

A Message From Greg By Greg Hackenberg

So, apparently some of you have encouraged me to keep writing these Hopline thingys. Well Okay, then. So again, a subject initially eluded me, but then someone sent me a link to one of the old Michael Jackson Beer Hunter's on the interwebs and it got me thinking. And while that can often mean trouble, in this case it might just work out pretty well for all of us. So herewith I present the first installment of something I am going call "Brewing Like a Brit, part 7, One of the Millions" (anyone who gets the running music reference in this article without Google wins a prize, sadly it won't be a pint from Arkells, and that's sort of a clue).

Okay, so it's part one, but seven sounds so much more impressive, or at least wordy. But that's the theme; I will impart on you some of my experience learned from attempting to brew classic British ales and from drinking pints in a number of pubs from Canterbury to the Scottish Borders. Well, at least what I remember...the Green Dragon in Welton, the Yorkshire Pudding was spectacular, and the beer was a veritable Garden of Earthly Delights. It had been frequented by the famous highwayman Dick Turpin, but I digress.

"For a quart of ale is a dish for a king" - William Shakespeare, 'A Winter's Tale'

The BJCP racks up 14 categories for the Brits: 8A, 8B and 8C, represent the Pale Ale continuum. 11A Mild, 11B and C Southern and Northern English Brown. 12A Brown Porter and 12B Robust (which I think should be split into a traditional British type and non-Brit categories). 13A Dry Stout, 13B Sweet Stout, and 13C Oatmeal (13F, Russian Imperial Stout, now dominated by the Yanks, originated in Britain for the Russian courts). 14A English IPA. And, 19A Old Ale, 19B English Barley Wine.

That is a pretty impressive range of beers considering they are all ales. But here's the rub, I doubt many of you out there have ever had the chance to try, real, authentic versions of most of these beers. There are a couple of reasons; the biggest (historic India Beer trade aside) is many of the legendary beers simply will not survive shipping and handling of a cross-pond distribution.

A fine British ale is a pretty fragile beer. The kind of abuse that shipping imparts, heat in particular, will ruin a good bitter or mild in no time. These beers are meant to be drunk fresh and quickly consumed. This is not a problem in the UK. Pub are usually owned or under contract by local breweries so beer is delivered almost daily and maintained at consistent temperatures in the cellar that's beneath virtually every pub. And remember, this is not Louisiana. Summer's Cauldron in the UK it might mean a beastly 70 degrees outside, and those cellars maintain a consistent temperature through the Season Cycle.

Another is that what we do get is most often "export" versions, usually stronger, often suffering from the shipping and handling, sometimes of dubious quality. Seriously, if you ever see the words "specially blended/formulated/etc. for American tastes" attached to any consumable item, run like hell. Really, I've eaten and drunk what passes for food and beverages in Ohio, and that's what they mean by "American". Seriously they thought Red Dog was a fancy craft beer...they argue over which Applebees is better...coffee looks like tea and tastes like a brown crayon mashed up in water...get the idea? Not exactly setting your Senses Working Overtime.

And then we have a feedback loop. British beers are not widely distributed because they are not popular, and they are not popular because they are not available. See the problem? Third political party enthusiasts can sympathize (steer clear of them if they've been drinking during election years, "blah blah blah...if only candidate X were in the debates, that would show the world...blah blah blah." Followed by banging their heads on the bar). The long and the short of it is that we're missing out on one of the great brewing traditions. We do get a number of good examples, and we're been getting more, but we don't get the depth and breadth of what the styles have to offer. Grand generalization time...German beers are characterized by clean malty beers, spiked with spicy noble hops. Belgian are yeast centric beers showcasing the amazing qualities and range of yeast. Americans go big, with vivid specialty malts and bold strokes of hops. British beers? Well, the British beers are all about balance. Digging into

ingredients, almost all the characteristics and flavors of the others are there but they are about the whole package. And what this gives you is something called “drinkability” and that is not the same as the mass-marketed yellow fizzy stuff advertising slogan. What it means is a malty yet dry beer that hits all the right notes and keeps you heading up at the bar for another satisfying round.

So where does that leave an adventurous beer drinker? Besides booking your ticket to London, and mastering the English Roundabout, it means brewing your own. A bit of unsolicited person history; I started brewing after my first trip to the UK. My first beer was an Elvis of Brew-Ha-Ha fame recipe for a bitter, and I’ve been working on recreating some of the pints I had savored in sight of the Towers of London ever since.

So if you are Making Plans for Nigel to recreate, or just plan create one of these gems, I hope to impart some of my hard earned experience with these styles. However, given the lack of experience with these wonderful brews, however, it might take some education to set you Burning with Optimism's Flames and inspire a new brew. And if you do make it to the UK, I hope to make your trip something other than The Ballad of Peter Pumpkinhead and you will not feel like The Mayor of Simpleton when you walk into a pub.

Next up, I’ll go over some of the key ingredients to these beers, then some techniques, commercial examples and so on. And if you ain’t got the music reference you lived under a rock or only listened to mainstream radio in the 80’s. "Give my people plenty of beer, good beer, and cheap beer, and you will have no revolution among them." - Queen Victoria