

Latest Diatribe from Greg Hackenberg (3/2013)

Pure and Easy

To recap, we had a recipe:

“Brewers Reward” Best Bitter
BJCP 8B: Special/Best/Premium Bitter,
O.G. 1048 (75% efficiency) 36 IBU’s
7 lb. Maris Otter (you can use extract)
8 oz. Crystal 60
8 oz. Wheat Malt
4 oz. Invert sugar No.1/Demerara Sugar
1.0 oz. Challenger, 60 min
.50 oz. EK Goldings, 30 min
.50 oz. EK Goldings, dry hop
Yeast WPL002 English Ale

The Acton Arms is closed, too many Rough Boys, perhaps. So Stardom in Acton will have to wait for whoever gets the musical reference first. Now we need to turn this recipe into beer, the British way. The good news is paying attention to a couple of key details is Gonna Get Ya a prime example of a good British beer. Even extract brewers can get good results. The not so bad news is you will have to pay attention and Keep On Working to control your temperatures through the process. In this installment, we are going to cover the mash and selecting the yeast. Next time I will cover the fermentation, which deserves its own installment, as it is a really important bit. Okay, Let’s See Action.

First we need to mash, and the British make mashing pretty easy. What we might consider the basic all-grain mash, the fairly thick single infusion mash, sparge etc., we got from the British. No fancy decoctions, temperature rests, or other complicated steps, save perhaps a mash out. There are some variations in commercial production. A notable example is Fuller’s (the last of the great 19th century London breweries) essentially does a pseudo-batch sparge partigyle to produce wort of three strengths that are combined to make the ordinary, best and extra special bitters. This was a common technique through the 19th century particularly for porter and stout porters, which soon lost the “porter” and were known simply as “stout”. None of this really applies on a home brewing level, so I digress.

Now, here is where I start going on about temperature. The old rule of thumb was for lower gravity beers your mash temp should be higher to keep some mouthfeel and malty flavor, and that’s where a lot of people go wrong. British Pale Ale, while malty is pretty dry beers. Wait? Malty and dry? Why it’s one or the other! Well, no, it’s not. Malty is not the same as sweetness, or body. Malt flavors are just that, the taste of the grain, and you can be dry and malty. So, while we are not into Belgian territory in terms of temps, you want to mash a British Pale Ale fairly low at 50-52 degrees for nicely fermentable wort.

Now, remember that nice British base malt that I was going on about last time? Those biscuit, toasty notes are going to give you that malty flavor. The crystal malt and wheat, just A Little Is Enough, will fill in with caramel/toffee notes and prop up the mouthfeel. You’ll get a chance latter on to jigger a little sweetness into the beer with the yeast.

So you’ve mashed and you’re gearing up to sparge. If you actually read some of the stuff I’ve written before, you might recall the technique of First Wort Hopping. This beer is a prime candidate, And I Moved the Challenger bittering hops to FWH addition in letting them steep while sparging. Since the quantities are pretty low to start, I’d still go with the 30 minute .50 oz. of EKG. Once sparged, you give it the usual 60 min. rolling boil.

You should add Irish Moss or Whirlflock. A lot of British yeasts are buggers about clearing, and chill haze seems to plague these beers. The Irish moss helps. Also Crashing By Design at kegging with gelatin or isinglass finings is standard operating procedure in British brewing and you will likely need it.

Now, this is the biggie; yeast and fermentation. Time to Face The Face. All this work has been leading up to the fermentation and this is where so many beers go awry. I cannot stress this enough; the key to a successful British style beer is selecting the appropriate yeast for the beer, pitching a good quantity of healthy yeast, and maintaining the proper temperature consistently through fermentation.

If you're not Exquisitely Bored by this article yet, here is a bit about some of the available British Yeast strains and why you might want to use one. As I mentioned last time, there are a lot of very good and very interesting British yeasts available and almost all are from particular breweries with unique flavor profiles. And I'd prove it but right now all I have an Empty Glass, so I will just tell you about a few of the yeast that I regularly use.

WPL002 English Ale /Wyeast 1968 London ESB is the Fuller's, the last of the great 19th century London breweries, yeast and it is a spectacular yeast, the one I'd recommend starting with. Pick up a Fullers ESB and that's what you're getting. A little lower attenuation, 63-70%, so it maintains a residual sweetness.

WLP007 Dry English Ale/Wyeast 1098 Whitbread Dry is the Classic Whitbread Ale yeast, which to me produces an "apple" ester that is specific to Whitbread Ale. As the name implies this one devours malt and finishes crisp and bone dry (also described as tart) attenuation 70-80%.

WLP017 Whitbread Ale Yeast, rare)/Wyeast 1099 another Whitbread yeast. Not as dry, less intense and lacks the tartness of the Dry. Middle of the road, but clears well, and at cooler temps will ferment cleaner than most of the others, if that's what you're going for.

WLP013 London Ale/1028 London Ale Yeast is Worthington's, a classic Burton-on-Trent brewery now owned by Bass and one of those nameless corporate conglomerates. I have yet to see Worthington's White Shield this side of the pond, nor do I remember the White City Fighting, but the yeast gives a rich mineral profile, earthy and woody with slight diacetyl production. Some pick up a cherry ester in the aroma. Now here's something; a touch of diacetyl is okay in a British ale (so long as it is balanced, of course). A bit drier than the 007/1098 at 67-75%

1318 London Ale III is the Boddingtons yeast. It is a true top cropping strain and will put up a spectacular krausen with globs of yeast. It has a light, fruity palate and unlike a lot of the others finishes with a slightly sweet note despite the 71-75% attenuation.

1469 West Yorkshire Ale is a gem of yeast from the Timothy Taylor brewery, which has raked in the awards and the yeast is a big part of it. It leaves a big malt flavor and with 67-71% attenuation a touch of sweetness, with a dry finish with earthy, nutty and stone-fruit esters.

So notice, we have a range of ester productions, a range of dryness from bone dry to a nice residual sweetness, and a pallet of specific flavors. And there are a lot more yeast strains out there. My suggestion is do little research. There is a great comparison chart at MrMalty.com giving both White Labs and Wyeast strains and the brewery of origin if known. Hit the White Labs and Wyeast descriptions on the web pages for more. Pick one that fits what you are going for or would complement your grains or hops, and give it a go. Brewing with extract? I'd lean to the higher attenuating yeasts to compensate for the "average" ferment ability of the extract. I'd also suggest a partial mash with a little mild malt and the wheat to boost the flavor a bit.

All of these are pretty distinctive yeasts. I would put them second to the Belgian stains in that quality. You may not like the results, either the yeast does not suit the beer, or you just don't care for the flavors. WLP013/1028 London Ale has that "mineral" profile that some do not care for. So if it's not your cuppa tea, move on to another.

Next time I'll cover the fermentation, and the kegging/bottling part.