

British Guild Of Beer Writers

Newsletter — April 2006

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Duty calls for Andrew Pring *inside...*

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The Chairman Reports...

WELL, I PROMISED the annual SIBA conference last month would be a lively affair. But in truth I had no idea just how explosive events at Bristol would turn out to be. The battle over progressive beer duty between micros and regional brewers dominated proceedings, and has been reverberating through the industry ever since.

When the progressive beer duty tax break came in three years ago it seemed 'a good thing', and it certainly was for the smallest brewers, who have subsequently flourished. However, a few bigger names such as Adnams, Refresh and Timothy Taylor are hopping mad. They say they're losing market-share to micros through this state-sponsored undercutting, and that will jeopardise the sales and marketing investment they can make in driving the category and halting real ale's remorseless decline.

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The larger brewers are asking Gordon Brown to rethink PBD but there doesn't seem much chance of that. As far as he's concerned, his measure is doing what he wanted it to do: help smaller brewers get into more pubs. Moans from

brewing aristocrats that micros' gains may be at the expense of some larger brewers, and that real ale sales as a whole are gently slipping, are unlikely to tug at his socialist heartstrings.

The only way forward, therefore, is for both sides to work together to make more noise about ale and win over new drinkers in the way Fuller's is doing with its Discovery ale.

To this end, micros are more than holding their end up. They may not command the advertising firepower of the Chiswick champion but they capture a lot of interest in their vicinities and local papers write regularly about local real ale breweries.

Over and above that, the real ale category has a highly active and effective ambassador in SIBA. And its power is growing. The bigger ale boys are also trying hard, notably through the Beautiful Beer initiative, which, although it embraces all beers, is very encouraging of real ale. Ros Shiel, Beautiful Beer's co-ordinator and a newly joined Guild member herself, was invited to attend last month's Guild committee meeting to update us on progress.

She left us in no doubt that the £1 million committed to raising beer's image over three years is starting to pay dividends — and incidentally, on a more parochial point, she invited Guild members to make full use of a well-stocked picture bank accessible through the website of the British Beer & Pub Association.

One real ale brewer who has no trouble promoting the right image of beer is Cains, which under the Dusanj brothers is rapidly becoming a force in the trade. Ajmail and Sid were kind enough last month to host a Guild visit to their historic Liverpool brewery, and mightily impressed the tour party with their growth, their ambition and their beer — see Tim Hampson's report elsewhere in the newsletter. The Dusanjs

CALENDAR 2006

April 7-8	Helsinki Beer Festival
April 7-9	CAMRA AGM, Blackpool
April 10-11	World Beer Cup 2006, Seattle
April 11-13	Pub & Bar, Olympia, London
May	CAMRA's Mild Month
June 27	Guild's AGM Brook Green Tavern

July 12	All-Party Parliamentary Beer Group Annual Awards Dinner (PLEASE NOTE CHANGE OF DATE)
July 31	Guild's pre-GBBF reception, London
Aug 1-5	Great British Beer Festival, Earls Court

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

have cleverly cultivated the national media and now enjoy some of the best publicity brewers could ever dream of. They've done it by being outward looking, and that surely is a lesson for us all, wherever we stand on PBD.

Talking of initials, my time as Guild chairman is drawing to a close PDQ. After nearly three years in the chair, I feel it's time to stand down and will do so at the AGM. There are a couple of very strong candidates to succeed me, but if you'd like to join them on the list, please do contact me.

Andrew Pring, Chairman

The Secretary's round...

DON'T FORGET the Guild's AGM in June, see the date elsewhere on this page. Once again, we are at the Brook Green Tavern thanks to the kindness of Young's, while as usual there is a special rate for members wishing to book a room there.

Good to see the *Mail On Sunday* covering beer and food in a recent issue of its *Live* supplement with Guild members Roger Protz, Pete Brown, Sue Nowak and Mark Dorber all turning up in one way or the other. It's a timely counterbalance to the hysterical anti-pub invective of the paper's sister title the *Daily Mail*.

*You should be reading...*the latest edition of CAMRA's *Good Pub Food* by Sue Nowak and Jill Adams, which will tell you everything about where to get a good glass of beer alongside the sort of food which would even tempt a monk on a fast. Early May sees the release of Pete Brown's *Three Sheets To The Wind* (Macmillan), which is an hilarious and engaging account of what seems like the writer's attempt to punish his liver in various drinking outposts throughout the world. Both are thoroughly recommended.

*Finally...*After mentioning the Appenzeller beers from the Locher Brewery in last newsletter, I received this email from Swiss Guild member Laurent Mousson: *'Regarding Locher's range, indeed it's good news that you lot can get your hands on them, since it's a good example of the decent lagers regional brewers can brew in this country. Shame about those 33cl green bottles, though... but the sturdy brown glass swingtop returnable half-litres they use for the Swiss market are probably too heavy and expensive for export.'*

'Sidenote: Eastern/German-speaking Switzerland indeed still is very much lager country, but the Western/French-speaking side of the country, which has been a fertile ground for imported ales from Belgium, has seen quite a few micros start

up brewing only top-fermenting stuff. The most notorious in this particular field is La Brasserie des Franches-Montagnes, aka BFM (www.brasseriebfm.ch).

'Back to Locher: this 'biodynamic' thing about Naturperle actually means it's erm, organic... In French and German, 'Bio' is used in daily language for 'biologique/biodynamique' (French) or 'Biologisch/Biodynamisch' (German), which all mean the same thing as 'organic' in English.

'Regarding Castégna, its name indicates it contains chestnuts, although these remain subdued indeed on the palate. The mention of a similarity with Czech lagers is indeed right: Swiss brewers tend to tolerate a bit of diacetyl in the finished product, just as the Czech do, something which is absolutely taboo in German lager-brewing. This small buttery note gives more presence on the palate, and indeed tends to suit British palates pretty well. By the way, Locher also brews a pretty nice Weizen too. Bottle-conditioned, unfiltered and all. But it's not seen the light of day in the smaller, non-returnable bottle format.'

GUILD AGM

The Guild's AGM is now officially called for Tuesday June 27, and we will be meeting once more at Young's excellent Brook Green Tavern.

BRUM, BRUM

An email arrives from Marketing Birmingham to announce a 'Real Ale Trail' in the city. It will take place on Saturday, April 22 and will give those taking part the chance to try beers in four historic city centre pubs in the company of local historian Professor Carl Chinn. The four pubs visited will be the Prince of Wales, the Shakespeare, the Wellington and the Old Joint Stock. The cost of the break is £45 per person which includes a meal at the end, while an overnight stay is chucked in for £67. If you are interested contact Marketing Birmingham on 0870 225 0127 or go to www.beinbirmingham.com.

GUILD TRIPS

APRIL The Hall & Woodhouse trip on 26/27 April is now full and I have had to place a couple of members on a reserve list. If anyone who has put their name forward needs to cancel please let me know asap.

JUNE Moorhouse's has invited the Guild to its brewery in Burnley on 21/22 June. It is likely to kick off at lunchtime at the brewery, and later after a short break at our hotel an evening tour of some of the innovative company's pubs.

SEPTEMBER There is a possible invite from NE/ Yorkshire brewers to a beer & food lunch in York on September 26.

OCTOBER Tour of and tasting at Shepherd Neame on October 5 with a Hop Blessing at a local church on the next day. October 13 should see invites to press day of Beer and Food Exhibition, Harrogate.

● To be considered for any of the Guild trips contact Tim Hampson on tim@infopub.co.uk; please include details of where you may be able to place a story. Furthermore, if anyone has any suggestions for trips please let him know.

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF CAINS

THERE CAN be few who would deny the brothers Ajmail and Sudarghara Dusanj the opportunity for a glittering success with the Cains Brewery in Liverpool, which is after all the home of the Beatles. As Guild members discovered on a recent trip to the Cains brewery, things are getting better all the time.

For this is not a story of a family company turning its back on brewing, others before them had done that; Cains is a story of one family's belief that they could make a go of regional brewing. And though the road ahead might be rocky — few business paths ever run smooth — as least Ajmail and Sudarghara have given Cains a chance.

Rather than just saying let it be, a business going nowhere, producing a drink for yesterday, they have strived to make the business work. And in doing so they have won the hearts and minds of many in the 2008 European Capital of Culture by keeping Liverpool a brewing town and also keeping much needed work in a part of the city not far from Penny Lane.

The story of Cains in recent years is well documented — its conversion to a state-of-the-art lager plant in the 70s, its embrace by other brewers which nearly stifled its lifeblood and the decline and nearly fall of its production and the massive financial losses made by the Danish Brewing Group who sold the company in 2002. The future indeed looked bleak with the company wasting away. But, today a state-of-the-art canning line works tirelessly to fill cans for Cains' own brews, other brewers and supermarkets.

We learnt that Ajmail and Sudarghara had made great strides in working with consumers in Liverpool to push their brands to a wider range of drinkers and that Cains Finest Lager has picked up a mash tun full of awards. We learnt

too that the company would like to expand its stock of pubs — first in its Liverpool heartland and then perhaps to a wider area. The company's small meeting room is adorned with posters and creative treatments from the marketing campaigns of previous owners. 'They are there for a reason,' said Ajmail with a mischievous twinkle in his eye. 'It's so that we do not make the same mistakes again.'

The Cains marketing campaigns are like a breath of fresh air — reaching out to audiences old and new — as evidenced by the readers of *GQ* choosing Cains Finest Lager as number two in their list of 100 best things. But the job is not yet over even though the company has moved from losses to modest profits. Ajmail and Sudarghara, together with a little help from the team of David Nijs, Mark Leedham, Kate Darbyshire and Louise Bell, showed us around their terracotta palace, and made it clear Cains is getting a little better all the time. So when I'm sixty-four, I look forward to enjoying a pint of Cains beer (*that's more than enough Beatles references, Ed*).

Tim 'Helter Skelter' Hampson

SIBA NEWS

SIBA's National Brewing Conference Goes Local... In recognition of SIBA's adoption of 'Your Local Brewer' as its slogan, this year's conference addressed the theme of localism and the emergent commercial opportunities available from local beer. Contributions from leading professionals within the industry and beyond covered the growing importance of a local focus in social, economic and political life and the role local brewers and retailers can play in both supporting and benefiting from the local economy. In a passionate pitch for quality craft beer to command a more premium price SIBA Chairman Keith Bott underlined the organisation's central role in educating the retailer in the financial necessity to trade with local brewers whose beers can become 'lighthouse brands' and thus add valuable attractions to licensees' and store operators' fight for increased business. Delegates also heard the latest news on the enabling Direct Delivery Scheme which is now a separate legal entity, wholly owned by SIBA, and dedicated to opening new accounts, demonstrating the role of premium local ale, logistical simplicity and best practice in general. 2006 is set to witness a 300% increase in turnover of beers sold through the scheme and the launch of a seasonal and festival service with nationwide coverage. **Steve Griffin**