



The Midland Craft Brewers Association



Brewing crafted ales.....at home

Retro Brewing. (Beers from the past)

Beer styles over the past 200 years or so have changed and evolved gradually with time and have encompassed a wide range, from the London Porters and Mild Ales of the late 19th century, to the Pale Ales of Burton, the Irish Stouts and Bitters, right through to modern styles such as the Blonde and Golden ales that are becoming increasingly popular at the present time. But what did these beers taste like from several decades ago and how do they stand up to the beers that we brew and drink today. Fortunately groups such as the Durden Park Beer Circle, and individuals such as Ronald Pattinson have researched many historical beer styles, and have studied and deciphered records from brewery logs that have amazingly survived. The Durden Park Beer Circle have published many recipes in their book "Old British Beers and how to make them" and Ronald Pattinson has published several books on the subject which are available to purchase on the website www.lulu.com

Many of these beers have been brewed successfully by CBA members, notably from the DP book and several have won prizes at national beer festivals.

Some general notes about brewing these beer styles.

The traditional Burton India Pale Ale with a gravity of over about 1.058 was brewed with what seems like today an extremely high hop rate, sometimes as high as 6 pounds per barrel for example. This is well over three times the hop rate of a typical strong bitter brewed today and if sampled during the first six months after bottling, the bitterness would be extremely harsh and unpalatable. However after maturing the beer for a further six months, the harshness mellows and blends with the malt to produce a wonderful beer. Regarding the London Porters and Stouts from the late 19th and early 20th century, most of the recipes contain considerable quantities of roasted ingredients, such as black and brown malts, these too must be matured for a few months to avoid harsh flavours. And a tip here, some time ago I replaced ordinary black malt with the de-husked (or de-bittered) variety following advice from a respected Northern Craft Brewer. This malt is comes from Weyermann and is known as "Carafa Special No 3 " and is available from the "Malt Miller." Having substituted it for the husked variety some time ago I find it gives a smoother palate to my dark beers and cuts the maturation time considerably. As for hop varieties, there are logs that show brewers were importing American hops (Cluster) in the early 1900's and it is a fact that brewers used "what they could get " with cost being a considerable factor.

Burton IPA. This is my own interpretation of the style and seemed to go down well with my usual “tasting panel.” The hop rate is somewhat lower than the original, but after only 6 months maturation the initial astringency had smoothed out leaving a good balance of flavours.

O.G. 1.057 for 23L. Estimated IBU's 60

3000g low colour pale malt mash with 15L of liquor at 66C for 90 minutes.

2825g pale malt

125g Cara-hell malt (or Carapils)

60g goldings @ 7.2% alpha acid boiled for 75 minutes

50g fuggles @ 5.0% boiled for 75 minutes

28g fuggles @ 5.0% boiled for 15 minutes

18g challenger for dry hopping

Unlike the above Porter recipe, the water for this beer needs to have most of the alkalinity neutralised and also some gypsum added to replicate the typical Burton well water.

A few notes;

The wort was boiled for 15 minutes before adding the main batch of hops with a second addition during the last 15 minutes. (total 90 minutes) A 2 litre starter of Brewlabs Burton Ale yeast was pitched after cooling and thorough aeration, this fermented the beer down to 1.011 after when it was racked to a second tank with an airlock, the dry hops were then added and left for 12 days after which the gravity had dropped to 1.009. Finings were then added to clarify the beer prior to bottling with sugar primings and also a little fresh yeast. The bottles were left at room temperature for a month to condition then stored cool for three months before sampling.