

# A Continuing Series

from Greg Hackenberg (5/2013)

## Episode Five: What the Water Gave Me

In the last beery episode we have seen...off flavors and unreduced compounds thwarted by a healthy yeast starter. The telltale twang foiled by optimum fermentation temperatures. And now the beery crusaders are precariously poised for kegging and bottling as the CO<sub>2</sub> is about to be released. But wait! The worst is yet to come!

You've made it this far, but once again this balanced beauty can still go so horribly wrong, and far too often it does. But before I describe what you would be getting in your glass when you sally up to the bar at your local pub and how to replicate that, a bit about getting that glass in your hand in the first place and the pub experience.

When you enter a pub, you will first notice the bar. Whether a simple affair or a grand Victorian edifice, it will dominate the space. As you approach, you will notice the familiar taps for mass market YFS we all know too well. And sadly they have been becoming far too popular. I blame Baywatch for starting this disturbing trend. Convincing poor Brits that bikini clad beauties will magically appear if only they emulate David Haselhoff, get a white boy afro and drink insipid beer. My sister-in-law once got paid as an extra to cheer for David Haselhoff, which is the only reason to cheer for David Haselhoff...but I digress.

Now, in the UK a bar is almost always strictly for service; no stools, no sitting, and limited leaning space out of the traffic areas, so approach it only if you want something. Which you do, so look past those taps and there will be a neat line of what you might think are taps but they are not, these are beer engines (if they are not, find another pub). Atop each will be a cheery sign identifying the wonderful elixir that it will dispense. Some pub will taunt you with a collection of unused signs for beers you won't be drinking on the back bar, but you're thirsty and there is beer to be had. Peruse the selections, and select your beer. You can, if unsure, ask the good man behind the bar for advice.

Now when ordering, politeness rules; Yanks with their "I want" this or that is right off. "I'd like a pint of, Cheswick, please" or "May I have another pint mild, please" is the way to go. The British like their rules and social conventions and really will follow them with the rigidity of those Monty Python characters. Don't ask if they will let you see the cellar, it's against the rules and baffling that anyone would even ask such a thing.

The bartender will place a glass below the spout and by pulling the beer engine handle, actually pump or "pull" the beer up from the cellar below. As if nothing was sacred, more and more pubs are switching to the CO<sub>2</sub> driven taps we are all familiar with. When drinking with your mates, everyone takes turn and gets a round; that is still sacrosanct. Also sacrosanct is paying for your beer.

Now this is hard for a lot of Americans to get, but you DO NOT TIP. Pubs are likely owned by the breweries whose beer they feature, and the bartenders are brewery employees. And unlike US service industry worker, they are paid reasonably well with benefits that are inconceivable in this country and covered by universal healthcare. Some pubs are individually owner and tied contractually to a brewery. A fully an independent pub is known as a "Free House" can have beers from several breweries, and now from any of the small craft breweries springing up in the UK.

The only acceptable form of "tipping" in a pub is if the bartender has been particularly, and way beyond the call of duty, helpful, or perhaps on a slow day took a shining to you and gotten quite chummy. In such cases the proper response is to offer to buy him a pint and put the money on the bar. This usually goes into a pot and used for some nice treat for the staff. In four trips to the UK I have never seen this happen. Much of the hospitality was handled by the pub owner and you don't tip the owner, even in the UK.

So you're in this pub, or at least imagining you are. Before you sits a dimpled mug or the classic pint glass full of a beautiful copper colored beer with a thin creamy head. The delicate aroma of hops drifts up to your nose with the carbonation followed by that first sip of the cool beer, your taste the crisp malty notes and delicate fruit from the yeast punctuated with a lingering bitterness. No, it's not warm and flat, but if all you drink is Supercold™ Coors Light then it might seem that way. And it will also be marred by this annoying thing called flavor. Now how do we get our beer that way?

When a beer hits the pub in the UK, it is hopefully cask conditioned aka "real ale". Real ale has been on the wane in the UK despite the efforts of the Campaign for Real Ale, CAMRA which publishes yearly guide books that list most pubs serving real ale (get a copy if you're going). It is a bit of an art, labor intensive and the beer needs to be consumed within a day or two, but it makes an enormous difference. Real Ale is a topic for another article, but take my advice and get it whenever you can. We may not be serving our beer as real ale, but we can get close. Cask conditioned ales are put in the cask with additional sugar for natural carbonation, much like bottle conditioning a beer. Also a handful of hops (classic dry hopping) and a charge of isinglass, a fining to help settle the reactivated yeast are added. Isinglass is derived from the swim bladders of cod and other fish. Now exactly how they figured that out I'd like to know. I mean was it something like this; "Oy! Let's toss this bit of fish guts into the beer, that'd be the bomb" ? ...but I digress. If that's a little unappetizing for you, use gelatin.

The takeaway is we want our beer clear or "bright" in brewing parlance, and we want to dry hop as close to serving as possible. You can drop some hops into secondary a few days before you keg. But I have a couple of 3" stainless tea balls so I can just toss it into the corny keg. And again, balance, restraint, this is not a west coast IPA ½ to 1 oz. max of a good English finishing hop is all you need. I've actually used gelatin in the corny and it has worked just fine. As for the sugar? You can naturally carbonate if you so choose (and if you bottle, you will be), but in a standard homebrewing corny keg setup, I do not think it adds much.

All jokes about warm beer, aside, you do serve these at "cellar" temperatures. Now I was never served something that was "warm", but at some not so good pubs cool beer was about the best you could do. I prefer the 50-55 degree range. A little bit of useless trivia for the traveler; in the south (London and the channel counties) beer is served with a minimal head. North of London a sparkler is attached to the tap head, agitating the beer and producing a creamy head. Purists claim the out gassing of the head diminishes the hop aroma. Coincidentally the south (no sparkler) is the major hop growing region of Britain where hopping levels were always a bit higher and enjoyed that way.

So what happens to our masterpiece if serve it too cold? The esters and malty flavors will vanish and all you'll taste is the more vegetal notes of the hops and a wallop of bitterness. Over carbonation will wash the hops and esters out. If you get one that's too cold, let it warm up. Over carbonated is a bit tougher, but you can swirl it and let out some of the gas a few times. Anyway, now you're on your own.

That's all for this time.