

British Guild Of Beer Writers

Newsletter — October 2009



The Chairman Reports...

ARE THERE any other Guild members who are concerned about moves to set a minimum price for alcohol in Scotland?

Which if it happens will certainly put a pressure on politicians in England, Wales and Northern Ireland to do the same. Don't get me wrong — I'm more than happy to see any sensible steps to stop stupid promotions of alcohol, and boy some elements of the drinks industry certainly know how to sell drinks in insane ways. But what if the introduction of a 40p per unit minimum price doesn't work? Where will the price go next?

According to the Scottish Executive research shows that a minimum price of 40p per unit combined with a ban on promotions would see alcohol-related deaths fall by about 70 in the first year of the policy and about 370 per year after 10 years of operation — a drop in such deaths of nearly 20%. According to the Executive's press release a minimum pricing policy would lead to significant falls in alcohol-related illnesses and crimes, with yearly savings for taxpayers. 'It would also have economic benefits — including nearly 30,000 fewer absence days from work every year, using the 40p example with a promotions ban,'

says the release. These are sweeping claims, but if the minimum price was 50p, 60p or even more could even more lives be saved? And where would it stop £1, £2 or £3 — do I hear higher?

A report for the Scots by Sheffield University says the greatest impact of the policy will be on heavy drinkers, who tend to choose cheap, higher-strength products such as white cider and own label spirits. My worry is what happens when the campaigners in support of minimum pricing using it as a means of controlling behaviour of one sector of society, start to argue that dramatically higher taxes on all beers would also bring similar health benefits.

Another move by politicians is the introduction of a two-thirds of a pint glass for use in pubs. The UK Government has decided to relax the law on pub glass sizes, but it won't allow bars that want to sell draught beer in metric sizes the opportunity to do so.

Currently beer can only be served in pint, half and third of a pint measures. But in future, assuming the measure gets through Parliament next spring, these will be joined by glasses that contain two thirds of a pint. The BBPA has welcomed the move saying it has been 'lobbying for it for years'. However the message has not got through to Tony Payne, chief executive of the Federation of Licensed Victuallers

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Associations, who said that the new measure could be confusing for drinkers, while the Scottish Licensed Trade Association said there was 'no call' for the new glasses. Apparently the glasses will be introduced because they will give consumers more choice — well we shall see.

Recently, lots of men and women walked into a pub — well it was the Riverside in Vauxhall, south London — to celebrate the Guild's 21st anniversary. Beer, with or without the politics, is certainly the most sociable drink in the world. And the many guild members, industry top knobs, politicians and friends who came to the event certainly showed they could talk. If we could have harnessed the energy created by beer-related conversations that night we would probably have enough to power the national grid for a week. Thanks should go to Ros Shiel, Robert Humphreys and Pete Brown for taking on the burden of organising the event — and thanks to Roger Protz who gave us the idea to do it.

And an even bigger thanks should go to the founder members of the Guild, who 21 years ago formed the Guild. Beer is certainly the most sociable drink in the world: it deserves to be written about — be it in blogs, twitters or Facebook pages — and calls for more coverage in the national media. I certainly won't say no if someone asks me to write another book on the suds.

There is still time to enter the Beer Writer of the Year 2009 and win the Michael Jackson Gold Tankard Award. Entries close on October 9. Go to www.beerwriters.co.uk and click on News for more information.

Tim Hampson

Last call for the awards

ZAK AVERY, chairman of judges, writes: 'From where I'm sitting, it's shaping up to be a very interesting year for the Guild awards. There have been a lot of enquiries about who and what is eligible to enter. I refer these

enquiries back to the Guild's strapline: "to improve standards of beer writing and extend the public knowledge of beer", and to the brief on our website for the awards: "to communicate about beer or beer culture, new products or the ingredients and brewing of beer". From the enquiries that I've dealt with, it seems that this year's judges may be asked to look at everything from academic journals to Twitter-based campaigns, along with more mainstream media. It seems that this year's awards are going to be harder-fought than ever, so if you communicate about beer, and are seeking to raise standards and broaden minds, we'd love to hear from you before October 9.'

Membership renewal

JUST TO remind those of you that haven't renewed your membership yet, the deadline for rejoining was October 1, but there are a few stragglers who might have misplaced their renewal forms or being overwhelmed by work and just put it to one side — so if you are one of those please either send in your form and cheque or let me know your intentions. If you have misplaced your form, please contact me and I will email another. Finally, if you would like to pay the reduced price of £35 by Standing Order please ask for a form (NB this is to be sent to your bank not to me).

ATJ

BGBW awards and dinner

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

CALENDAR 2009

Oct 3	World Beer Festival, Durham, USA
Oct 12	British Guild of Beer Writers Seminar on Barley Wine, Thornbridge Hall
Dec 3	BGBW dinner/awards, London

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

coming together and commingling of those who think and drink deeply of beer and brewing. We also hope that it will be a chance to demonstrate that beer and food matching is one of the great glories of our age. Tickets remain at the reasonable price of £50 for members and £60 for non-members, while tables of ten people are £500. I will be sending out booking forms in October to every member (email for those who receive the newsletter that way and post for others), so if you want to be part of this magnificently convivial event then etch the words December 3 in your diary (whether paper or electronic) at once. **ATJ**

Media positive about beer shock

ROGER PROTZ writes: 'Perhaps the attitude of the media to beer is starting to improve. The 2010 edition of the *CAMRA Good Beer Guide*, launched in September, had the best media coverage for many years. The main thrust of the guide — that the craft brewing sector is booming, with 71 new breweries opening in the past year — seemed to tickle the collective fancy. My day started with a 5.30am wake-up call to do a piece for Radio Five Live. This was followed by several breakfast-time interviews with local BBC radio stations. The *Independent* and the *Times* both had major news features on the craft brewing boom though our friends at Thornbridge must have been shocked to learn from the *Times* that they can produce 30 million barrels a year at their new plant at Bakewell. BBC Radio 4's Six O'Clock News asked to interview me in a beerpub in St Albans while More4 News wanted to also interview me in a brewpub in Leyton, east London. Life got a bit hectic then but I managed to be in two places at once. Pete Brown was also interviewed in the King William IV/Brodie's Brewery in Leyton. I then had a wild dash home to do a timed piece on the Chris Evans programme on Radio 2. All very encouraging. Nothing in the *Guardian* — but it's a well-known fact that *Guardian*

readers only drink wine — and nothing, surprise, surprise, in the *Daily Mail*. But we definitely make progress.'

Off-trade news

JAMES CLAY, the leading independent supplier of speciality beers, is delighted to announce six new speciality beer listings in Oddbins and Tesco, available from the end of August 2009. Three beers will be from Belgium, including a strawberry lambic beer from Timmermans and two abbey beers brewed in the Trappist Abbey of Westmalle. The other three beers are from America, including one from Brooklyn Brewery of Manhattan and two from Flying Dog, the quirky craft brewery based in Maryland.

James Clay's sales director, Nigel Stephenson, comments: 'We sell over 300 bottled beers, with an increasing number of seasonal specials, so there is an incredibly wide range of beer styles from which supermarkets and other retailers can choose. The UK beer drinker has never had it so good.'

World Beer Guide

A NEW edition of Roger Protz's *World Beer Guide* hit the bookshelves at the end of September and is the result of a major rewrite by the author. 'The world of brewing has changed out of all recognition since the last edition,' Protz says. 'As a result this is not just a quick cut-and-paste job but a major rewrite, especially for the British and American sections. And thanks to my trip to Australia earlier this year, I've been able to include a major new section on the exciting developments Down Under.'

The World Beer Guide is published by Carlton Books, £12.99

Parish notes

ROGER PROTZ has changed his email — it is now roger.protz@virginmedia.com, but if any problems roger.protz@camra.org.uk or roger@beer-pages.com can be used.

**DEADLINE FOR THE NEXT ISSUE IS
OCTOBER 27, 2009.**

Brave New World

Guild members, Melissa Cole and Glenn Payne, judged at the Great American Beer Festival this year – a totally unique experience as Melissa relates

You may be aware that nothing is done on a small scale in the States and in keeping with that Herculean sense of bigness the GABF is the GBBF super-sized. And I'm not just talking about the festival itself, but also the judging. The sheer level of professionalism at the GABF is something to behold and I believe all of us who run or participate in beer competitions can really learn from this.

Here's just one example: on the night before judging commenced we attended the judges' briefing session, which took us through the whole process and provided us with our categories. Then, and here's what let me know straight away I was in a different league, we were given some sensory training using different hop products and asked to rank them in order of bitterness — at this point I'm thinking okay, a little bit nerve-wracking for the new girl, I'll give it my best shot.

So after tasting all these products and ranking them I begin to relax a bit when the majority of the show of hands in the room agreed with my assessment... only for the presenters to announce that these compounds were actually all the same IBUs and to be careful about using our 'perceived' bitterness in beer as an absolute benchmark; this was fascinating, insightful and extremely valuable. And when it comes to the physical judging itself, there are 78 different beer-style classifications, some with sub-categories, to be judged — and okay we may not have, or be willing to, break down our beers that minutely, in the UK but I feel we are currently failing to accurately reflect the diversity of beer styles available and that this needs addressing. Without doubt the most useful tool of all is the style descriptor sheet you get and this is something I'd really like to see adapted and adopted over here — here's just one small extract: *Bohemian-Style Pilsner: Bohemian Pilsners are medium bodied and they can be as dark as a light amber colour. This style balances moderate bitterness and noble-type hop aroma and flavour with a malty, slightly sweet, medium body. Extremely low levels of diacetyl and low levels of sweet corn-like dimethyl sulphide (DMS) character, if perceived, are characteristic of this style and both may accent malt aroma. A toasted, biscuit-like, brady malt character along with low levels of*

sulphur compounds may be evident. There should be no chill haze. Its head should be dense and rich. Original Gravity (degrees Plato): 1.044-1.056 (11-14 degrees Plato); Apparent Extract/Final Gravity (degrees Plato): 1.014-1.020 (3.55 degrees Plato); Alcohol by Weight (Volume): 3.8%-4.4% (4.5%-5.5%); Bitterness (IBU): 18-25; Colour SRM (EBC): 4-5.5 (8-11 EBC)

Now I'm not necessarily advocating this as the definitive format, as the technical aspect may prove overwhelming for some, but what I wanted to demonstrate is the gulf between our methods and those in the US. Here in the UK we quite often don't even provide the category descriptions the brewers were given to enter the competition, and whilst I applaud the fact we have significantly more focus on drinkability in most of competitions, there's also a lot to be said for raising the professionalism of the industry as a whole by ensuring beers do meet the criteria set for their entry.

All this aside, the most lasting impression that I got from the overall experience I feel is the most important one that we can learn from in the UK — and that's the positive attitude. Glenn uses the word collegiate and I can't think of a better term with which to describe the brewing community out there; people work together so closely, they care about what happens to their neighbouring brewery and they refuse to give in to any doom and gloom. I know we've been having a rough time here over the past few years but the outlook is brighter now than it's ever been, with more craft breweries in the UK than at any other time since 1945, and I strongly feel it's time we started focusing on that and sending out the good news stories.

Beer Academy and IBD events

- IBD Big Cask Day, Nottingham, October 8 — www.ibd.org.uk/events
- Beer Academy Foundation Couse Day, London, October 9 — <http://www.beeracademy.co.uk/events-and-conferences/calendar-of-events/>
- Beer Academy 90-minute tasting: Best of Bottle-conditioned beers, London, October 13 (see Beer Academy website above for details)
- Beer Academy 90-minute tasting: Hoppy British Ales, London, October 21 (see Beer Academy website above for details)
- Weekend with the Beer Academy: November 21-22 Masham, Yorkshire. Home of Theakstons, which will be visited as well as other breweries, gastronomic beer and food dinner; one night's stay with breakfast at The White Bear Hotel (see above website for details)