

## Ask the Brewer(s) – Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup> April 2009

Venue: The Surrey Oaks

The Panel: Ross Hunter (R)– Surrey Hills Brewery  
Dave Roberts (D) – Pilgrim Brewery  
Ken Proctor (K) – Landlord of the Surrey Oaks and questioner

### START OF QUESTIONS

#### **Q1. Do you try to brew beers so they taste the same?**

(D). Yes, by using the same ingredients. However, the changing ingredients (time at which they are purchased) is a problem. Hops are probably the worst as they vary most.

(R). Barley varies a lot. You have to try and improve your brewing process; I concentrate on aroma, colour and body.

#### **Q2. Are different flavours created at different phases of the brewing process?**

(R). Yes, hops, aroma and flavour change a lot. Malts don't change that much, but fermentation does change things quite a bit.

(D). While brewing, it's the smell.... You try to capture the smell of a beer and get it into the beer. It's difficult!

#### **Q3. Do you treat the water?**

(D). Yes. We use different water for different beers. The ions change the taste and they may also change the acidity.

(R). Yes, we reduce the PH. We aim for a PH of around 5 (slightly acidic). We don't burtonise the water though.

(D). Burtonised water has high sulphates. This can make a beer quite bitter and they also smell of quite a high sulphur content.

#### **Q4. How do you design the taste of a new ale?**

(R). I love hops, they give a great characteristic to the beer. We always do a trial brewing. Malts give colour, but this is always complimented by the hop flavour.

(D). I look for the 'totality', the whole beer, water, malt, yeast etc.... The Germans would say 'yeast'

**Q5. Do you create beers with female drinkers in mind?**

(D). No, women don't do pints! *[met with humorous hisses and groans]*. In any case ladies pallets are more sensitive to bitterness.

(R). No, never! The market is not there. Dark beers are less wanted by women, but once they try them, they prefer them

**Q6. Why do freshly squeezed hops have such a fabulous smell, but once they go in the beer, they loose it?**

(R). Boiling destroys the hop oils. The best way to keep the smell is to dry hop a beer.

(D). There are 600 compounds in a hop cone. Only three contribute to the fresh smell. The beer process is just too aggressive for these to survive.

**Q7. Which are the best hops for late hopping?**

(R). Probably cascade. It's used in Hop Head *[from the Dark Start brewery]*. You get crispness from its bitterness.

(D). Dry hopping gives aroma. Always look for carbonation offset by aroma.

**Q8. Why are American and New Zealand hops more interesting than English hops?**

(R). My favourite hops are English! However, American and New Zealand hops have more aroma. I use hops from Kent, Worcestershire, and Herefordshire. Our beers use around 10 to 12 different hop varieties and the average Surrey Hills beer contains 3 to 4 different hops.

(D). There has been an explosion of hops recently. When I started brewing, I had the choice of just five varieties! Today, there are around 100 different types.

**Q9. Is it true that hops don't grow in Scotland?**

(D) & (R). *[After a bit of discussion]* They don't

(R). Golden Promise malt/barley does grow in Scotland and it's used in Timothy Taylor's Beers.

**Q10. Is it easier to brew dark beers?**

(D). Yes! A good lager is very difficult to brew properly.

(R). The malt in a dark beer is dominant. The dark varieties vary less and they are much more robust in flavour.

(D). Darkness comes from malt and roasting. Guinness uses roasted barley.

**Q11. What's the difference between Stout and Porter?**

(R). It's not very clear! You tend to have roasted barley in a stout. Why bother trying to separate them?

(D). Porter in ancient times was made with a different type of malt. They can't brew that beer today. Guinness also uses maize, which gives it its white head.

(R). A porter/stout uses a small amount of dark malt, about 5%, but malted barley is used for the sugar.

A SHORT BREAK/INTERVAL

**Q12. Why are there so many light beers (light golden)?**

(D). I brewed Pilgrim Crusader in 1985 to compete with lager!

(R). Globally, 'yellowish' works. There is less colour and less interference with the hops.

**Q13. Have 'brown beers' had their day?**

(K). There is one traditional brown beer that is very good. Harvey's Sussex Best. I tend to sell 60-70% light golden ales and 20-30% dark. It's the trend.

(R). The average pub is different [*to the Surrey Oaks*]. They prefer brown beers. They want a good balance between malt and hops and this means brown beer! Real ale is 'Yellow or Black'.

**Q14. Why have traditional beers lost their flavour, for example, Wadworth 6X, Timothy Taylor Landlord, etc...**

(R). Not sure about Timothy Taylor! Maybe it's the demise of English hops? I'm not really sure. Fullers London Pride used to be a really good pint, but now it's not. Some of these beers used foreign hops and no doubt the size of the brewery affects things.

(D). Simply.... size. Heritage is lost. Large fermenters don't work. Fullers used to use 12ft fermenters, now they use 200ft fermenters. How can the beer taste the same?

**Q15. Who brews the best beer, the British, Germans or Belgians?**

(D). Best beer? It's best because you like it. It's all based around quality and style.

(R). Not weissbier.... Actually, there is one that's really good, Tucher Weissbier [*the editor probably got that wrong*]. I think Yates Cumbrian beers are really good. English is best!

**Q16. Why don't small breweries invest in bottling?**

(R). I prefer draught beer, I don't want to bottle it, but I recognise that bottling is a growing market.

(D). It's just not the same. There are lots of Belgian bottled beers, but this actually stems from a change in the Belgian laws, when, some time ago, spirits were banned. To get round this, the beers got a lot stronger and ... ended up in bottles.

(R). The Belgians tend to produce a bottled beer first and then a draught version. The English produce draught versions first and then might think about bottling it.

**Q17. How long does it take to get a brew to Ken?**

(R). I like to have 14 days of secondary fermentation, so it probably takes 3½ weeks to get it to Ken.

(D). It varies, because the yeast changes things (quite a lot).

(K). When I get the beers, they all tend to have a 2-month shelf life.

(R). That's probably a bit short. I'd expect a light beer to have a 6-month shelf life and a strong beer to have a 12-month shelf life.

**Q18. How far do your beers go (travel)?**

(R). We [*Surrey Hills*] sell 95% of our beer to outlets within 15 miles of the brewery. Some beer even goes to Cumbria, Foxfield, Barrow-in-Furness!

**Q19. What are Pubco's doing to pub trade?**

(D). Sha\*\*ing it! The only thing that matters is money. Pubs are the losers.

(R). Pubs do tend to shut, at least the poorer ones. The publican is an important part, if they are always there [*ie. Not constantly moved around*], things will work. The Pubco's also force things on publicans/Customers, for example, stemmed glasses. I watched three builders come into a pub and when they got stemmed glasses asked to have them changed. They were told "No, it's company policy". They left and will not return, how can that be good for the business?

**Q20. What do you think of Tied Houses?**

(R). They do have benefits. You get a pub sign/brewer that you recognise, you also know what beer's you're likely to get.

(D). It's not good if they are forced to sell the same poor beers.....

END OF QUESTIONS