



CAMPAIGN  
FOR  
REAL ALE

# THIRSTY TIMES

Chelmsford & mid-Essex Branch of CAMRA

## WILLOWS INN CRESSING MOST IMPROVED PUB OF 2015



**CHELMSFORD WINTER BEER & CIDER FESTIVAL**  
17<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> February 2016



# Christmas Greetings

We wish you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy, Healthy and Prosperous New Year!

Victor, Susan and the Team



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# MOST IMPROVED PUB 2015: THE WILLOWS, CRESSING

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Chelmsford & mid-Essex CAMRA does not make a Most Improved Pub Award every year but does like to recognise pubs that have made a particular impact by improving their ambience, range and customer experience.

Like London buses, there may not be any for a while then several come at once. The finalists this year were The Willows, Cressing; The White Hart, Witham and The Star & Garter, Chelmsford. We suggest you go out and visit pubs and let us know your suggestions for next year.

This year the award has been won by The Willows in Cressing, which was taken over by Emma Maidens, and Daryn Hazle, in May 2014. This young couple ooze enthusiasm and had big ideas to transform the run-down, forgotten pub which sold a solitary real ale - Greene King IPA.

They refurbished the whole place and created a separate dining area to make better use of the 16<sup>th</sup> century building with the low, beamed ceiling and log fires. However, customers can have bar meals, eating at the bar - literally!

Their ethos is to Keep It Local and so they are part of the CAMRA Locale scheme selling local beer throughout the year. In fact the "Willows Own" beer is brewed by Red Fox Brewery down the road in Coggeshall. The map on the kitchen door shows the location of the Essex microbreweries that supply the two changing guest ales to accompany their regular beer, Adnams Southwold Bitter.

They support all things local with a barter system so if you have something local that could go on the menu then see Daryn to barter with beer. Local cider compliments local fresh produce for the food and beer. They came to see me on the cider bar at Chappel Beer Festival in September to try Essex ciders. You would be hard-pushed to be more local than 3 miles away for the Berties Cider from

Braintree round the corner from Bishop Nick Brewery. In addition to the changing range of Bertie's cider and perry, Wibblers have recently installed a gas line for Dengie Cider from Mayland in Essex.

Bottled Essex beers are available to drink in or take away and feature on the Match Sausages with Local Beer menu. As well as modern British Pub Grub, there is Daryn's Gastro Pub "out of the ordinary" items such as pigeon, artichoke and various foods cooked in beer. For vegetarians there is an interesting variety; so much more than macaroni cheese! The black boards with tasting notes using the Cyclops system for smell, taste, bitterness and sweetness help those unfamiliar with real ale to choose something they would like. The Try Before You Buy policy is administered by Rebecca, a wonderful barmaid and waitress with her notorious wink which makes everyone feel special. Sous chef Kevin assists Daryn in the kitchen, and they cater for special diets. Please call ahead of your visit to discuss your requirements. The 5 ways with pear was innovative and delicious.

A successful pub has great service and welcome, ambience, good beer/cider, interesting food and caters for the community. The Classic Motorcycle Club meet here every Thursday, the monthly quiz and occasional theme nights such as Karaoke or Caribbean are popular and well-attended.

If you have not been to The Willows at Cressing, I recommend that you go and hope that your experience proves that that they deserve the accolade of "Most Improved Pub 2015". CAMRA Key Campaigns 3 and 4 are to encourage more people to use pubs and to try a range of beer and cider so go out and Campaign by supporting pubs. Let me know which pubs you feel should be considered for next year's competition.

WELL DONE THE WILLOWS!!

Claire Irons, Publicity Officer CME CAMRA

# PUB NEWS

After being closed for a year, and following extensive renovation and improvements, **The Flich of Bacon at Little Dunmow** was due to open on 1<sup>st</sup> December as “a restaurant and pub with rooms”.

Having been closed for much longer, a planning application has now been submitted for work at the **Green Man, Howe Street** and a board outside announces that it will re-open in early summer 2016. The new owners intend it to serve as a traditional village pub and a destination restaurant, with an extension providing an additional dining area.

We understand that **The Kings Arms, Broomfield** has been sold to the owner of the King Harold, Harold Wood. He has reassured a neighbour that it will be an upmarket pub run by a manager and that he is going to spend quite a lot of money doing it up.

Continuing the theme of good news, Greene King have been granted planning permission for a refurbishment of the **Horse & Groom, Braintree** – “to freshen and enhance the existing character of this listed building”. Works include new flooring and carpets, new and re-upholstered furniture and alterations to the bar area.

And Will & Donna at the **Woolpack, Chelmsford** report a busy few months. Their September Beer Festival was a great success, and that was followed by the refitting of the toilets and the extension and refurbishment of the lounge area. “The fresh new area allows more space for beer lovers to sit down and enjoy themselves with friends”. Next up was the Halloween Beer Festival, at which all the beers sold out but Colchester Brewery ‘Day of the Triffids’ was the first to go and Will & Donna’s favourite too! “Thanks to everyone who came down and drank the ale so quickly we had to add more barrels on the Friday!” News of more beer festivals below.

The **Castle, Great Leighs**, opened as scheduled and is attracting a lot of customers. Several real ales are served. The picture shows the supposed “Witch’s Stone” which was found during renovation work. A piece of history preserved.



Incidentally, in a previous edition I implied that the Castle’s sister pub, the **Hare, Roxwell** had been renamed when it was taken over by Pie & Pint Inns. John, a regular at the pub for over 20 years, emailed to point out that the name was changed from the Hare & Hounds some years before that by a previous landlord to avoid confusion with another local pub of the same name. Thanks John; happy to put the record straight.

The Meet the Brewer evenings at the **Railway Tavern, Chelmsford** continue to be popular. The photo shows Simon Tippler of Round Tower brewery with licensee Jo Green and a couple of well-known faces from the branch. The next one is on 13<sup>th</sup> January with Farmers presenting; then in March it will be Red Fox. These events start at 6pm. As a nod to winter the Railway currently always has a stout or porter on, as well as a mild.



*Railway Tavern – Simon Tippler, Jo Green, Doug Irons and David Seidlaczek*

# PUB NEWS

The **Thomas Mildmay, Chelmsford** is one of 34 pubs (and the only one in our area) put up for sale by J D Wetherspoon. It was opened in November 2001.

While another of our Wetherspoon pubs, the **Picture Palace, Braintree**, has been awarded a platinum star rating in the Loo of the Year awards! The beer's pretty good too!

First to mention Christmas this year was Sue at the **Square and Compasses, Fuller Street**. "We will be having our traditional Hand Bells and Christmas Carol Evening on Wednesday 16th December with complimentary homemade mince pies and mulled wine." As Michelin might have said, well worth a journey.

News from Brett at the **Golden Fleece, Chelmsford**. "Thanks to all the CAMRA members and others who came along to our autumn beer festival and evening for local members. We've had over 20% growth on ale alone over the same period as last year.

"We have recently been bought by Stonegate and several members were concerned what might happen going forward. I'm pleased to say that not only will we not be changing on the ale front, we will have a wider choice of ale available, more craft options and also some cider options too.

"We have all of our usual great entertainment offers over Christmas and New Year plus we are offering a 3 course Christmas meal for £15.95. We wish everyone a merry Christmas and a happy New Year."

Kelvin at the **Eagle, Braintree** announces that the pub now has alternating quiz and bingo nights on Wednesday evenings, i.e. a quiz one week, bingo the next. Both start at 9. There is a special Christmas quiz on the 20th of December with a Christmas prize draw. This starts at 8.

Regular readers will know that there's always something happening at the **Endeavour, Springfield Road**. You may have missed the Beaujolais night in November but on Friday 4<sup>th</sup>

December representatives from the RNLI Harwich lifeboat crew are attending to present the pub with a picture to commemorate their 50th anniversary and as a thank you for all the support the pub and its customers have given them.

Also on the charity theme there is a Quiz night on Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> January, 8pm, to raise funds for Farleigh Hospice as part of the London Marathon fundraising. Teams of 4 -6 people. There will be team prizes, a raffle and sandwiches all for only £3 per person!

Before that there may still be time for a lunchtime or evening home-cooked Christmas meal.

Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> December is the Landlord's birthday party – "a great disco and some free food as a thank you to all our customers. Come and share Mike's birthday celebrations with us" writes Jacqui.

Christmas Eve is ticket only, but they are free. Ask at the bar for yours soon as numbers will be limited. And for New Year's Eve a celebration of 'The Best of British' - a traditional English Roast dinner of either beef or pork with all the trimmings. Two top London DJs will be entertaining you. This is also ticket only as numbers will be limited and is just £10.

Adnams Southwold Bitter is proving a popular addition to the regular ales here.

Forthcoming pub beer festivals we know about:

**Wednesday 2<sup>nd</sup> to Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> December. Woolpack, Chelmsford.** The best Christmas ales.

**Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> to Thursday 31<sup>st</sup> December. Woolpack, Chelmsford.** A selection of the pub's best-selling and most requested ales.

**CHELMSFORD SUMMER  
BEER & CIDER FESTIVAL**

**Admirals Park  
Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup>-Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> July**

# PARTY CELEBRATING 40 YEARS OF CME CAMRA

On Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> October 150 people joined in the fun at The Black Bull in Margarettng, where the first Chelmsford and mid-Essex CAMRA branch meeting was held in 1975.

4 founder members were present and are still proactive, campaigning in different ways.

Dave Day has continued to be part of the beer team looking after the beers at the festivals and is part of the CME40 Committee. Dave Buckley helped me to put together the display boards for the summer festival depicting various aspects of the branch history and enjoys joining up new members at the festivals. Chris Mills is the Brewery Liaison Officer for Felstar Brewery and Martin Webster campaigns by enjoying drinking the beer at festivals and pubs.

Various Essex brewers who have had brewery bars and made 40 Year Beers compared notes and brews.

There was a lot of laughter and banter with most people following the dress code to wear something ruby or Real-Ale-Ly related.

Copies of the photos are available from Claire Irons.



THE  
**LEATHER BOTTLE**  
- PLESHEY -



**CHRISTMAS BEER FESTIVAL**

23<sup>rd</sup> - 29<sup>th</sup> December

Heated marquee, selection of Christmas Ales,  
Bottled German Lager, Mulled Wine & Mulled Cider.  
Bands playing every night from 6 - 9pm except  
Christmas Day and Bank Holiday Monday.

**CHRISTMAS A LA CARTE MENU**

From 1<sup>st</sup> December

Bookings over 10 people will need to pre-order.

Very pet friendly here!

New playground equipment in rear garden.

The Street, Chelmsford CM3 1HG

Tel: 01245 237291

Email: sharonleatherbottle@gmail.com



King William IV, 114 London Road,  
Braintree, Essex CM77 7PU

[www.moodygoosebrewery.co.uk](http://www.moodygoosebrewery.co.uk)

[info@moodygoosebrewery.co.uk](mailto:info@moodygoosebrewery.co.uk)



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A PROPER PUB

See you at the bar...

**Winner of CAMRA:**  
East Anglia Pub of the Year  
2014  
Essex Pub of the Year  
2014 & 2015  
North Essex Pub of the Year  
2013, 2014 & 2015

# 17TH CHELMSFORD WINTER BEER & CIDER FESTIVAL

## 17TH - 20TH FEBRUARY 2016

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**King Edward VI Grammar School (KEGS)**  
**Broomfield Road, Chelmsford CM1 3SX**  
**(5 minutes from rail and bus stations)**

Our very popular Winter Beer and Cider Festival is coming round shortly, with over 150 real ales to choose from. Although we will have many of the stronger, darker winter brews there will also be golden ales, milds, bitters and fruit beers so hopefully there will be something to suit everyone. We will also have ciders and perries including some special winter ciders.

There will be a selection of local Essex wines from Felsted Wines. Soft drinks will also be available for designated drivers, those under 18 or anyone just wanting a break from the alcohol.

Please note that there is not any parking on the school premises and that parking is very limited in the surrounding streets, although there is a car park nearby. Fortunately, the school is served by a number of local buses which stop outside close to the school entrance.

There will hot and cold food available at all sessions. As they did last year, Hopleaf will be providing their winter range including curries, burgers and even a good old English fry-up, whilst there will be an interesting selection of cold food from Pipers Crisps, Merry Berry Chocolates and Olives & Things.

As in previous years, we will be supporting the school's charity partner at the festival, but as we go to press these details are not yet available.

The Festival is manned by CAMRA members who are all volunteers and who give up their time to build, run and take down the Festival - for fun!

Our opening times are Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> February 3pm to 11pm, Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> to Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> 12 noon to 11pm.

Admission is free to valid card-presenting CAMRA members at all times, and to everyone until 6pm on all festival days. After 6pm Wednesday to Saturday entrance is £3.

Our website will be updated regularly; please visit for the latest information using the QR code or web address at the end of this article.

By the time this edition of Thirsty Times hits the pubs, the winter festival will be about 2 months away, so please put the dates in your diaries now!

And don't forget to come and claim your free half pint if you participated in our survey at the 2015 Summer Festival.

[www.chelmsfordbeerandciderfestivals.org.uk](http://www.chelmsfordbeerandciderfestivals.org.uk)

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# 17th CHELMSFORD WINTER BEER & CIDER FESTIVAL

Wednesday 17th - Saturday 20th February 2016

12 noon - 11pm each day

King Edward VI Grammar School (KEGS)  
Broomfield Road, Chelmsford, CM1 3SX

**OVER 150 REAL ALES AND 50 CIDERS, PERRIES & PYDERS**

Locale Bar, Local Wines from Felsted Vineyard

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Chelmsford Beer Festival

# CAMRA CAMPAIGNING FOR ASSETS OF COMMUNITY VALUE

by Claire Irons

The Campaign for Real Ale recently launched an initiative to protect 3,000 pubs by the end of 2016 from demolition or conversion to other uses such as supermarkets or restaurants. 29 pubs a week are being lost according to CAMRA using official statistics from various sources.

Hence CAMRA is encouraging its members, of which there are 175,454 nationally and 1,798 in Chelmsford and mid-Essex (CME) branch, to nominate their local pub as an **Asset of Community Value (ACV)**. We have around 160 pubs in our branch area so we appreciate help on this important matter!

“Holes in the current planning system allow pubs to be sold off, demolished or converted to many other uses without planning permission or the involvement of the local community. However when a pub is nominated as an Asset of Community Value it automatically receives planning protection

meaning that it is no longer a soft target to would-be developers looking to quickly purchase and convert or demolish the pub –which in some instances has literally happened overnight.” Tom Stainer, CAMRA’s Head of Communications.

**ACV nomination** can be done by an unincorporated group of 21 local people, a Parish Council or by CAMRA members on behalf on their branch. However, you will require written permission from the chairman of the branch, Doug Irons, if you wish to nominate a pub on behalf of Chelmsford and mid-Essex CAMRA. He will email the project officer of the relevant council. Contact him on 01245 290710 or email [chair@chelmsford.camra.org.uk](mailto:chair@chelmsford.camra.org.uk). The CAMRA Articles of Association, (all 13 pages!), the official copies of the Register of Title for the pub and the Title plan will need to accompany the ACV nomination form for the relevant council,

THE WHITE HART HOTEL, WITHAM

Christmas Meal Bookings Dec 1-23rd

12 days of Christmas Beer Festival starts December 13th

OVER 30 DIFFERENT BEERS & CIDERS

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which can be sent electronically.

To find out more about the ACV campaign, please visit [www.camra.org.uk/list-your-local](http://www.camra.org.uk/list-your-local).

### LIST YOUR LOCAL

Recently members of CME CAMRA have

nominated the following pubs:

The Duck, Newney Green

The Eagle, Galleywood

The Walnut Tree, Broads Green

(CME Branch Pub of the Year 1978)

The Wheatsheaf, Hatfield Peverel

The Willows, Cressing (CME branch Most Improved Pub 2015)

**THE WALNUT TREE, Broads Green** is so much more than a great pub serving **real ale and cider** to thirsty customers who have made the effort to visit the **only pub in the village**. This pub has special value to local heritage and culture, which should be protected. The Public Bar and Snug are original since 1888 with original flooring and bar front to what was the bottle and jug. It is unusual in having three bars with the Saloon being used for meetings of local sports teams, charities and community groups including CAMRA.

Featuring regularly in the Good Beer Guide and the Chelmsford and mid-Essex Recommended Pub Guide, it is a member of CAMRA's Locale scheme, committed to serving locally-produced real ales and meeting consumer demands for local produce. The

pub takes delivery of parcels, take aways and various deliveries for people living on the Green. It has continued in the traditions that bring the community together including a dartboard, crib, a Christmas carol service and hosts social functions for a karate club and local children. The community use it as a bartering point and sell local vegetables and eggs. The annual Help the Heroes community barbeque on the last Sunday in May is run in conjunction with the villagers. The free biscuits and water for dogs, and training, go down well with the dogs and their owners!! The monthly baking club, local newspapers and library are popular.

By the next edition of Thirsty Times, I shall know if my nomination for it to be registered as an ACV has been successful.

Please help us in the campaign to LIST YOUR LOCAL!!



# BREWERY NEWS

## **BISHOP NICK** *Libby Ridley tells us:*

Back for the Festive Season is the ever popular **Feast** (4.5% Winter Ale). This strong premium ale is packed with traditional festive fruit and spice flavours. Available in cask and 500ml bottles.

Now taking orders for polypins/mini pins/mini casks for all your Christmas and New Year revelry. Our Brewery Shop is open Monday-Friday (9am-4.30pm) and on Saturdays (10am-1pm) throughout December. Gift packs and merchandise make perfect presents for the hard to buy for.

Excited to announce we scooped THREE awards at SIBA East Beer Competition 2015:

**Embers** (3.8% Amber Ale) got SILVER in the Cask Beer category for Standard Bitters and Pale Ales.

**Martyr IPA** (5% American-style IPA) was awarded BRONZE in the Small Pack category (bottled beer) for Strong Bitters & Pale Ales and BRONZE in the Cask Ale category for Strong Bitters & Pale Ales.

**Embers** was re-brewed due to demand and both **Embers** and **Martyr** are available in 500ml bottles from our brewery shop, online or at our regular stockists (see website).

**Witch Hunt** (4.2% Porter) has proven a hit for October/November – now sold out in cask but still available in 500ml bottles. (Splash it in to your Christmas pudding mix for that extra je ne sais quoi!).

We are now listed with Majestic Wine for our core range of bottle-conditioned ales and have supplied Braintree, Chelmsford and Bishops Stortford stores. They can also be found in Shenfield Wine Store in Brentwood, Braintree Arts Theatre, Four Vintners (Stock) and Guntons Delicatessen (Colchester).

New outlets for our cask ale include: Donkey & Buskins (Colchester), Golden Lion and Milestone (Rochford), Three Horseshoes (Farnham), White Hart (Grays) and Cherry Tree (Stambridge).

We had successful and enjoyable days at Lathcoats Farm Shop's Apple Day on 17<sup>th</sup> October – a great family day celebrating all things Autumn. And at the Stoke-by-Nayland Christmas Fayre on Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> November.

For a full product list see [www.bishopnick.com](http://www.bishopnick.com). Reach us on 01376 349 605 and follow us on Facebook - BishopNickAle and Twitter - @BishopNick or sign up for our newsletter at [info@bishopnick.com](mailto:info@bishopnick.com)

## **MALDON BREWING COMPANY** *Mike says:*



We have been very busy brewing and have lots of specials coming up at the brewery for Christmas! All will be available in bottle direct from the brewery, as well as on draught and in bottle

at the Farmers Yard micropub in Maldon. This year we see the return of the classic and immensely popular Farmers Christmas Stout 4.8%. Chocolatey, coffee and all round delicious! We have also brought back Five Gold Rings, the hoppy 3.8% golden ale that was first to sell out last year. To complement these there is the new Christmas Light 3.9%, a light gold ale with an interesting and tasty hop called Waimea

from New Zealand, Rudolph's Red, a traditional ruby 4.3% best bitter and Agnes Fountain 4.0% - an easy-drinking amber ale brewed for the Agnes Fountain concert in Maldon.

December also sees this year's final barge-themed beer Winter Sail 4.0%. We are very excited to try this ale as we let the brewers loose in the hop store - we now have a lovely golden beer featuring a heady mix of Kazbek, Summit and Pioneer hops for a superb citrus finish. Can't wait to drink this!

We have some really smart bottle gift packs on sale at the brewery that make ideal presents and which can have all of the Christmas beers in if desired.

# BREWERY NEWS

## BRENTWOOD BREWING COMPANY *Wendy Pike reports:*

### Beers

Brentwood Beer to savour in front of a log fire at your local or in bottles at home has to be Winter Warmer 4.7% ABV. Keep a lookout in pubs for Volcano 4.7% ABV too. Chestnut Stout (3.999% ABV) season is but short, so enjoy whilst it lasts. This one is brewed with local chestnuts. New from Elephant School is White Elephant 4% ABV. Invented by Head Brewer Ethan, this golden mild is brewed with coriander. It's light and spicy.

### Pubs

As a way of promoting local pubs and Brentwood Beer, we're working with different locals for our Pub of the Month campaign. The first one is our brewery tap, The White Horse, Coxtie Green. A review appears on the brewery's community news page in the Brentwood Gazette and on the brewery website as well as getting mentions throughout the month on social media. The Forrester's Arms, High Ongar is our December pub with The Eagle, Kelvedon Hatch for January and The Hutton Junction, Shenfield in February. There'll be beer and food matching ideas

too.

### Christmas

Our Twelve Beers of Christmas promotion starts with a Tasting Event on Saturday 12th December 10.30am to 3.30pm at Brentwood Brewery. The promotion runs until 23rd December in the Brewery Shop and includes a different special offer, a free gift or discount, on a different Brentwood Beer each day. See [www.brentwoodbrewing.co.uk](http://www.brentwoodbrewing.co.uk) for full details or check us out on Twitter @BrentwoodBrewCo. Alongside our selected Twelve Beers of Christmas for each ale we'll be suggesting complementary food match combinations like trying Christmas Cake with Chockwork Orange 6.5% ABV.

Christmas beers from us are: Santa's Little Helper, Santa's Paradise, Berry Christmas and Five Gold Rings. The ultimate celebration ale Brentwood-style is of course our Champagned beer, Van Kannon 7.7% ABV. You'll agree there's plenty of choice when it comes to raising a glass of Brentwood Beer to toast the season. Which reminds me, Roland and team would like to wish you a very, merry, Berry Christmas.

## CROUCH VALE

*Sir Colin of Dengie told us:*



For December, available in both cask and (500ml) bottle-conditioned form we will have Santa's Revenge (abv 5%) – a dangerously drinkable strong amber ale, brewed with pale and cara malts and flavoured

with US Amarillo hops.

Sorachi Ace (abv 4%) - a Japanese hop dating from the '80s which seemed to be destined for obscurity until the clever Yakima Valley growers in the US got hold of it. It's a distinctive, citrusy hop with herbal notes and provides excellent character in this beer.

Also, Anchor Street Porter (abv 4.9%) and Essex Nights (abv 4.1%), in cask only on a when-it's-gone-it's-gone basis and all the regular beers.

## ROUND TOWER

*Simon Tippler reports:*

Here at Round Tower Brewery we often look forward to winter, and here it is. The darker nights often bring out the darker beers, and we love them here.

Have you been keeping up with our current series of beers named after the Blue Plaques found in and around Chelmsford? Currently you should be able to find Strutt 5.1% gold hopped with Ella, Galaxy and Crystal, Wireless Gold 4% and Knight 4.5% bitter hopped with Bramling Cross. Keep an eye out for more beers in this series in the New Year.

We are pleased to announce that alongside our ever popular Slipstream we also have Skreens 6.1% stout in stock and available in bottles for enjoying at home.

For the third year running, we are opening the brewery and our 'Pop Up Bottle Shop' on Saturday afternoons in December for sales of bottles, gift packs and preordered poly pins. Why not pop along, say hello and pick up some beer for Christmas or some great gifts.

# BREWERY NEWS

## WIBBLERS

Our new beer is Festive Star – 4.1%. Santa's (Night Off) is back as it is so loved. We also have Porters – 4 flavours and all great to drink. Oatmeal Stout 4.0% and Winter Wibble 6% will both be coming along soon.

If you are interested in something a little different please contact Abby (aaby@wibblers.co.uk) as we have our Be The Brewer range of ales, made by the public when they come along and spend the day with Phil and Ollie making their own recipe. They tend to be a little bit stronger and slightly different to our core products, firkins only.

Update on our move – builders are working on putting up various walls and building office space. Taproom being designed. Still no idea on dates!

Christmas open day 12th December 12 until 3pm. Come along and sample our ales, buy your Christmas supplies or place an order for collection by 2pm Christmas Eve.

Sales into Central London are starting to pick up on both ale and craft keg lines so keep an eye out for Wibblers.

## MOODY GOOSE

*In a special report Colin Brown tells us:*

The newest brewery in the branch first started brewing in February 2015, the fruits of the initial brew being commercially sampled in May.

But why Moody Goose? More of that later, first a (brief) bit of history.

Moody Goose is run by husband and wife team Marian Dennison (the brewster) and Angus Hicks (the enabler). Together they own and run the King William IV in London Road, Braintree. They have run the King William since it reopened in December 2009, rescuing the pub from possible permanent closure after it lay empty for the prior two years.

The route to brewing was not necessarily straightforward; is it ever? The first brewing kit they tried to purchase was sadly denied them at an advanced stage. Not deterred they pressed on and one evening a slightly alcohol-fuelled eBay

search netted the remains of the 3 barrel Urban Brewhouse brewery plant. The equipment had been in storage for two years, being previously housed in the Junction Brew Pub (now closed) located near the National Railway Museum in York.

Moody Goose is housed in the old outbuildings of the King William which Angus converted from an outside bar into a purpose-built brewery. While Angus was busy with the conversion Marian got out the books and began the task of learning how to brew. She confesses that prior to this the only other thing she had brewed was a cup of tea!

The first brew Pickled Pig, was so named because it was literally a pig to brew and came out much stronger than planned. The brew process was completed at 2:15 in the morning! With customers waiting in the pub, like expectant parents, to celebrate the new arrival. Of course it was some weeks before they could sample the results but it was declared clear and drinkable, much to the relief of the fledgling brewers.

There have been many and varied brews since then. Angus explains that this is driven by the fact that the brews are being tweaked as they progress, so



# BREWERY NEWS



it is not always reasonable to reuse the name of a prior brew. This tweaking will eventually lead to the core brews of Moody Goose being established. This strategy can be employed because, apart from a number of beer festivals, the only establishment supplied by Moody Goose remains the King William.

You only have to talk to Marian and Angus for a short period of time for their enthusiasm for the brewery and the pub to become apparent. Angus is rightly proud of that fact that over a recent weekend Moody Goose ales outsold all other beers (including lager) combined.

The emphasis now appears to be on establishing Moody Goose but notwithstanding this they have plans for improvements and developments over the coming months. It will be interesting to see how things develop.

Oh and why Moody Goose? Simple. Angus is locally known as Goose and he can be a bit ..... well, Moody.

Currently drinking in the King William is LackdasicAle (amber 4.1%) with Old Rooster (old ale 5.1%) soon to be ready. Closely followed by the eagerly awaited first mild Stark Mild (4.2%), to follow later is Winterfell (5.2%) Christmas ale. If you are lucky and time it right you might be able to sample JurEssex Ale (old ale 5.6%), most of which is destined for the Pigs Ear beer festival (Jurassic Pork).

Recently brewed is Toad Tickler (amber 3.8%) and Arbor Gold (gold 3.7%).

## Tasting notes for current

### and favourite ales of Moody Goose

**LackdasicAle** – 4.1% amber ale, with a pleasant mixture of malts and hops and a full hop and fruit finish.

Winter 2015

**Old Rooster** – 5.1% old ale, strong old Essex ale with sweet malt to start with and a hoppy almost citrus finish.

**Stark Mild** – 4.2% mild, autumn mild, warm red with a gentle blend of malt and fruit and a dry hoppy finish.

**Winterfell** – 5.2% Christmas ale, dark old ale, gently hopped with Essex grown hops, fruit flavours with a bittersweet hoppy finish.

**JurEssex Ale** – 5.6% old ale, dark strong old ale, gently hopped with Essex-grown hops, rich fruit flavours with a bitter sweet finish.

**Toad Tickler** – 3.8% amber, last taste of summer, fresh and hoppy using locally-grown hops giving a good balance of malt and hop and a bitter and fresh green aftertaste.

**Barnestormer** – 4.2% pale ale, complex ale with a soft mixture of malts and hops with an intense hop and fruit finish.

**Fibonacci** – 5.1% pale ale, sweet malt taste with malt and fruit aromas and a gentle hoppy finish.

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# THE FLEMISH BEER YEAR



## 1. Bruges Beer Festival

First weekend February, Bruges – Annual.

Very much the herald of the Belgian beer year. Large well-run beer festival that takes place a short walk from the station in a functional but spacious venue. Always well-staffed considering the numbers through the doors over the weekend. There is usually a high proportion of Beer Firms amongst the participants but these days the quality of these contract-brewed beers have soared and last year there were 365 beers to choose from. To give an idea of scale this festival is around the same size as Chelmsford Summer Beer festival but takes place in just two days. If you want to avoid the crowds try the latter part of Sunday.

## 2. Nacht van de Grote Dorst

Fourth weekend April, Eizeringen – Biennial.

Seen as the Friday precursor for the weekend of the Zythos Beer Festival. This unique outdoor event attracts beerlovers from all over the world, who congregate for the national festival. The event promotes traditional Lambic beer culture for locals and far-flung fans. The Night of Great Thirst takes place in the centre of the village of Eizeringen, just west of Brussels, in the superb lambic café In de Verzekering Tegen de Grote Dorst (The Insurance Against Great Thirst) and under marquees, and offers spontaneously fermented beers from the handful of Belgian lambic brewers and

blenders and some wannabees from further afield. A great event but wrap up warm.

## 3. Zythos BierFestival

Fourth weekend April, Leuven – Annual.

Belgium's premier beer event. The festival takes place in the gigantic Brabant, a short free shuttle bus ride from Leuven station. Individual beer stalls manned by each of the breweries invited. Recently Zythos has been proud to present only beers brewed at their own breweries rather than contract brews. As this is the premier event from Belgium's consumer group expect very slick management and very good service. A great experience to get up front and personal with the actual brewers and a fountain of Belgian brewing knowledge can be gleaned by just chatting to the guys behind each bar.

## 4. Toer de Geuze

May, Pajottenland – Biennial.

The average British beer drinker has little experience of lambic beers apart from at specialist beer shops and bars and at the better beer festivals. However the Flemish public turn out on mass for a chance to tour all the main breweries and blenders of this style of beer as they play open house for the day. This is a must-do event if you want to know more about spontaneously fermented beers. Book early for one of



the buses organised by HORAL, the guys behind the day's proceedings as these sell out early.

### 5. Leuven Innovation Beer Festival

May, Leuven – Annual.

A relatively new festival that only started in 2015 supporting Hof ten Dormaal after the fire at their brewery. They managed to bring together inspirational brewers from the USA and Europe to showcase all that is currently best in the brewing world, ironically at a venue which is the aged heart of AB InBev or whatever they will be called following the absorption of SABMiller. The 2016 festival will see lots of tickers since this festival puts innovation at the centre and consequently it sees plenty of new and unique beers. The venue is very special and future festivals should thrive bringing in top breweries from all over the world.

### 6. International Streekbierenfestival

August, Zwevegem – Annual.

More a good-time celebration of beer than a deep reflective experience. This huge festival has a long history of bringing good beer to lots of people. Some of the best brewers in Flanders gather for what is plainly a community knees-up. Imagine lots of good spirit and great beer to a soundtrack of dated 1980's rock and pop. If you want a great time just go with it!

### 7. Hoppefeest

September, Poperinge – Triennial.

Although this only takes place every three years it is worth keeping an eye out for this celebration as it is unique. Here you can be part of local culture as the hop harvest takes place and there are lots of celebrations all around the town. They are twinned with other towns in Europe who share the hop vibe including Zatec in the Czech Republic, Wolnzach, in Germany and Hythe in Kent. There are themed exhibitions at the excellent National Hop museum based in town and the Sunday also sees the huge Hop Parade through the town as the culmination of this special time of year for the

town when the townsfolk dress up as insects friendly to the hop plant (yes, really). Lekker Westhoeks beer exhibition in the Grote Markt keeps people lubricated with a great choice of beer from around 25 breweries through the weekend.

### 8. Modeste Beer festival

October, Antwerp – Annual.

A great example of how a well-run Zythos branch presents their local festival, quite different from UK traditional beer festivals. The festival takes place in the giant De Koninck brewery now owned by Duvel-Moortgat. It features brewery stalls from all over Belgium including some of the new thriving newcomers to the market. Although the knowledgeable staff at each bar is provided by each brewery the local branch of ABC supply the temporary infrastructure and the smiles.

### 9. Poperinge Bierfestival

October, Poperinge – Annual.



Expect to see lots of experienced beer-drinking Brits alongside the local populace at their new more spacious venue which is a short walk from the centre of Poperinge. Really good beers from mainly west Flemish brewers and beer firms. A good number of these beer firm guys are currently brewing at established breweries while they get their kit together to start their own places.

### 10. Christmas Beer Festival

December, Essen – Annual.

Signalling the end of the Belgian beer year this renowned seasonal beer festival is staged by the northernmost branch of Zythos in Essen. Every year objective Beer tasters Essen Region manages to get round the whole of Belgium to collect supplies of every available winter and Christmas beer produced during that year. This has got to be experienced at least once in your lifetime when over the two days visitors have the chance to try more than 150 Belgian Winter and Christmas beers.

# CIDER PRESS by Claire Irons

## CIDER PRESS by Claire Irons

(made with katy apples and perry pears)

### East Anglia Cider Competition

The East Anglian Cider competition was judged at the Norwich Beer Festival in October, which is a CAMRA-designated cider month along with May which is when the National Championship judging is done at Reading Beer Festival of the new season ciders and perries.

The results of the East Anglian Cider Competition were:

#### CIDER:

- 1<sup>st</sup> Hardings, 3 Peace Sweet
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Pickled Pig, New Season Porker
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Whin Hill, Browns (single variety)

The other finalists were (alphabetically):

Blackhand Cyder, Cider  
Herts Cider, Secret Cider  
Potton Press, Trip Hazard  
Simon's, Short Stirling  
Waddlegoose Lane, Woodsprite

#### PERRY:

- 1<sup>st</sup> Cambridge Cider Company, President's Perry
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Burnards, Stray Perry

The 3<sup>rd</sup> place would have been for London Glider Perry however as it is produced in Woodford on the London /Essex border, a stone's throw from the Essex boundary it was deemed to not qualify as being an Essex cider. However, they are due to move premises to Ongar in 2016, which definitely is Essex so watch this space!

I plan to have some of these winning ciders available on the Winter festival cider bar so come and try them and judge for yourself.

## WINTER FESTIVAL CIDER BAR AND PRESENTATIONS

I plan to present the winning producers with their awards for the customers' choice at the summer festival 2015 from the free vote on the opening day Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> February at KEGS.

**Cider of the Festival:** Berties, Cox- A- Ruby – Do Medium (from cox apples and matured in a red wine barrel made to celebrate 40 Years of Chelmsford and mid-Essex CAMRA)

**Perry of the Festival:** Apple Cottage, Fred's Perry

**Pyder of the Festival:** Apple Cottage, KT Perry

COME AND ENJOY THE TREMENDOUS CHOICE TO TANTALISE YOUR TASTE BUDS AND VOTE FOR YOUR FAVOURITE CIDER, PERRY AND PYDER OF THE FESTIVAL. Voting slips will be available at the cider bar.

ALL THE STOCK ON THE CIDER BAR IS GLUTEN FREE AND SUITABLE FOR VEGETARIANS AND VEGANS.

Whether they contain any other allergens such as Sulphites will be stated on the card. The cider bar will be restocked as required to ensure suitable supply until Saturday night with many familiar favourites and award –winning Ciders, Perrys and Pyders (made with apples and pears).

The cask cards will have **coloured numbered stickers according to style** from sweet to dry to make it easier to spot specific styles. Taste and appearance symbols give information about each product: CASK-MATURED, CLEAR, CLOUDY, FRUITY, TANNIC and WINE-LIKE.

This winter festival our **SPECIAL FEATURE** will be **Spiced Ciders**.

We plan to have Delvin End Winter Festival 7% from Essex; Henderson's Spiced Cider from Kent, fruity sweet 5% and Orchard Pig Maverick Chilli and Ginger cider from Somerset 4.4%.

WASSAIL!! (traditional toast meaning "good health", as you raise your glass of cider and SMILE!)



*Pictured at the 2015 Winter Cider bar are (centre) Ian Reynolds, producer of Bertie's Cider and (right) Pete Thomas, landlord of the Three Elms, Chignal St James which went on to be judged runner-up in the East Anglian Cider Pub of the Year.*

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# SOCIAL CALENDAR

## DECEMBER

**Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> December, all day.**

**Ipswich Pub Crawl (joint social with Ipswich CAMRA).**

I am by train from Chelmsford, Witham or Braintree – Group Save tickets where possible. Full details and proposed itinerary to follow as we will be under the guidance of the Ipswich Branch.

**Wednesday 9<sup>th</sup> December.**

**Branch meeting at the Walnut Tree, Broads Green.**

8pm for 8.30pm start. Community bus from opposite Chelmsford bus station at 7.45pm. £5.00 members/OAPS, £6.00 non-members.

**Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> December, 12.30pm for 1pm sitting. Lunch at the County Hotel, Chelmsford.**

Choose from the a la carte menu. Firm bookings will be required for this event.

**Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup> December.**

**The Mystery Runabout Trip.**

Coach/minibus to be confirmed. Will include a visit to an award-winning brewery, cost includes a buffet and generous amounts of ale. Plus we plan a visit to the brewery tap afterwards. Departing opposite Chelmsford station at 7.30pm, with pick-ups and drop-offs in Braintree & Rayne. Cost £9.00 members, £10 non-members for travel, plus £12 for brewery visit.

**Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> December, all day.**

**Colchester Social Pub Crawl (joint event with Colchester CAMRA).**

By train from Chelmsford, Witham or Braintree. Group Save tickets where possible. Visiting some of the best pubs in Colchester under the guidance of our friends at Colchester CAMRA. Departing Chelmsford station at 11am.

**Tuesday 29<sup>th</sup> December, all day.**

**Inter Branch Social – London Trip and Pub Crawl.**

Train from Chelmsford to Paddington, then 205 bus visiting various pubs on the route back to Liverpool Street. One day off-peak travel card costs £26.40 from Chelmsford and includes travel within London. (However there may be some cheaper options available.)

## JANUARY

**Monday 11<sup>th</sup> January.**

**Branch Meeting at the Hop Beer Shop, Moulsham Street, Chelmsford.**

8pm for 8.30pm start (no bus to this event). The Shop will be closed to the general public and John is kindly opening the shop for our private function.

**Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> January.**

**All Day Runabout by minibus to Saffron Walden, Thaxted and Cornish Hall End.**

Potential joint social with North West Essex Branch. 17 spaces, members only. Price £10. Optional 10am breakfast at Railway Tavern (usual price £6.00). Depart 11am opposite Chelmsford station. Chelmsford drop-off circuit afterwards.

**Wednesday 27<sup>th</sup> to Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> January. Colchester Winter Beer Festival.**

Members are encouraged to make their own way to this event by train or bus. Group Save on train for 3 or more (1/3 off).

## FEBRUARY

**Friday 5<sup>th</sup> February. Evening Runabout.**

To the Hurdlemakers Arms, Woodham Mortimer, the Bell, Purleigh and the Prince of Wales, Stow Maries. By community bus departing 7.30pm opposite Chelmsford station. Price £7.50 members, £9 non-members. Price includes Chelmsford drop-off circuit afterwards.

**Wednesday 10<sup>th</sup> February - Branch Meeting at the Square & Compasses, Fuller Street.**

8pm for 8.30pm start. Community bus departing from opposite Chelmsford station at 7.45pm. Cost £5.00. Usual drop-off circuit afterwards.

**Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> to Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> February. Chelmsford and mid Essex Winter Beer Festival.**

At King Edward VI Grammar School (KEGS), Broomfield Road, Chelmsford CMI 3SX.

**Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> February.**

**Branch Cider POTY Judging.**

Free Campaigning minibus. 17 spaces for members only. All-day event visiting the branch's favourite pubs who are serving more than 1 real cider or perry. This

# SOCIAL CALENDAR

is a judging trip so those wishing to partake must be prepared to complete score sheets for each pub we visit. Places must be booked with Martin Joy 07878 624443. Usual drop-off circuit afterwards.

## MARCH

### **Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> March. All Day trip to Bath.**

By coach from opposite Chelmsford station. Possible brewery visit to Abbey Ales, to be confirmed. Price for trip will be £25 for members, £26 for non-members. Departure times and itinerary to be confirmed.

### **Wednesday 9<sup>th</sup> March.**

#### **Branch Meeting at the Battersford Court, Witham.**

8pm for 8.30pm start. Community bus from opposite Chelmsford station at 7.30pm. Cost £5. Our Chosen POTY will be announced at this meeting. Usual Chelmsford drop-off circuit afterwards

### **Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> March. Chelmsford Pub Crawl. Joint Social with Maldon and Dengie Branch.**

Meet 11am at the Ale House, Chelmsford and visit all the best real ale and cider pubs in the City.

### **Friday 25<sup>th</sup> March (Good Friday).**

#### **Our annual Good Friday pub crawl.**

Broomfield Road and Duke Street crawl ending the evening at the Woolpack for its Easter Beer Festival. 12 noon from the Angel, Broomfield. The plan is to visit as many of the pubs as possible along Broomfield Road and Duke Street.

## APRIL

### **Friday 1<sup>st</sup> to Monday 4<sup>th</sup> April.**

#### **CAMRAAGM and Members' weekend, Liverpool.**

See CAMRA website. Make your own arrangements for travel and accommodation.

### **Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> to Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> April.**

#### **Maldon Beer Festival, Plume School, Maldon.**

All members encouraged to attend and support this event. We will not be running a bus to this event so please use public transport or make your own way there.

### **Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> April.**

#### **Walk to Maldon from Chelmsford.**

You are all invited to join our planned walk along the river from Chelmsford to Maldon stopping off for refreshments at Papermill Lock on the way.

Proposed departure from Railway Tavern, Chelmsford at 11am. Optional breakfast at the Railway Tavern at 10am. (Price is usually £6.00). Arriving at Maldon the plan is to visit the Beer Festival and some of the fine drinking establishments this town now has. Returning to Chelmsford by bus/ taxi at your leisure. Cyclists and those wishing to do only part of the journey are all welcome to join in.

### **Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> April. Essex Cider POTY Judging.**

Free Campaigning minibus. 17 spaces for members only. All day event visiting the best Cider pubs in Essex as chosen by each branch. This is a judging trip so those wishing to partake must be prepared to complete score sheets for each pub we visit. Depart from opposite Chelmsford station 11am. Optional breakfast at the Railway Tavern at 10am (Price is usually £6.00).

### **Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> April. Branch Meeting at the White Hart, Margaretting Tye.**

8pm for 8.30pm start. Community bus departs from opposite Chelmsford station at 7.45pm. Cost £5.00 which includes Chelmsford drop-off circuit afterwards.

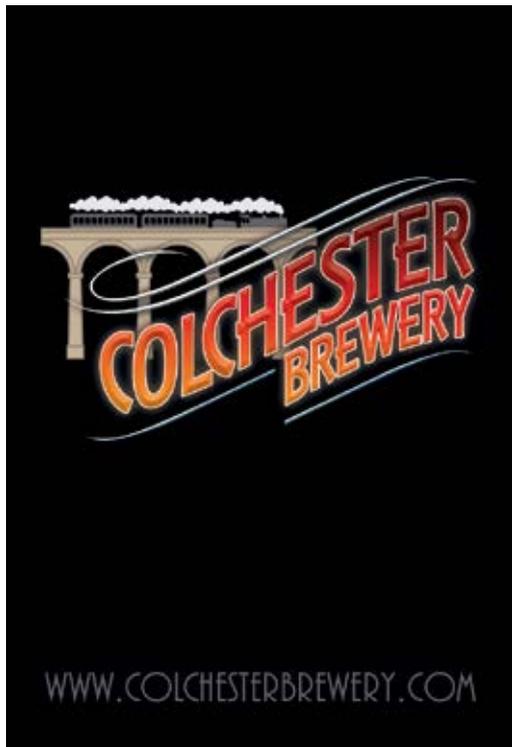
### **Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> April. Evening Runabout.**

Visiting the Leather Bottle, Pleshey, Butchers Arms, North End, Chequers, Felsted and Flitch of Bacon, Little Dunmow. By community bus departing 7.30pm opposite Chelmsford station. Cost £7.50 for members, £9 for non-members, includes Chelmsford drop-off circuit afterwards.

### **Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> April. Essex POTY Judging.**

All day event visiting the best pubs in Essex as chosen by each branch. This is a judging trip so those wishing to partake must be prepared to complete score sheets for each pub we visit. Depart from opposite Chelmsford station 11am. Optional breakfast at the Railway Tavern at 10am (Price is usually £6.00).

Places for trips must be booked with Martin Joy: 07878 624443 or by email: [socialsecretary@chelmsford.camra.org.uk](mailto:socialsecretary@chelmsford.camra.org.uk). Please give your contact telephone number when booking.



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# A STEP INTO THE PAST: STONE-GROUND MALT USED ONCE AGAIN

by Nigel Sadler

I was fortunate to receive a call from a brewing friend up in Lincolnshire back in early September with an invite to launch a new beer. When I say fortunate it was because this really was going to be quite a special event in many ways. So what made it special? It was to be the UK's first beer brewed with locally-grown and malted Lincolnshire barley, stone-ground in Western Europe's only working 8 sail windmill standing all of 12 feet from the brewery itself. I was hooked!

The 8 Sail Brewery was started by Tony Pygott back in June 2010. He bought the brewing kit from PBC (Porter Brewing Company.) and set up the six barrel plant in Heckington Windmill's adjacent former grain store. The first brew took place on 22nd June that year. Having built up a solid distribution network, 8 Sail Brewery cask and bottled-conditioned beers can now be found across Lincolnshire, Nottinghamshire, South Yorkshire and further afield. He was joined by Brewer Steve Doane in 2012 and since then the pair have gone on to produce many award-winning ales, the most recent accolade being East Midlands CAMRA's Champion Beer for their Damson Porter.



*The 6BBL PBC kit: Left to right – Copper, mash tun and edge of HLT*

Steve and I had met 4 years previously when he came down to Learn2brew to attend one of my courses and it was he who called me that September Winter 2015

morning.

Heckington Windmill is truly unique and has quite a history, going back to 1830, the year it was built. The 6 storey mill has been at various times a 4, 5, 6 and 8 sail mill over the years. The current 8 sail configuration came into being in 1892.

Used originally for milling locally-grown wheat it went through a series of owners until in 1974 it passed into the ownership of Lincolnshire County Council. Wheat grinding stopped back in 1907 but was revived for a 15 year period between 1984 and 1999 before structural defects took their toll and it was forced to close.



*Heckington Windmill as it looks today.*

In 2009 the former Mill house re-opened as tea rooms and visitor centre and in 2013 the Heritage Lottery Fund awarded a grant to purchase and renovate the site. Currently the site is managed and run by volunteers and local enthusiasts who form the Heckington Windmill Trust. The Trust leases the mill from the County Council.

2014 saw a new set of sails fitted and the mill has been operational again for just over a year. Other plans in the pipeline include a separate visitor and education centre for local schools to use.

So who came up with the idea of milling malt and producing subsequently a beer from that malt? It seems to have been a joint decision, taken over a few glasses of beer no doubt, that would see both brewery and mill work together closely in this unique venture and create something special. The brewery team was confident of their brewing skills and Mill Manager, Jim Bailey, was equally confident that he could get the right grist profile suitable for mash tun use so why not give it a go?



*Tony Pygott and Steve Doane of 8 Sail Brewery*

Tony and Steve's first step was to contact Ken Steer-Jones, General Manager at Bairds Malt in Grantham.

Ken's vast knowledge and input would be key to getting the project working successfully. Ken was a little apprehensive at first but soon realised what an opportunity this would be. New brewing-barley variety Propino was selected from a local farm and sent to Ken to be malted in the usual manner. Once done it was then delivered to the windmill in small 200kg lots where it was Jim Bailey's turn to work his magic.



*One of the sets of Peak stones and grain feed-hopper*

Jim learnt the miller's art many years ago and was kind enough to give me a quick guided tour upon my arrival. He was keen to show me the 3 sets of mill stones and the system for controlling their spacing. Two pairs of stones, known as Peak Stones, are made from Derbyshire gritstone, hence their name, a hard-wearing and relatively cheap material; these sets being dedicated to the production of the malt grist and wholemeal flour. The third set of stones, used for milling fine white wheat flour, originate near Paris and are of quartzite, he told me, much more expensive but necessary for the higher quality of that product.



*The screw controlled cantilever system that adjusts the gap setting by raising or lowering the bottom fixed stone.*

Jim knew the basic grist spec. that Tony and Steve were after for their mash tun system and the requirement to maintain a degree of husk integrity to help keep the mash bed open. It took a couple of trial runs with tweaks here and there plus a couple of worrying moments with some sparks produced at one point but eventually it all settled down to produce a milled product with around 80% coarse material/grits and 20% flour.

Brewer Steve told me that he reckoned they could work with this grist and went ahead with a trial brew at the end of August. So successful was the batch that they decided to do the beer launch with it and racked off a number of firkins plus plenty of bottles for their brewery shop and the mill's licenced tea room. Thus "Rolling Stone", a 4.3% ABV golden ale, was born which I found to be a very pleasant, easy-drinking and balanced beer featuring mostly English hop varieties.

Jim explained to me that he can now rattle through 200kg of malt in about an hour, fairly fast going by all accounts. He samples the milled material every few minutes and his other hand is almost constantly on the adjuster mechanism where with barely a ¼ turn of the screw he moves the huge stones by less than half a millimetre at a time, which is really fine control for this set-up I would think.

It's hoped that this unique beer will help raise funds for the Windmill Trust as well as providing 8 Sail Brewery with a really good USP. The Windmill Trust has plans to restore a bakehouse on the site in the



*Mill Manager Jim Bailey points out the sample port on the grist chute*

coming year to produce bread and cakes using stone ground flour from the mill.

Let's hope that both parties do well in the future and maybe we might see one or two more windmills across the country turning out grists for small-scale breweries to use.



*Two fine products from the Heckington Windmill*

Further information about the brewery can be found at: [www.8sailbrewery.co.uk](http://www.8sailbrewery.co.uk) and for more on the windmill: [www.heckingtonwindmill.org.uk](http://www.heckingtonwindmill.org.uk)

# SO YOU WANT TO BE A BEER EXPERT?

Jeff Evans (CAMRA Books, £12.99)

.....

This is a timely book. The surge of interest in drinking good beer in recent years has led to a demand for greater knowledge and appreciation of the subject. As Jeff Evans points out, many years ago the wine industry took consumers to its heart, enabling them to develop an understanding of grapes, production methods and vintages. Beer needs similar tender loving care.

But those of us who have been labouring to create a language of beer are in danger of being overtaken by twin events: the sheer flood of new styles and a tendency among the young turks of the craft beer movement to talk in a manner that divorces them from the average punter in the Dog & Duck. "Hop forward", an expression much in evidence today among craft brewers, is more likely to direct drinkers to the sports pages of their newspapers than to the delights of Cascade, Citra and Willamette.

Sensibly, Jeff restricts the discussion of beer styles to the main ones. As Stephen Beaumont has pointed out in his new book, the Beer & Food Companion, the American Brewers Association has mystified rather than clarified styles by creating a list of 141 divisions and sub-divisions.

In a major section called "A family of beers", Jeff takes the reader through generic styles that include ales – from milds, through bitters, IPA, porter and stout to old ales and barley wines – lambic, lagers dark and golden, wheat beers and wood-aged varieties. Each style is accompanied by his selection of beers to seek out and taste and the entire book is interspersed with useful tips on where to obtain beers along with breweries that offer tours and key brewing museums in many countries.

Jeff begins at the beginning, tracing the origins of

brewing to the Old World in the fertile plains that now form modern Iraq. Brewing played a vital role in turning hunter-gatherers into settled communities where grain was grown to make the staples of life – beer and bread. Brewing spread to the west and Jeff outlines brewing methods and types of beer in the medieval period and the vast changes in technology ushered in by the industrial revolution. He describes how the growth of global brewers in the 20<sup>th</sup> century restricted consumer choice but how choice has been restored by the modern craft beer revolution.

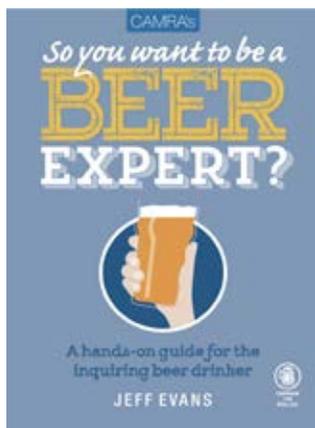
A major section on brewing strips away the mystique surrounding the subject. In a clear and non-technical way, Jeff details the roles played by grain, hops, yeast and water in the brewing process. There are useful charts that set out the main types of grain used in brewing, with a similar list of the main hop varieties.

With your taste buds tingling from all the information packed in to the book, Jeff lays out the best way to organise beer judging, suggesting the best glassware to use, with tasting forms and a helpful list of beer defects. I was aware of most defects in beer but Jeff has kindly warned me of one that's new to me: baby vomit.

This is a splendid contribution to the growing library of books about beers. It's not just for new drinkers. Even the most seasoned beer drinker and writer will gain from Jeff's book, which serves to stimulate the appreciation of and passion for the world's favourite beverage.

<https://shop.camra.org.uk/books/so-you-want-to-be-a-beer-expert.html>

This review is by Roger Protz and is taken from his website: <http://protzonbeer.co.uk>.



# MR GRUMPY'S GRIPE!

I have never attended a CAMRA Annual General Meeting and I never shall! Having experienced how far the CAMRA National Executive is divorced from its rank and file members at the "Super Regional Conference", held earlier this year, I have no interest whatsoever.

Let's look at a few things that they were discussing at the AGM held in Nottingham recently.

Motion 5 – This conference recognises that CAMRA believe in choice and that denigrating whatever people choose to drink is counterproductive and can alienate existing and potential members. Therefore, it instructs all branches to desist from "anti campaigns" against other drinks.

Well, if they think that that is going to stop me poking fun at my lager-swilling friends then they

have another thing coming! "Why do you chew gum when drinking lager? Is it to give the lager some taste?"

Motion 19 was all about the flavourings that can be added to cider. Why is CAMRA pontificating about cider? I don't drink cider from one year to the next. I did not join CAMRA to discuss cider. I don't care about cider! I care about Real Ale – end of story!

Motion 20 – This conference proposes that CAMRA shall oppose fracking and unconventional hydrocarbon exploration and extraction on both a local and national scale, as they pose a real and substantial threat to the production of real ale.

How? I rest my case!  
Mr Grumpy

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# BERTIES CIDER

by Claire Irons

## Who and Why

In 2011 **Ian Reynolds** started making cider as a hobby from various apples scrumped from hedgerows and donated from friends' gardens. In his first year he made 80 litres and the second year 300 litres. He is known as Bert at work and so decided to call his cider company **Berties** (with no apostrophe as part of his branding).



## How

In 2013 using a hand **press** in his garden in all weathers he had to start early to make the best of the autumn daylight to press the **apples**. The maximum he could press in a day was 100 litres so his total production that year was 1000 litres.

Champagne yeast works in cold conditions and ferments out to dryness. Other yeasts for cider-making can influence the speed it ferments at and the final dryness. Although obviously, the sugar content of the fruit is a factor and determines the final alcohol content. Hence the finished product varies from year to year depending on the sugar content of the apples and the weather. Late frost kills the blossom causing a poor harvest in the autumn. It needs a combination of rain and sun for the fruit to develop properly. Ian uses a secret **cider yeast** for his Berties products to supplement the natural yeasts present in the apple juice. Commercial orchards often have irrigation to water the trees to ensure good size apples but with scrumping from hedgerows, the fruit is variable.

## What

Now that he has more contacts, he has a wider variety and larger quantity of fruit. Using apples donated by members of the Phoenix Hockey Club in Braintree in 2013, he called the cider **Phoenix Cider** which continues to be the main cider he produces at around 6.5-6.8% ABV (Alcohol by Volume). Since its first appearance at the Phoenix Hockey Club open day in 2014 it has gone down well at various CAMRA Beer Festivals in Essex, Cambridge, Norwich and even the Great British Beer Festival in 2015. He made a small batch of **Abbots Dry Cider** approximately 7%.

Also in 2013 he made **Con-Cox-Tion**, his first **pyder** fermenting together 30 litres of juice from conference pears with 80 litres of juice from cox apples. This proved popular at the Chelmsford Summer Beer and Cider Festival in July 2014 and at Rochford Festival that November.

By then he also did **Cyderkin** which was 3.5%. The

term cyderkin is given to a drink originally made for farm workers hundreds of years ago. It was safer than drinking contaminated water, thirst quenching and yet a low ABV for the workers to continue long days working on the fields and farms. This was re-pressed, i.e. after initial pressing the pulp is wetted and then pressed so the resulting juice has a lower sugar content and hence ferments out to a lower percentage alcohol by volume. With consumer demand for a choice of lower ABV drinks Ian went on to produce **OBSESSION (Old Bertie's Session) cider** at 4.5%. This was done in a similar way to the Cyderkin but with more apple and less water. It is allowed to ferment out to its natural conclusion and is not stopped by the addition of sulphites to kill the yeast.

In 2014 production was doubled to 2000 litres now using a more modern press which has a crusher on the side which speeds up the process of crushing the apples and extracting the juice from the cheeses.





**Cox-A-Ruby-Do** produced from cox apples from Lathcoates Farm, Galleywood was made as a special cider to celebrate 40 Years of Chelmsford & mid-Essex CAMRA. Maturing in a red wine barrel gave it a ruby hue. This was voted by the customers of the Chelmsford Summer Beer and Cider Festival 2015 to be Cider of the Festival.

I shall be presenting Ian with the **Cider of the Festival Award** at Chelmsford Winter Beer and Cider Festival on Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> February 2016.

Also in 2014, he extended his range to produce his first perry. 5% medium sweet **Galanthus Perry** was made from a variety of dessert pears. Traditionally made in Braintree to give a refreshing, easy drinking full flavoured perry. The pears used to make this perry came from Galanthus Farm, Galanthus being the Latin name for snowdrop. The bulbs are harvested beneath the pear trees.

The Phoenix Cider 6.5% Medium and the Galanthus Perry 5% Medium Sweet featured at the Great British Beer Festival held in London in August 2015.

At the time of writing this in November 2015, he is in the middle of the pressing season with production due to more than double again on the previous year. In

addition to fruit from previous sources, there are new ones to boost supplies in order to produce approaching 5000 litres of juice.

For 2016, expect an extended range to include at least one new perry, a new cider and possibly a pyder.

#### **Where to Buy**

Drinks produced by Berties Cider are available at local pubs and festivals.

The Square and Compasses, Fuller St,  
CM3 2BB 01245 361477

The Three Elms, Mashbury Rd, Chignal St James  
CM1 4TZ 01245 443151

The Willows, The Street, Cressing  
CM77 8DQ 01376 741436

The Woolpack, 7 Church St, Witham  
CM8 2JP 01376 511195

Direct from Ian Reynolds: [www.bertiescider.co.uk](http://www.bertiescider.co.uk)  
Facebook Berties Cider 01376 348639

Come and meet him at Chelmsford Beer and Cider Festivals in February (KEGS) and July (Admirals Park).  
See the festival website:  
[www.chelmsfordbeerandciderfestivals.org.uk](http://www.chelmsfordbeerandciderfestivals.org.uk)

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# LONDON'S FAST-GROWING MINI CHAINS

The number of new pubs and bars serving good beer in London continues to grow. In 2014 we added 29 new entries to our Guide to London's best pubs and bars. In 2015 we've added 32 already, with 6 weeks of the year still left and several more new openings coming soon.

One particular trend we've noted at [beerguidelondon.com](http://beerguidelondon.com) is the growth of London's mini chains. This autumn several of these chains have opened new branches, and this article gives more information on the main players and their new venues.

**Craft Beer Co.** Craft have just opened their 6th London venue - the 7th if you include their original 'sister' pub Cask Pub and Kitchen in Pimlico. Given that the first Craft Beer Co in Leather Lane only opened a little over 4 years ago this growth is remarkable. The new one's a gem too - in the shadow of the famous 'Gherkin' at St Mary Axe, Craft have brought some seriously good beer to the heart of the City. The interior is beautiful - in particular the amazing ceiling, the cosy downstairs room and the exposed brick work behind the dramatic, eye catching bar. Expect 10 cask ales alongside 18 high quality keg beers, but do not come at the weekends expecting it to be open - normal 'City' hours apply.

Details of Craft St Mary Axe can be found here: <http://beerguidelondon.com/pubs.217>

**BrewDog.** Everyone's favourite Scottish beery punks have been busy this autumn, with two more London openings, bringing their total to 6. Dog Eat Dog - a gourmet hot dog restaurant offering 12 drafts and around 25 excellent bottles/cans - is on Essex Road in Angel. Note that you can't just pitch up for a beer, you have to order some food, even if it's only the (incredibly tasty) sweet potato fries. But try the hot dogs too - they are great!

A more conventional BrewDog offer can be found at their most central London venue to date, on Poland Street in Soho, close to Oxford Circus. This offers 20 drafts and around 50 bottles/cans, with the same beers offered from two bars on the two different levels. Expect the usual cool, minimalist 'industrial' vibe but with some comfy seating especially on the basement level.

Full details of Dog Eat Dog can be found here: <http://beerguidelondon.com/pubs.210>

Full details of BrewDog Soho are posted here: <http://beerguidelondon.com/pubs.216>

BrewDog's 7th London venue is due to open before Christmas at 45-47 Clerkenwell Road, EC1. This is currently a (rather good) beer bar called Fourteenth Colonie.

**Camden Brewery** have just opened their third bar





in London, to add to their stunning brewery tap and the original location, the Horseshoe in Hampstead. The new bar - Camden's Daughter - opened mid November on Kentish Town Road, just down the main road from Kentish Town station. Offering 13 drafts including guests from stellar breweries such as Burning Sky, this bar is cool and contemporary but also welcoming and comfortable. If you like kebabs you'll also enjoy the food.

You can find our Guide entry for Camden's Daughter here: <http://beerguidelondon.com/pubs.218>

**Late Knights Brewery** have also become rather prolific bar operators, recently opening new venues in Crouch Hill and Sydenham, taking their London total to 5. These places are opening so quickly that the Guide has yet to visit either new location, but our spies report very favourably on both and as we like their other bars I am sure these will both be excellent.

More information on the Hopsmiths, Crouch Hill can be found here: <http://www.lateknightsbrewery.co.uk/the-hopsmiths>

And you can find details of Beer Rebellion Sydenham here: <http://www.lateknightsbrewery.co.uk/beer-rebellion-sydenham>

The people behind the excellent **Euston Tap, Holborn Whippet and Pelt Trader** are soon to open their 4th London venue, the **Resting Hare** in Kings Cross/Bloomsbury (Woburn Walk, to be precise). It's due to open in the last week of November so should be fully up and running by the time you read this article. Expect 15 drafts of the

usual high quality you'd associate with this excellent group of bars.

Further information can be found via their Twitter feed at <https://twitter.com/restinghare>

Slightly further ahead, the same group of bars will soon be joined by the long awaited **Waterloo Tap**. This promises to be one of the most exciting new London openings of 2016, and is expected to open around the end of February. Located on the corner of Sutton Walk and Concert Hall Approach between the Royal Festival Hall and Waterloo Station, this will be another great addition to an area fast developing a reputation for much better beer.

Follow their progress at <https://twitter.com/TapWaterloo>

This accelerated growth of London's new mini chains is extremely welcome, indicating that the sector remains strong with growing demand for good beer. London's thirst for top quality beer appears to be far from satisfied and these new openings can only be good news. We look forward to seeing what happens next.

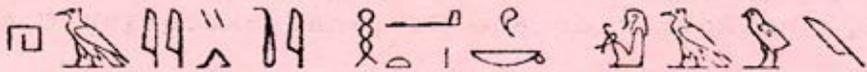
Written by Jezza, SW London. Jezza's guide to pubs and breweries in London can be found online at:

<http://www.beerguidelondon.com>

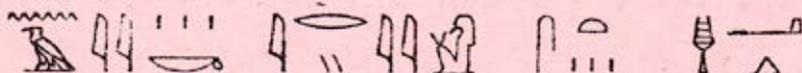
The site contains full details of all the bars featured in this article – including opening times, which you should check carefully while planning any visits. You can also follow Jezza on Twitter @beerguidelondon or @bonsvoeux1 for frequent updates.



Make not thyself helpless in drinking ..



Falling down thy limbs will be broken ..



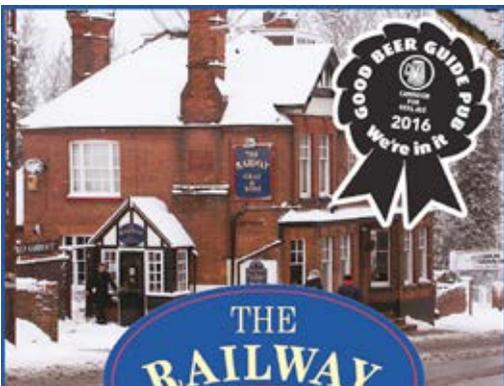
as for thy companions they will get up



and say, " Outside with this drunkard."

*"The precepts of Ani", a book of etiquette dating from about 1,500 BC. (Sir R A Wallis Budge "The Dwellers on the Nile", Lutterworth Press).*

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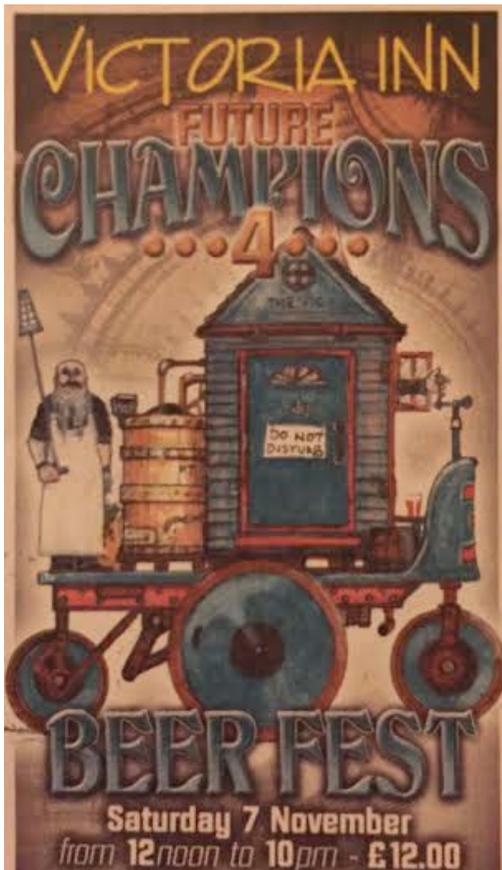
# “I DON’T THINK ANY OF US ACTUALLY BREW IN OUR SHEDS” FUTURE CHAMPIONS BEER FEST 4

by Justin Mason

.....

It’s just after midday on a mild but decidedly damp early November afternoon as I get off the train at Colchester station and take the short walk to the Victoria Inn on North Station Road. With every step I take my anticipation grows as I know with absolute certainty that the festival I’m headed to will not have a single beer on its list that I will have had before. I also have a slight sense of apprehension as, despite this being a festival I have been planning to attend since I was first told about it back in March, I won’t be drinking a single commercially produced beer.

The Future Champions Beer Festival, otherwise known as the Shed Brewers Festival of which this is the fourth, began as an idea following a meeting of the local home brew club, the Shed Brewers. Sheena and Andy had been given some of the beers to taste and were amazed at how good they were, which got them talking about the possibility of an actual home brew festival. Realising that there would be some legal issues with regard to beer duty, Sheena spoke to a friend of hers who just happened to be an ex-licensing officer, and a suitable solution was found. Planning started in early Spring 2012 and subsequently has done every Spring since, mainly due to the fact that the home brewers don’t meet that often. It proved to be a resounding success. This ticket-only festival has grown in popularity and reputation every year since and now sells out weeks in advance, so I was rather intrigued as to what I might find.



Although the doors have only been open for around twenty minutes by the time I arrive there’s already a good crowd drinking in the pub itself. Deciding not to head immediately up to the function room where the festival is being held I take a seat at the bar and order a half of Muck Cart Mild from Bedfordshire brewery Son Of Sid. Its toasty flavours are rather pleasing and it’s light enough to sharpen my taste buds before I embark on the main event. Sheena and Andy come over for a chat and tell me that they’ve already had to turn away a couple of disgruntled local ‘tickers’ who had ignored the fact that they would need a ticket to gain entry.

Sheena encourages me to go upstairs and after noting several beers on the bar that I’ll be back to try later I make my way up the stairs into the function room above. My £12 ticket entitles me to twelve thirds of beer, but there appear to be more than twelve beers available and this is confirmed when I’m handed my programme. With fifteen beers available I realise that I’m going to need some judicious planning and start

to read the descriptions provided to enable me to navigate my journey through the afternoon and into the evening.

With any sustained drinking bout common sense says that you drink the lower abv. beers first, leaving the heavy-weights until a little later on, but I'm intrigued by the 5.5% Idle (Weisse) brewed by Keith Bailey so even though it's mid-range strength-wise on the list I decide, on balance, that it won't cause me too much damage later on and head straight for it.

It has a beautifully carbonated off-white head, and the classic German hefeweizen aroma of zesty lemon and dry coriander seed backed buoyantly with notes of bubblegum. It is perhaps a little more full-bodied than I anticipate but the deep lemon interspersed with light orange wine gum flavours tell me that I've made the right choice and I savour its long lingering finish before draining my glass in no time at all.

One of the best things about this particular festival is that the brewers themselves are present, and even though they take their turns serving from the assembled stillage they take this opportunity to talk to each other about the beers they have brewed and more importantly, from my perspective at least, are on hand to give impromptu interviews.

I manage to grab a few words with Keith, who has come down from Norwich to enter his beer, and ask him about his brewing and the Shed Brewers.

"I don't think any of us actually brew in our sheds," he tells me, "I've been home brewing for about four years, and I took it up as a way of saving money. I started brewing from kits at first but soon moved on to all-grain brewing with some interesting results in the beginning."

The Weisse beer is a standard beer for him I'm told, and is made using White Labs WLP380 yeast. After chilling the wort to 13 degrees and pitching the yeast before letting it come up to 17 degrees over two to three days. He seems genuinely delighted that I like his beer.

Interestingly, I discover that he grows Cascade hops in his back garden and we talk about his favourite beers styles (US-style Pale Ales and British Oatmeal Stouts for the record) and beer in general for some time. The one question that I have to ask him however is whether he has any aspirations to brew commercially and his response is very definite.

"Absolutely not" he says. "This is just a hobby and I don't really have any interest in taking it to the next level."



Heading back to the bar whilst contemplating my next beer choice I notice that names are being taken for three separate tutored tastings (light and golden ales, dark beers, and speciality beers) a little later on. Realising that this is my opportunity to actively taste all of the beers available today I manage to get my name, as well as that of fellow Essex beer writer Martin Oates who will be joining me later, added to the latter two tasting sessions. This means that I need to focus on the lighter beers at this stage but after a decidedly mixed bag of Blonde and hoppy Golden Ales, generally good but not overly memorable I decide to up my game and go for the strongest beer at the festival, a 7.2% double IPA called HopHopHop.

Brewed with Summit, Centennial and

Cascade (three hops you see, hence the name), it's a beautifully sticky and thick dark amber beer that's heavy with lime and pine flavours. Luckily for me the brewer, Jon Wood, is on hand and we move to a convenient table at the back of the room for a brief chat.

Originally from Ipswich but now living in Colchester, Jon works in IT and has been all-grain brewing for around seven years. I ask him whether his job influences his brewing philosophy and what he likes to brew.

"I am a bit of a self-analyst," he confesses, "and I'm always striving to improve. I really like Brewdog beers and they do inspire me, but I really like to experiment. There's no set style that I favour, I like to try everything. This year's beer for example is quite a jump from last year when I entered Brown Leaf Bitter, a 4.0% session bitter brewed with East Kent Goldings and Challenger hops that I grew in my garden, but this year I really wanted to do something bigger."

In addition to growing hops in his garden he also grows Bacchus grapes which he uses to make his own wine. This variety gives lower yields in the UK but has an acidic Sauvignon Blanc quality, and I ask if he's ever considered combining the two and brewing a beer with grapes or wood chips soaked in wine.

"I hadn't," he laughs, "but it's certainly something I'd consider."

"Maybe next year?" I ask him.

He smiles but won't commit. "Maybe" he replies.

One of the things I like about the Victoria Inn is that I always feel welcome there. Despite not knowing anyone apart from Sheena and Andy, who are busy with the bar and barbecue downstairs, I have no trouble finding people to talk about the beer, some of whom have been going to this festival since its inception. Everyone tells me that this is the best yet but there are a few beers that are dividing opinion.

There is a nineteenth century style brown Porter brewed with Oak-cured amber malt called "Smoke on the Porter" which is a little too much for some whilst others, myself included, are drawn to its smokey chocolate caramel flavours. This is the

lowest abv. beer available, at 3.8% and I later discover that the brewer, Ashley Carr, was in hospital at the time. I wish him a speedy recovery.

Braggot is not a style that you come across often and certainly not one that I'm overly familiar with although Uncle Zester, Siren's collaboration with Michigan meadery B.Nektar is currently front-runner for my beer of the year, so I'm expecting good things from the two featuring today.

The first, Old Bag, is brewed with both honey and apples but without hops and it is these flavours that are evident throughout. It's quite dry but without being overly sweet and I rather enjoy it. Less to my taste however is Beowulf, brewed with local honey from hives sited near Colchester Zoo as well as Northern Brewer and Fuggles hops before being aged for two months. There's something about it that I find a touch stale, although that is purely my opinion and the brewer, Dave Souch, is certainly experienced. He tells me that he's been brewing for just over six years and that his 8.5% Vanilla Bourbon Imperial Porter, which ticks quite a few of my 'that's a beer I really want to try' boxes, was the beer of the festival last year.

It's Dave's girlfriend, Claire Barrett a teacher from Colchester, who is the brewer of what is possibly my beer of the festival. Her Salamander, a chocolate chilli stout brewed with home-grown chillis, is a slow-burner of a beer that grows in flavour and warmth as you drink it and I'm amazed to discover that it's her first all grain beer.

"I really like chilli chocolate and wasn't aware of any beer being brewed with those flavours, so I thought I would research chocolate stouts and chilli beers and give it a go. Of course since I've brewed it I've come across two others but I'm quite pleased with it."

I asked her what made her take the plunge and start brewing.

"I've come along to the last two Future Champions festivals with Dave," she replies, "and thought that if I was going to be part of this then I really needed to brew a beer of my own."

As I finish speaking to Claire it's time for the first of the two tasting sessions I've signed up for. Martin has arrived by this time and I go downstairs to say

hello to him, his girlfriend Michelle and their friends before we take our seats ready to taste the dark beers. These are led by Andy Gill, a SIBA judge and accredited wine judge and he encourages us to say which flavours we are finding as well as guiding us through the styles. Some of the brewers are also on hand to add comment and insight as well as hear how their beers are received and I notice that Claire is emotionally moved by the universal praise her beer receives.

There are a couple more dark beers that stand out for me at this session as well. Colin Miller's Cherry Porter (Special) is brewed with vodka-steeped cherries, and has a smooth cherry stone and chocolate taste that develops wonderfully as it warms in the glass. Similarly benefiting from a little warmth is Simon Baker's Madagascan Vanilla Oatmeal Stout which tastes like a deliciously creamy vanilla toffee yoghurt.

I manage to grab Simon, another home brewer who works in IT, for a few words after the tasting and ask him about his brewing.

"It's something that I've been doing for around four years," he says, "and I've entered beers in this festival for the last three. I was inspired to brew after reading Dave Line's 'Brew Your Own Beer' book, and I entered a black IPA brewed with Simcoe and Citra my first year, and a Porter called Mr Shifter in the second.

For this beer I soaked two Madagascan vanilla pods in Jim Beam to kill off any nasties that might be present before making an English Oatmeal Stout and putting them into the boil with Fuggle and Citra hops".

He plans to brew a 6.8% black IPA for himself for Christmas and wouldn't mind a collaboration with either Mighty Oak or Maldon Brewing (Farmers) in Maldon if that could be arranged.

The Speciality Beer tasting session enables me to complete the full list and after I check my tasting notes for each of the beers I head back

upstairs to fill out my card by re-visiting some of my favourites and chatting with Dan, whom I know from the Hop Beer Shop micropub in Chelmsford and who is an SXBottleshare regular.

Evening is turning into night as I leave the Victoria Inn and head for home, although not before I gulp down a swift half of Crouch Vale's Conkeror to help me on my way.

The Future Champions beer festival has exceeded my expectations, and any concerns I had about the quality of the beer and the skill of the brewers are far from my slightly blurry thoughts. I'll definitely be back next year, the atmosphere alone was worth the price of the ticket. Perhaps I'll see you there.

If you fancy trying your hand at brewing, you can contact your local Craft Brewing Association at [www.craftbrewing.org.uk/index.php/localgroups](http://www.craftbrewing.org.uk/index.php/localgroups)

Alternatively you can email the Victoria Inn at: [info@victoriainncochester.co.uk](mailto:info@victoriainncochester.co.uk) who I'm sure will be able to point you in the right direction.

You can read more from Justin Mason at: [masonjust.blogspot.com](http://masonjust.blogspot.com) or find him on Twitter at [@1970sBoy](https://twitter.com/@1970sBoy) and [@BeerInEssex](https://twitter.com/@BeerInEssex)



# MARKS AND SPENCER

by Justin Mason

It's a quarter to one and I'm sitting in the Mad Bishop and Bear pub in Paddington station killing time. I've been here for the past twenty minutes nursing a pint of frankly average Ruck & Roll from St. Austell Brewery, observing the South African rugby supporters at the bar and occasionally checking and re-checking the route to Marks and Spencer's Head Office in North Wharf Road just around the corner. I down what's left of my beer, pull on my coat and head out into subdued hustle and bustle of a mainline railway station on a damp Wednesday afternoon.

Ten minutes later I'm heading up the steps into the nerve centre of one of the UK's most recognisable and respected brands. Founded in Leeds in 1884 by Michael Marks and Thomas Spencer, its name is a byword for quality and service, and although it has had a hard time in recent years it seems to have ridden the storm well, restructuring the business and concentrating on what it does well. Being quick to spot an opportunity, over the last few years Marks and Spencer have considerably expanded the range of beer that they offer. They have responded to the growing craft beer market by re-inventing and re-invigorating their own range to an impressive degree, so much so that they have earned two successive 'Retailer of the Year' awards (2014 and 2015) at the International Beer Awards.

Today is Marks and Spencer's Autumn Beer Tasting 2015.

In order to showcase their range of fifty-three different beers including their most recent seasonal releases, they have invited a select group of beer writers along to sample the whole lot, the first time that they have done so. This strikes me as quite a brave thing to do, and displays an assured confidence in their selection that they are willing

to open themselves to potential criticism in their own front (tasting) room from such as Melissa Cole, Jane Peyton and Christine Cryne, whose pedigree is renowned and opinions highly respected. There is an obvious publicity benefit to be gained from a positive reception however, and this is why we have been invited to enter the inner sanctum.

I'm met in reception by Natasha Redcliffe from Westbury Communications Ltd, an independent food and drink PR agency, who have organised this event, given my visitor's badge and taken up one floor to meet the team from M&S responsible for putting this range together.

Entering a rather sterile room I am confronted by a long line of bottles stretching nearly its whole length, and most of its width as well. Although I am the first to arrive I notice that all of the bottles have already been opened, and there appears to be some furious quality testing going on with some slurping and spittoon spitting being undertaken by the three people moving down the line from various points.

I haven't been to a wine tasting for more than ten years, and I suddenly find the alien absurdity of this happening at a beer tasting both confusing and amusing in equal measure. One of the great pleasures of beer is that it tastes all the way down, with some flavours revealing themselves after the swallow, and to see it treated in this way makes me feel a little uneasy.

I put my feelings aside as they put their glasses down and introduce themselves as; Jenny Rea: Product Developer - juice, soft drinks, beer, cider, spirits and alcoholic drinks, Richard Applegate; Technologist - beers, ciders, spirits and chilled juice, and Joe Homeyard; Buyer - beers, ciders, spirits and chilled juice.



These are clearly people that know their business and know their market, and after I introduce myself I waste no time to start asking them about the range itself.

Richard takes me over to the assembled bottles, and explains the way they have been grouped for us today and displayed in their stores in order to appeal to different buyers.

“The brown labelled bottles” he says indicating the first twelve, “are our craft beer range. Designed to appeal to those who want something more from their beer, they have more unusual flavours and concentrate on quality ingredients. They are something special, something different. Next we have the eight single hopped beers also with their own distinctive labelling, followed by the British Regional

range, some traditional styles with some newer beers, and finally our Belgian beers.”

It’s an impressive selection, and it is at this point that I’m handed a glass and told to help myself, but the Essex boy in me comes to the fore and I ask why they no longer feature Brewers Gold, brewed by Essex brewery Crouch Vale, in the their single hopped range.

“We took the decision to take that out as it simply wasn’t selling as well as the others”, Richard replies, which immediately leads me to my next question.

“So what does sell well?” I enquire.

“Interestingly,” he responds, “the beers that we find sell the best are those that feature lighthouses on the labels. So we have the Cornish IPA (brewed by St Austell) and those Adnams beers in the Southwold

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**Harvestown Brewery in Scotland makes Lowland Glen Amber** £1.85 (330ml), using the Fenale hop, which has malty undertones. Try this fruity little number with a haddock.

**Ash Brook Red Lager** £1.85 (330ml), by Freedom Brewery in Staffordshire, uses three UK malts for a full flavour. Take it to your picnic.

The zesty, spicy flavours in Adnams' **Sorachi Saison**, £1.85 (330ml), are a match for Thai-style curries or coconut-based drinks.

**Fruity Island Hopper Pale Ale** £1.85 (330ml), from Windsor & Eton Brewery, uses British Solweican and Nelson Saison hops. Try with a spicy soup.

International Beer Challenge  
Retailer of the Year 2004

range that also feature one.”

He is at a loss as to explain why this is so, and when I express my admiration for the label artwork he points out something that had previously gone unnoticed by me.

“If you look closely at the artwork on our label art you may spot some unifying themes. For example,” he says, picking up the 9 Hop Kent Pale Ale bottle, “you’ll notice that there are bottles hidden within the label artwork on the bottles themselves, and similarly hop cones feature on many too. You can also find beer glasses of all shapes hidden there. Our design team had a lot of discussion about this, and we believe it adds something a little extra to the buying and drinking experience, something that you might not have immediately expected.”

Another thing you might spot on the label is the ‘Made with British Hops’ badge.

“It’s something we are particularly proud of,” Joe says, entering into the conversation at this point, “and we have redesigned the label to emphasise this more. We have particularly requested that British hops are used with some beers, and we’re keen on supporting British hop producers.”

“We also have beer and food pairings on each bottle,” says Rob, picking up the nearest bottle and pointing to the ‘A perfect match for ...’ section on the back, “it’s something we’re keen on developing.

I ask whether there are any plans to group beers with foods in any stores or train staff in suggesting beer and food matches.

“Not at this stage, although we have considered it. Obviously it is important for us to train and up-skill our staff where we can but we’ve no plans to introduce this in-store at present. We have heard that some stores have organised trips to their local breweries, but only get to hear of these later on. This is something we encourage, and our only misgiving is that we don’t get invited along.”

“What about growler fills in branches?” I ask.

“No.” comes the firm reply.

One thing that I have wondered about, particularly with regard to beers like the Citra single hop beer brewed by Oakham, is whether they are just the breweries’ usual beers re-badged and bottled for M&S. I had read only that week on some social media circles speculation about whether the new black IPA

‘Black’ was the same beer as Purity’s own ‘Saddle Black’. I want to know whether this is the case.

“We do use those beers as a guide, but the beers produced for us are variations on the breweries’ own beers. It could be that we’ve asked them to bring out a certain character to emphasise a certain aspect of the beer, or for the abv to be reduced, but mainly we ask for something just a little different. Our Warwickshire Amber

Ale for example, is based on Purity’s UBU. It’s a beer we really liked and asked if they would do a beer like it for us and they were more than happy to oblige.”

The bottling, I discover, is all done by three specific companies trusted by Marks and Spencer’s for all of their bottling, not just for beer. The breweries have their specially commissioned brews collected and taken away to be bottled and labelled separately so that they can maintain quality and consistency.

I’m keen to find out about the beer that they carry from breweries such as Siren, Buxton and Fourpure and where they fit in to the range, and whether they plan to carry more from them. Are they actively seeking out new breweries and beers to put on their shelves?

“That isn’t the case at all.” Rob says. “The beers fit gaps in our existing range. They attract customers into our stores as they are from breweries they recognise, have read about and are keen to try, or simply look distinctly different from our in-house range.”

“Should we expect to see sour beers on the shelves



soon?" I enquire.

"It's something we've looked at" Rob confesses, "in fact we have discussed it this week, but we feel that we're not ready to put sour beers on the shelves just yet. We do constantly review our range, however, and take note of new styles and breweries that are doing something different, so maybe at some time in the future, who knows?"

Other beer writers have started to arrive and I realise that I have taken up plenty of our host's time, and there's plenty of beer to be drunk here, some of which I haven't had before, and so it's those I head to first.

I pour myself a glass of the new Salted Caramel Porter. Rob had mentioned that this was a beer that they had particularly asked Meantime to develop for them and that they were rather pleased with it, and whilst I find it drinkable, it's a bit thin and sweet for my taste and I don't really get any salted caramel flavours from it. Much more to my taste is the Smoked Ruby Ale brewed by Adnams. Based on the brewery's own 1659 Smoked Ruby Beer, made with cherry-wood smoked malt, it goes particularly well with duck or game, and I remember enjoying its original incarnation with an excellent venison pate one evening.

The Warwickshire Amber Ale that Rob mentioned earlier also impresses me, as does the Sovereign single hop offering.

Finding much less favour with all of us is the Welsh Golden Ale brewed by Brains. It is the only beer that comes in a clear glass bottle, and despite having been kept out of the light prior to today's tasting, just by sniffing the bottle that nasty, slightly musty off-flavour associated with a light-struck beer is very apparent. Tasting confirms this to be the case, and we all leave it well alone.

It is at this point that I have a notion that I will possibly never have the opportunity to taste the whole of Marks and Spencer's in-house beer range in one place again, so I set myself the challenge of

achieving this before I leave. Thankfully a block of M&S's superb three-year old matured cheddar, Cornish Cruncher, has appeared and this is hastily devoured by all present, the fat helping to ward off some of the effects of the alcohol.

I eventually manage it about a quarter to five. Drinking thirds, probably a little less, of mostly tasty, relatively low alcohol beer over nearly four hours is, as you might expect, not really a chore. With plenty of good conversation, Martyn Cornell, Bryan Betts (the beer Viking), Glynn Davis and two guys from Brewdog who didn't have the letter 'y' in their first names as far as I recall, had joined us, but it was time for me to go.

I pulled on my coat, grabbed my bag, said my goodbyes and thanked them before making my way down in the lift and walking to the station.

Sitting on the train I reflected on an afternoon of good beer, and not only that, good beer that can be found in Marks and Spencer's stores up and down the country. Not every branch can carry the full range of course, shelf space prevents that unfortunately I was told, but the range and choice of styles is really quite

mind-boggling compared to what you would have found on those same shelves three or so years ago. Times really have changed.

We had of course been invited to help promote the range, with the hope that we would write about it and talk about it to a wider audience, in fact it actually surprises me how few beer drinkers and brewers I speak to realise what can be found there. More importantly, to me at any rate, it shows the commitment that M&S

have made to beer. Long may it continue.

NB. Several readers asked who wrote the articles "Four Coggeshall Pubs" and "A Tale of Two Sitings" in our previous issue. It was in fact Justin Mason, and our apologies for not crediting him. Follow Justin at: [masonjust.blogspot.com](http://masonjust.blogspot.com) or find him on Twitter at @1970sBoy and @BeerInEssex.



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Winter 2015

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