

Minutes of Midlands MCBA Meeting 9th January 2010

Venue: Victoria Inn, Rugby

Local chair: RJC

11 members in attendance, despite the snow ! : RJC, RA & MA, JF, SH, DH, AQ, SR, JN, PS, AG, CT.

1. RJC welcomed everyone and thanked them for making the effort to travel to the meeting under difficult circumstances. It was especially nice to welcome a recent member, JN, to his first meeting.

2. We then moved straight on to tasting the 11 beers:

DH – a 4.7% bitter made with fresh, home grown First Gold hops. A clean tasting beer with a hint of spice from the First Gold hops.

JN – a pale ale at 1046 made from pale malt and Goldings. A well balanced beer.

SH – a Christmas beer at 4.9%, made from pale malt, roast barley, Susan and Challenger hops. Good malty aroma and malty taste.

AG – a bitter at 1050 with 55 IBUs, made from pale malt, crystal, wheat malt, flaked maize, flaked barley, Goldings and Fuggles hops with a large amount of Cascade hops added at switch off. Good hop aroma and flavour.

DH – A White Shield clone at 5.5%, made from pale malt, crystal, Challenger and Northdown hops. All agreed that it did not taste like White Shield, but in fact had much more flavour.

SH – a lager at 5.7%, made from lager malt, wheat malt, sugar and Perle hops. A real lager with a good hop flavour.

RA – Bombay IPA. This beer was a comparison brew tasted by the group some time ago, so it was interesting to see how it had matured. The beer was well conditioned and had a good hop aroma and flavour. Some members thought that the beer had lost some hoppiness over time.

RJC – a Christmas beer at 1066, made from pale malt, crystal, chocolate, wheat malt, amber, roast barley, flaked barley, dark sugar, Northdown and Styrian Goldings. A small amount of Gluhwein spice had been added at switch off and was instantly detected by the group. Windsor yeast gave high residual sweetness.

SR – a Ringwood Old Thumper clone (1052) from the Wheeler recipe, made from pale malt, Challenger and Goldings hops. This beer had a nice colour and a malty flavour. Some members thought it was close to the original from memory.

CT – his 100th brew, made from pale malt, crystal, amber, wheat malt, Goldings and Fuggles hops, at 7.8%. The high alcohol level was apparent on tasting. There was some Belgian character to the beer.

At this point there was some discussion about the accuracy and fragility of hydrometers. AG has found a source of cheap hydrometers and offered to buy in bulk for the group. Most of the beers had been made with Nottingham yeast and

there was a difference in experience reported whether this yeast fermented right down to about 1006 or stopped at about 1012.

PS – a Belgian beer at 1076, 2 years old, made from pale malt, Belgian caramalt, torrefied wheat, sugar, Challenger and Hallertau hops. The Brewferm top fermenting yeast was used. The beer had a definite Belgian character and was thought to be similar to Chimay.

A sample of draught beer was provided by the pub, Atomic Disaster at 9%. This was treacly and had some barley wine character. The high alcohol content was obvious. This beer was well received by the group.

Some of the beers had sugar in their recipes and there was some discussion about this. It was not thought that there was any advantage in including sugar and it could be replaced by grain, as we do not have brewery accountants breathing down our necks.

3 + 4. After lunch CT presented one beer for the beer clinic. This was a mild made with Nottingham yeast. Most members noticed a medicinal/TCP/burnt plastic aroma. The taste of the beer was acceptable, but there was a slight medicinal taste. Not all of the members agreed on the TCP character. This was a good example of the problems with chlorine in the brewing liquor. It was suggested to boil all water before brewing and add a Camden tablet to the water, or to use a filter on the water supply. It was pointed out that the chlorine content of the water supply can be varied by the water company without notice.

5. SH gave an update on the website. There has already been some good work done on the new website by SH, AG and JF and the new look is much improved. Members comments have been very positive about the new look website. SH asked for photos, documents, articles, up to date information to include on the website. Members would need to be happy to have their photo published on the internet. Further link pages could be added and suggestions are welcome. There could be articles on technical discussions and topics of the meetings. The members involved were thanked for the work they have put in on this.

6. AG attended the Sutton beer competition. He reported that the venue was crowded, but it was an enjoyable festival. AG felt that some of the categories were rather vague and that it would be possible to enter the same beer for several different categories, a strong IPA for example. Feedback was via some signed comments from the judge, but there was no score. More comments would have been appreciated. It was felt that the system used at the last beer competition at Derby was a good model. The date has been set for next year's competition at Sutton.

7. AQ reported on the bitterness tasting trial at the last meeting in Loughborough. Four beers had been brewed with different IBUs to see if the group could taste differences in the bitterness. A simple form was used to rank the beers in order of

bitterness. On analysis the results were fairly random and we seemed to be unable to taste differences in the bitterness. This could be that either we are a poor tasting group or the bitterness levels of the beers may not have correlated with the amount of hops used and extraction of alpha acids from them. AQ is now investigating getting the beers analysed for bitterness scientifically. He has access to a lab in Nottingham and may be able to do that himself.

8. RA reported that membership of the MCBA was up by 2 -3 members.

9. RA reported that the National Festival will be held in Skipton on 18th September, organised by the Northern CBA.

10. There is a regional competition for a pale ale between 1050 and 1060 and it was suggested that members could brew one for comparison at the meeting in July in Nottingham, where selection could take place. Six bottles are required for the competition and more bottles would be needed for the selection tasting.

11. Brewing techniques: hop varieties and hop additions. Most members are using first worth hopping, but are not sure if it improves hop flavour. It does certainly help to reduce boiling over. The majority view was against using a single hop variety in a brew and a combination of two varieties seemed to work well. Bramling Cross and Northern Brewer seem to work well as a combination, as well as the classic Fuggles and Goldings. Some hops are not suitable for bittering use, as the alpha acid is rather low. It was suggested not to use Fuggles for late hopping, although Goldings and Cascade can be used effectively for this. Some members have used New Zealand hops to good effect. Matueka, Riwaka, Pacific Gem and Nelson Sauvín were all reported to be good hops. Some members favour American hops such as Cascade, but the grapefruit character can be dominating. Other tried and tested American hops are Crystal, Amarillo, and Chinook, however caution was expressed about using too much Chinook. AG's recent trial and the Bombay IPA comparison brew showed that late hopping with massive amounts of hops can be very effective. It remains to be seen whether the hop aroma and flavour persists in the beer over a longer storage time. Unlike commercial brewers we do not have to produce beers of a consistent taste and quality so we are free to experiment with hop varieties and additions. Use of a hopback was discussed and it was felt that its use did not give any advantages. Many members grow a variety of hops and are willing to provide cuttings.

There was a discussion about future possible brewery visits. The Titanic brewery in Stoke-on-Trent was suggested and also the Thornbridge brewery in Derbyshire. Some members have contacts at Thornbridge and will follow this up.

12. AOB: AG suggested ordering brewing ingredients in bulk and then distributing them to members. This was thought to be a good idea to save on costs, particularly for delivery. AG has received a request to speak at a meeting

of the Northern CBA about his article in Brewer's Contact on late hopping. There was a request for a source of beer crates for storing beer.

13. The next meeting will be in Banbury on 13th March, chaired by SO (hopefully snow free)