

*West Kingdom Brewers' Guild
Newsletter*



March Crown AS XLV

Chronicler's Corner:

Spring seems to have come quicker this year—my fruit trees are in full bloom, and my bees are busy at work. All those recipes lovingly hoarded through the winter are calling to me. Did anyone try a new recipe over the winter? Pen an article for your beloved Chronicler? Don't hold back—send it on and help us make our newsletter worthy of this fine guild.

A Message from our Chancellor:

Welcome back, everyone! As tourney season starts anew, I look forward to another year of creative, homemade beverages, and many samples at Guild meetings (shameless plug). Here at March Crown we have an opportunity for all you cidermakers to enter your wares in a Guild competition, and next event (Beltane) it's the turn of those who prefer the typically sweeter art of cordial making. Over the coming two years we'll hit all five of our main brewing categories: wine, mead, beer, cordials, and non-alcoholics, and then some.

Brew if you have time, bring a sample if you have some to spare, enter a competition if you feel adventuresome--but in any case, come to meetings if you can. If you have no homebrew handy, we also enjoy sampling store bought brews. Remember, some beers aren't readily available Kingdom-wide; for instance, some locally-made Sacramento brews are virtually unknown in the Bay Area, and have been brought to the attention of Mists brewers at our meetings. And, if you have nothing to pass around, we'd like to see you at meetings anyway--participation is one of our most valuable commodities.

A project I started last year was to contact the heads of brewers' guilds in other kingdoms and compare notes, see how they do things differently, etc. The results surprised me; I expected most kingdoms to have an active, centralized guild—but what I found was that I came up with no results for the majority of the twenty kingdoms. Either I

Interesting Links

Alton Brown's Amber Waves Beer Making Transcript:
<http://www.goodeatsfanpage.com/Season6/Beer/BeerTrans.htm>

<http://www.gotmead.com>

<http://www.meadfest.org>

<http://www.meadfest.com>



could find no information available at all, or the listed contacts never responded. Of those that did respond, the results were very spotty: only three (including us) have a central guild.

I find I have mixed feelings about this. While it might be tempting to feel it's a confirmation that we're the best and we've got our act together better than other kingdoms, it's sad to realize that as a guild we're nearly alone out there.

Here is a summary of what I found:

West	Official guild	http://www.westkingdombrewers.org/
Atenveldt	Official guild	http://www.atenbrewers.info/
Atlantia	Official guild	http://brewers.atlantia.sca.org/
Caid	Decentralized guild	
An Tir	No official guild	
Gleann Abhann	No official guild	
Artemesia	Local guild just started--unknown about kingdom guild	
Drachenwald	Just an interest group at the moment	
Northshield	No brewers' guild	
Outlands	No info about guild	http://groups.yahoo.com/group/OutlandsBrewers/

No info at all about:

East
Middle
Meridies
Ansteorra
Calontir
Trimaris
Æthelmearc
Ealdormere
Lochac

Anglo-Saxon Brewing (JJ). The History & Brewing of Anglo-Saxon Ales by Lord Alfred of Greyvale, Greyvale Brewing

ALE (EALU):

Ale was the weakest of the “adult beverages” available in Anglo-Saxon England. In fact, it was considered weak enough to be safe for pregnant women to drink, who were otherwise told to avoid consuming beer. While there is some evidence that it may have been bittered with herbs, this was likely a later alteration in the production of ale, after bittering agents became common in beers, discussed below. Originally, insofar as the Germanic tribes and the early Anglo-Saxons were concerned, it appears that ale had a rather wine-like flavor. As Tacitus (1st century AD) wrote of the Germans, “the liquor commonly drunk is prepared from barley or wheat, which, being fermented, is then brought to resemble somewhat wine.” Having produced a few beers without any bittering agent, I can attest that the flavor is accurately characterised as being “wine-coolerish” in nature. Simple grains do not ferment to nearly the strength of either wine or mead, though, so ale was a far weaker drink. It was also far less expensive to produce, grain being so much cheaper than either honey or grapes. It is possible then, that ale became popular among the early Germanic tribes and their Anglo-Saxon descendants because it was a cheaper and weaker alcoholic beverage. It is likely, in fact, that ale originated through the infusion of grains into a mead (a type of drink referred to today as a braggot – about halfway between a mead and a beer). Gradually, the amount of honey in the concoction was reduced to zero . . . and ale was born. Tracing this part of the history of ale is fairly complex and must, perforce, be reserved for a later article.

Competitions for 2007

March Crown XLI - Cider (including cyser etc.)
Beltane XLII - Cordials
June Crown XLII - Wines
Purgatorio XLII - Non-alcoholic drinks
October Crown XLII - Winter warmers

REMEMBER: There is always an “open” brewing category at every brewing competition. This is an excellent opportunity for brewers of all levels to have someone knowledgeable taste their brews and give them feedback. Our goal with the “open” category is to allow people to get feedback on their brews when they want and need it, without having to wait for a specific category to arrive on the schedule. Submission rules are located at our website.

Contacts

Guild Chancellor
Peyre de Barat

Cynaguan Representative
Baron Johann von Drachenfels

Mists Representative
Godric

Oerthan Representative
Vacant

July 7, 2006: I racked the ale into a secondary fermenter.

July 18, 2006: I bottled the ale late in the evening and checked the final measurements, shown below. After some debate, I added 7 ounces of DME to bottle condition the beers. While I don't know whether or not any carbonation is historically accurate in an early Anglo-Saxon ale, I finally decided that some carbonation during cask storage was at least possible, and I also couldn't quite bring myself to make it entirely flat.

July 28, 2006: With bottle conditioning complete, placed several of the ales into my fridge.

July 30, 2006: I opened the first bottle and tasted the finished, though young, product.

ACTUAL SPECIFIC INFORMATION:

Act. Original Gravity:	1.050
Act. Final Gravity	1.014
Act. IBU:	0.0
Act. SRM:	26.8
Act. ABV:	4.71%

CHARACTERISTICS AND ANALYSIS:

After brewing, the flavor of the ale was sweet and malty as expected, rather like a very rich ovaltine drink; some nutty, woody characteristics noted from the addition of the roasted barley and the oak chips. The aroma was very mild with a hint of roastiness.

At bottling time the ale displayed similar flavor characteristics, though it was noticeably less malty following fermentation. The ale carbonated mildly, and has a rather creamy, full-bodied mouthfeel. The body is medium and the aroma mild, still retaining a hint of roastiness. The flavor predominates with malt, though there is a touch of roasty dryness in the finish. Its color is a medium brown as expected, with a touch of haze most likely due to its young age. In all, not a bad beverage, clearly distinct from beer and, in some ways, being reminiscent of a weak, sweet mead, though obviously with malt flavors rather than honey. Over the course of three months following bottling, the ale cleared nicely and mellowed into a terrific, light, malty beverage.

CHARACTERISTICS:

Ale then, was probably a fairly weak drink (3-5% abv) made from water, malted grains and yeast. While some honey may have been included from time to time in earlier periods, this was most likely not the case by the time of the Anglo-Saxon Conquest of England in the 5th century AD. Its unhopped and unbittered nature gives it a moderately sweet, "wine-coolerish" flavor. Specific flavor characteristics, and the strength of the drink, would be determined by the amount and type of grains used. Using medieval methods of brewing, ale was likely a somewhat cloudy beverage with a color usually not much lighter than a Newcastle Brown Ale. It would not likely have had a "thick" or "grainy" flavor, however, unless one were to consume the unmixed sediment from the bottom of the brewing vat, secondary cask, etc. Mouthfeel would nonetheless tend towards full and malty, with none of the "crispness" inherent in most modern lagers.

MYRCENA SWEART EALU (Mercian Dark Ale)

It should first be noted that this recipe and the procedures used are not specifically replicating an actual Anglo-Saxon recipe, as none have survived. Rather, based on the research that I have done as to the likely characteristics of an Anglo-Saxon ale, I have used my personal experience as a brewer, and modern homebrewing techniques to devise something that I believe corresponds to an ale that could have been brewed during the Anglo-Saxon period in England.

ESTIMATED SPECIFIC INFORMATION:

Est. Original Gravity:	1.052
Est. Final Gravity	1.015
Est. IBU:	0.0
Est. SRM:	26.8
Est. ABV:	5.56%

INGREDIENTS:

6.0 pounds	Liquid Wheat Malt Extract
2.5 pounds	Crystal 60L
0.5 pounds	Roasted Barley Malt
1 vial	White Labs 007 – Dry English Ale Yeast
¼ tsp	Gypsum
1 oz.	Yeast Nutrient

REASONING:

Malt: As an extract brewer, I needed to find a malt that I felt would be roughly similar to the bulk of the grain used by the Anglo-Saxon brewer. I chose Liquid Wheat Malt Extract as I felt it would most closely replicate the color and quality of a simple 2-grain wheat. I chose this one over the standard Light Malt Extract due to its lighter color.

Specialty Grains: The Crystal 60L was chosen to replicate the inclusion of darker, malted grains, which I think were a likely mainstay for flavoring. The Roasted Barley was chosen to add a slight roasted, bitter flavor to the ale in order to offset the expected sweetness of a non-bittered beverage.

Yeast: I chose this yeast firstly because it is an English yeast strain. Secondly, this particular strain attenuates better than most and should eliminate a little more of the residual sweetness. While Ale is an un-bittered, sweet beverage, I don't believe that it should be cloyingly, sickeningly sweet.

Adjuncts: I added gypsum to soften my local water to something that should be closer to the water of southern England. The oak chips were added to simulate fermenting and aging in an oak cask. The Yeast Nutrient was added simply to get the best attenuation from the yeast as possible. While this was not something added in Period, they generally used thriving cultures of yeast slurry left over from previous batches, which can provide for a fairly active fermentation.

TIMELINE:

June 22, 2006: I spent several hours in the evening formulating the recipe.

June 23, 2006: I obtained the ingredients, making a few final adjustments, and wrote the above reasoning for my choices.

June 26, 2006: Brewing Day.

11:45 am – combined specialty grains in stew pot and added c. 1 gallon water. Heated the water to c. 155° F. Removed from heat and let steep for 60 minutes (normally only steep for 30 – 45 minutes; the added time was due to technical difficulties unrelated to brewing; the added time created a very thick mash that was difficult to sparge through – I therefore don't recommend steeping for more than 45 minutes). Sparged into brew pot with 2 gallons of water heated to c. 168°. Added malt extract and water to 6 ½ gallons.

1:15 pm – placed brew pot on propane burner and heated to boiling, adding gypsum and stirring well.

1:40 pm – Wort reached boiling. Boiled for one hour, adding oak chips during the final ten minutes of the boil.

2:40 pm – Turned burner off, added 1 oz. Yeast Nutrient and steeped for 20 minutes, then strained into primary fermenter. Sealed fermenter and placed in bathtub with blocks of ice to cool (I still lack a copper-coil cooling system, but then, so did the Anglo-Saxons).

10:30 pm – The fermenter cooled to 76°, removed from tub, checked specific gravity and pitched yeast. Set in laundry room at c. 72° to ferment.

July 5, 2006: I checked the specific gravity, noting a strength just over 4 1/2 % abv. The flavor at this point sweet, with slight hints of nuttiness and roasted undertones from the specialty grains. Without these, it would undoubtedly have a wine-coolerish flavor. With them, it has its own unique flavor, something in the neighborhood of a “very sweet”, low-hopped brown ale. The taste was clean, with no apparent off-flavors. There was a thick layer of sediment at the bottom of the fermenter and the testing glass also settled out very quickly, leaving a thicker portion at the bottom. This should settle out completely after racking into the secondary fermenter.

