prepared for such a large gathering is not easy. But the Hilton's creative chef Christian Honor

says he wants to learn from last year and once again showcase his talents alongside some of the world's greatest beers. The final menu is not decided — and the food and beer pairings have yet to be completed — but I am told there will be chips! Pre and post dinner drinks will be provided by our fantastic sponsors Coors, Wells & Young's, Brains, Shepherd Neame, Caledonian and Budweiser Budvar.

And thinking of food, one of the country's most progressive microbrewers has revived a medieval feast that it could become an annual event. Kelham Island's boss Dave Wickett used his spanking new 30-barrel brew plant in Sheffield to produce an Audit Ale, a style of beer first produced by colleges in Oxford and Cambridge, where the dons supped a hearty brew to celebrate the balancing of their accounts. Only 50 bottles of the 11% ale were produced, with one being presented to 30 of the city's dignitaries, from the world of politics and the universities, who attended the dinner. The rest will be auctioned for charity.

Honey, I drunk the beer...the phrase just tripped (dripped?) off my lips when along with fellow Guild

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members Steve Williams and John Porter I was a judge at the National Honey Show. The scale of the event is mind boggling with entries being made for more than 245 separate competitions — there are classes for everything from single jars of light honey stirred to the best educational bee related project in a school.

For the first time, the country's most prestigious honey show had a class for commercially produced beers, which used honey as an ingredient. It might have taken the show 78 years to allow honey beers in, but given the enthusiasm with which the class was received — I'm sure it will now become a regular feature. The standard of entries was very high — so congratulations to Co-Op/Freeminer's Bumble Bee, Thornbridge's Bracia and Lovibond's Gold Reserve for picking up the top honours.

So don't forget, December 3 is the date of the Guild's annual dinner and awards. Contact Adrian Tierney-Jones to book your tickets — I look forward to seeing you there.

Tim Hampson

One last reminder about the BGBW awards and dinner

FORGET PARIS Hilton, the only Hilton worth investigating this year is the Tower Bridge one in London, where the British Guild of Beer Writers dinner and awards will once again be held — this time on Thursday December 3. Once again, as we take part in the final celebration of a year in which the Guild hit 21 years with a fantastically successful party in the summer, the organisers hope that this annual event proves once more to be a glorious celebration of beer and beer-writing, a coming together and

commingling of those who think and drink deeply of beer and brewing. We also hope that it will be a chance to demonstrate that beer and food matching is one of the great glories of our age. So if you want to be part of this magnificently convivial event then etch the words December 3 in your diary (whether paper or electronic) at once.

ATJ

Cask Ale week returns

THE SECOND Cask Ale Week will be held Easter 2010 (March 29-April 5). Cask Marque is once again organising the event with the support of a steering group comprising of CAMRA, the Handpull Group, SIBA, IFBB, Punch and Enterprise Inns. Seal have again been appointed to look after the PR for the week. The 2009 event saw 8,000 pubs promoting cask ale over the week and analysis provided by Bruline showed that pubs that participated increased cask ale sales by 27% and overall sales by 5%. Interestingly keg ale and standard lager were the losers and premium lager sales held up reflecting the profile of the cask ale drinker being ABC1. A NOP survey in May 2009, showed that 15% of cask ale drinkers were aware of Cask Ale Week. If you require any further information on the plans for Cask Ale Week 2010 do by all means give me a call. Furthermore, if anyone hasn't seen the Cask Ale Report go to www.caskreport.co.uk where there is a powerpoint presentation on the findings.

Paul Nunny

Beer Academy events

- Commissioning the New Brewhouse, Wadworth & Co, Wiltshire: November 16
- Weekend with the Beer Academy: November 21-22; Masham, Yorkshire.

CALENDAR 2009/2010

Dec 3	BGBW dinner/awards, London
Nov 25-29	Great British Beer Experience, NEC
Jan 20-23	National Winter Ales Festival, 2010 Manchester

March 29 April 5 Cask Ale Week 2010

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

Home of Theakstons, which will be visited as well as other breweries, gastronomic beer and food dinner; one night's stay with breakfast at the White Bear Hotel.

• Foundation Course, the Anchor Inn, Suffolk: November 24.

Please contact Dan Cannas for more information Dan.Cannas@ibd.org.uk.

For those of you who might not read the US beer mag Beer Advocate, Guild member Tim Webb has a regular column in it. It's always readable, but this particular contribution caught my eye and I thought it worth reprinting, with permission from Tim and Beer Advocate — ATJ

Has CAMRA stunted the growth of British beer?

ONE OF the regulars at my favourite local pub shies away from the Pale Ale because it is too strong. This bear of a man is frightened by the prospect of drinking a soft, faintly hopped 'real ale' because it contains 4.5% alcohol.

We British are an island people. We may know more of the world beyond our shores than our Americans counterparts but then we live in a smaller place. Like goldfish in a bowl, we have little sense of proportion. We know what we like and don't like and we don't like change.

The Campaign for Real Ale (CAMRA) was a singularly British idea, dreamt up in 1971 by four young journalists holidaying in Ireland. Fantasising as young men do about making the world a better place, they decided to start with beer.

The 1960s had seen mass movements to counter war, poverty, famine and injustice. The 1970s would be about changing the day-to-day. Dull 1970s beer was about to be squeezed back to the future.

There had been consumerism in food and drink before CAMRA. Cookery writer

Elizabeth David had urged British households to improve mealtimes and political activist Raymond Postgate had challenged restaurants to do likewise, creating the pugnacious *Good Food Guide* in 1951.

But CAMRA was a single-issue campaign. Its simple message was, 'Old beer good — new beer bad'.

In this context 'old' meant cask-fermented ales served with no added CO₂, served usually straight from the barrel or hand-pulled to the bar counter. Such ales became 'real', while the rest acquired less wholesome names, including 'foreign'.

This began a patchwork global uprising that saw Charlie Papazian and others home-brew great beer back into the US mainstream and spawned a dozen national beer drinker groups across Europe. The global brewpub and microbrewery revolution had begun.

But then the awkward question. Has CAMRA fallen victim to the law of unintended consequences? By deifying a limited range of virtually unexportable ale styles, did CAMRA fossilise British beer culture in a spoof version of the 1950s?

What stops me admitting this is so? Sentimentality?

Everyone should waste a substantial part of their youth on a hopeless cause. Mine was beer — though we won!

Or maybe it is because the proposition is only half true.

CAMRA's double standard of tolerating abhorrent grain and hop substitutions while maintaining an autistic stance on fermentation offends all logic.

I get deeply embarrassed when the Great British Beer Festival refuses to use

**DEADLINE FOR THE NEXT ISSUE IS
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CO2 on any beer because it might offend campaigners, regardless of whether the beer is designed to be recarbonated.

The failure to challenge the narrow British obsession with beers drunk in measures of 20 fl. oz. Imperial is galling too.

On the other hand find any quality website about beer and CAMRA-inspired Brits will be there, enthusing away. And even the smallest CAMRA-run festival nowadays sells 'foreign beers'.

The last three decades have seen consumers generally kicking against the standardisation of food and drink by global corporations. CAMRA started beer's contribution to that, so maybe we should forgive its occasional spats of xenophobic myopia? Maybe.

Recent surveys report a massive increase in the proportion of British drinkers who have given 'real ale' a try — 38 years after it was first suggested. Over half now take the plunge. With the alternatives reduced to a shallow range of piss poor grain sodas, who knows, uncarbonated draft may yet become the UK's favourite style.

Maybe a bunch of young British journalists holidaying in Belgium, Germany or the US could start a group to campaign for more foreign influence on UK craft brewing?

What a splendid idea. I might even join.

Barley wine seminar

THE GUILD'S Barley Wine seminar saw over 50 attending Thornbridge Hall to hear a goodly variety of speakers expounding on the merits of this noble beer style. Mark Dorber kicked off the proceedings, and was followed by John Keeling, Steve Wellington, and Steve Grossman from Sierra Nevada, who brought a cask of wood-aged Bigfoot with him — this was thoroughly enjoyed by all those there. After a cheese and barley wine tasting, Barrie Pepper,

Durham brewery's Steve Gibbs, Lovibonds' Jeff Rosenmeier and Pete Brown gave us their thoughts on barley wine (with Jeff introducing his wheat wine). Once again thanks go to Thornbridge for letting us host this magnificent event and also to the brewers who donated their beers as well as the speakers. Any thoughts for next year's seminar will be gladly received. ATJ

THE KING OF BEERS

*This is no 'hairy armed beer'
Strong, but not a drink to fear
This is not rugby man's session drink,
Or a sweat stained steel workers tippie
Not a beer to gulp and guzzle,
A complex nose to make you puzzle
This is an after-dinner, sweet trolley,
Beer to slowly savour, almost a wine,
It's Madeira notes of flavour, divine
Try it with pudding....feel free
To match it with Cheddar and Brie
Its names are many...Alliance, Vintage,
Bigfoot, Golden Pride....what a show
Then Moonraker, Lovibonds and Stingo
This beer is no longer the preserve
Of dear old boys, it really does deserve
To reveal its glorious qualities
To drinkers male and female,
Old and young, all over the land..
This Barley Wine, from that noble line
Of Bass No 1 Strong — Ratcliffe Ale — 1869
Rejoice in the 'King Of Beers'
Cheers!*

Les Baynton

Parish notes

E-BOOK PUBLISHER Quicklook Books have got in touch to say that they are looking for a possible writer for their Quicklook@Beer (wine is already being written). If anyone is interested, contact Peter McGarrick (pcm@quicklookbooks.com) or visit www.quicklookbooks.com.