

# *British Guild Of Beer Writers*

*Newsletter* — October 2008

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Chairman Tim Hampson gets bullish *inside...*

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# The Chairman Reports...

***The pub industry might be going through an annus horribilis, but cask ale is starting to look like the superstar performer that keeps the whole show on the road.***

***According to the Intelligence Choice 2008 Report, written by Guild member Pete Brown, real ale is doing better at keeping customers satisfied than any other ale or lager category.***

The Report, which is prepared by the Why Handpull? group, including CAMRA, Cask Marque, SIBA and the family brewers, has discovered that cask ale's share of the total beer market is growing. Overall, cask shows only a slight marginal decline of 1.3% in volume, and only 0.3% in value.

This compares to a total beer market decline of 8%, and means cask ale is doing better than not only keg and smoothflow ales, but also standard and premium lagers.

Regional and local brewers are so far weathering the credit crunch, as 70% of the volume loss in cask ale can be attributed to the big four multinational corporations that dominate the British beer market, who continue to withdraw investment from the sector.

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According to the Report cask ale drinkers are more affluent than any other group of beer drinkers, and eager to try new things. New drinkers are coming into the market, but need more encouragement if their genuine profit potential is to be unlocked.

AND TALKING of potential, committee members Zak Avery and Jeff Pickthall have created a Beer Writers Group, which can be found at [www.flickr.com/groups/beerwriters](http://www.flickr.com/groups/beerwriters). If you wish to join you'll need to register a Yahoo account on Flickr and you'll then need to send a request to the administrator (Zak) to join the group; given that only three of us have joined the group so far, your request is likely to be accepted. At several AGMs members have asked for an internet-based forum — well now we have it.

ONE ORGANISATION with a huge potential is SIBA (Society of Independent Brewers), the trade group that represents most of the UK's brewers. One of its successes is the SIBA Brewing Business Awards, which shows that members can also demonstrate professionalism, innovation and commitment to customers alongside their brewing prowess.

For the second year, the Guild is the sponsor of the Best Sponsorship Awards category — I believe this association is an important part of the Guild's activity in trying to raise the profile of beer in the media, to the public and within the beer industry. The SIBA Brewing Business Awards are announced after the newsletter has gone to press, but members will be informed of the winners.

THE CLOSING date for this year's awards has now closed and the hard work for the judges led by Alastair Gilmour now begins. Nominations and entries were sought for six categories: Coors Brewers National Journalism Awards; Wells & Young's Business to Business Journalism Awards; Brains SA Gold New Media Award; Bishop's Finger Award for Beer and Food Writing; Budweiser Budvar John White Travel Bursary and the Regional Journalism Awards — as ever, the winners will be announced at our Awards Dinner. This year's Annual Awards Dinner has the

## CALENDAR 2008

Nov 14/15	Fleveys Bieres et Caprices, Montreal, Quebec
Dec 2-6	Pig's Ear Beer Festival, Hackney
Dec 9-12	China Brew & Beverage 2008 Beijing
Dec 10	Joint Beer Group/BBPA 2008 Christmas party, House of Commons

Dec 11	BGBW Dinner and Awards, Hilton London Tower Bridge
Jan 21-24 2009	National Winter Ales Festival Manchester

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

potential to be the best dinner the Guild has ever organised. So mark in your diary now: December 11 — Tower Bridge, Hilton, British Guild of Beer Writers Annual Awards Dinner. I hope to see you there. Details of how to order tickets will be announced shortly.

TIM HAMPSON, CHAIRMAN

## Great Danes

HERE'S A sentence I never thought I'd write: On a balmy mid-September evening, I found myself sampling beer on the terrace of the British ambassador's residence in Copenhagen. I wasn't trespassing though; I was attending a pre-European Beer Festival showcase of British brewing, pulled together by the governmental UK Trade and Investment Body, British Beer Exports, and the Brewing, Food and Beverage Industry Suppliers Association. There were 20 breweries showing around 50 bottled beers between them, to an invited audience of local and international industry figures. Noted importers and business owners were all in attendance, enjoying the variety of beers on offer, alongside half a dozen British cheeses, as well as an interesting Anglo-Danish hybrid canapé; halibut marinated in Greene King Suffolk Strong. I thought it was a delicious titbit, although it seemed like cheese was the favoured choice for many.

Asking exhibitors about the potential for growth of exports to Scandinavia, the responses are positive. Brian Young, national account manager for Okells Brewery said: 'The ambassador's reception allowed every brewer the opportunity to talk to importers and distributors on a one-to-one basis, which is always an advantage, as most of those who attended were key players in the brewery industry. As with all of these trade missions the follow-up conversations are most important, however I am sure that the Danish public will have the opportunity to drink Okells products in the near future.'

At the European Beer Festival next day (and the rest of the weekend), the same beers were offered in cask form. Asked about the response of the Scandinavian cognoscenti present, there is more good news, typified by this comment from Alex Buchanan of Thornbridge Brewery: 'The reaction of the Danes — many of whom had had little cask beer — was very good, and whilst many people just say nice things, they often came back to try more of the same or other beers.'

Carlsberg's latest advert claims that the Danes hate to see it leave. Maybe so, but they seem set to welcome British beer with open arms. Zak Avery

## Cask Ale: saviour of the British pub?

THE UK'S national drink is coming to the rescue of the British pub, according to a new cross industry report showing cask ale holding its own as lager, stout and other draught beer sales have fallen further and 36 pubs are closing every month during tough economic times. The *Intelligent Choice Report* — backed by some of the country's major brewers and consumers — shows a sterling performance of real ale, compared to a significant decline in sales of others. Research by one of UK's leading pub groups shows that pubs serving good cask ale have seen year-on year trade growth of 14%, compared to a fall of -2.5% for similar pubs without cask ale.

While general beer sales have declined by 8% over the last year, real ale sales are way ahead of the overall beer market with a mere 0.3% dip in volume. Regional and local brews are performing even better with a growth in value in the year to May 08 of 1.8%.

Report author Pete Brown said: 'the Report shows how Britain's national drink is really helping landlords and landladies keep business — and even grow it — in challenging times. It gives a real point of difference for pubs over supermarkets. You can't buy pub atmosphere in a shop and neither can you buy cask beer. Great quality cask ale is one of the key elements to keep attracting people into their locals. It's a massive reason to visit.'

A copy of the Report will be sent to all members, but if you don't receive one in the next fortnight please contact Adrian Tierney-Jones.

## Cellar to Seller 2009

THE NEXT Cellar to Seller Exhibition and Conference will take place at the Centennial Centre, Edgbaston, Birmingham April 22-23, 2009. This purpose built centrally located exhibition centre is easily accessible and close to Brindley Place, with its acclaimed canals and continental style cafes. The Exhibitors are obviously looking forward to a stand-alone event as in so many successful past years and they have already booked over half the available area for this tried and tested occasion. Contact Guild member Keith Hornby Priestnall ([bdi4keith@aol.com](mailto:bdi4keith@aol.com); [www.cellartoseller.com](http://www.cellartoseller.com)) for details.

**COPY DEADLINE FOR NEXT ISSUE IS OCTOBER 31**  
**Apologies for the lateness of this**  
**newsletter, which is due to a wish to get**  
**the seminar covered. ATJ**

## Trips

THERE ARE still several places available for the visit to Moorhouse's Brewery, November 19/20. The reason for the visit is to update beer writers on the plans for the brewery expansion (which hopefully will be passed in November) with work starting in the New Year (so the brewery will not be able to take visits while this is in progress for most of 2009). There are also plans to acquaint writers with what has happened at Moorhouse's over the last 12 months — beer launches, TV advertising, record sales including exports to USA and, crucially, major investment in the pub estate. Managing Director David Grant will be on hand to lead the discussion. Those on the trip should make their way to Burnley Station by 1pm (pick-up details tbc) and then the visit to the brewery (BB11 5BN) and estate will commence. We have been kindly offered overnight accommodation at a nearby hostelry — if you would like to go please contact Chris Marchbanks before you go to watch the fireworks at your municipal bonfire on November 5.

## Oh no, not another book about beer!

CHAIRMAN TIM Hampson, when he's not sitting at home looking out of the window and waiting for opening time, is also a keen author of books. Last year he worked with the late Michael Jackson on his *Eyewitness Companion* book on beer, while this year he is the editor of *The Beer Book* — a Dorling Kindersley production, which is in the very best traditions of beer porn, ie lots of pics that make you

want to get the next Ryan Air flight to a place where good beer is brewed (though given the current economic climate, it's probably more economical to go by bicycle, with a waterproof sleeping bag on your back). Having employed the talents of the likes of Stan Hieronymus, Lorenzo Dabove and Joris Pattyn, alongside Guild members Alastair Gilmour, Ron Pattinson and Conrad Seidl, our esteemed Chairman has produced a colourful, photographic record of some of the world's greatest beers (plus a few moderate beers for the sake of balance). There are some of you who might ask: why do we need another book on beer? Well the most uncomplicated (and easiest) answer is that given the world of the greatest alcoholic drink known to mankind is continually shifting (Italy has six pages devoted to its glorious artisanal brewing revolution, which is something that has only happened in the past few years), books like this are always necessary — and they don't half make you feel thirsty (mum). I recommend all Guild members (even the tee-totallers) to consider purchasing a copy or put it on their pared down credit crunch Christmas list.

## Corporate corner

Guild corporate member Marston's PLC is the UK's leading independent brewing and pub retailing business. It operates five regional breweries — Banks's Brewery in Wolverhampton, Marston's Brewery at Burton on Trent, Jennings Brewery in Cockermouth in the Lake District, Ringwood Brewery in Hampshire and Wychwood Brewery in Witney, Oxfordshire. Their estate totals over 2,300 pubs. [www.marstons.co.uk](http://www.marstons.co.uk)

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## ***Guild's lager seminar deemed a 'fantastic event'***

THE BRITISH GUILD of Beer Writers' first seminar on lager at Thornbridge Hall, Derbyshire, on Monday October 6, has been deemed a success by all who attended and spoke. This was an event that followed on from the previous year's focus on wood-aged beers at the same venue. What was it about? Simply put, it was an attempt to understand what we mean by lager, whether it be a Helles, Pilsner, Marzen or Bock, mass-market bestseller or simply a beer that is defined by the use of time in its production.

Brewers Alastair Hook (Meantime), Agostino Alioli (Birrificio Italiano), Stuart Cail (Harviestoun), Richard Keene (Cotswold Lager Brewing) and Kelly Ryan (Thornbridge) told the attendees what lager meant to them, while writers Paul Buttrick (also a former brewer), Roger Protz and Martyn Cornell explored various aspects of the issues surrounding the beer we call lager. Members of the Guild plus invited guests made up the audience and listened avidly while throwing in the odd awkward question.

This was the second Guild event held at Thornbridge Hall, and Thornbridge Brewery's MD Jim Harrison has this to say: 'it's a fantastic event — the sort we love to hold at Thornbridge. The Guild did a great job in bringing together an international group with expertise and passion about lager and how it is brewed, stimulating debate and assisting the exchange of ideas — all who attended will have learnt much more about lager and many of its myths have been removed. We are already looking forward to next year's event.'

For more information and a copy of the event's press pack that covers the subjects talked about on the afternoon please contact Adrian Tierney-Jones.