

West Kingdom Brewers' Guild  
Newsletter



October Crown AS XXI

## **Competitions for 2006**

### **Chronicler's Corner:**

Wow, October Crown already! Where has the year gone. I hope you have all found time to try a new recipe or savor the fruits of your labor with friends and family. I have been collecting brewing books to read during the winter months, and day-dream of delectable intoxications yet to be created. Do you have a favorite book to share? A critique of some journal that might help a fellow brewer? Let me know, I'll pass it on!

### **A Message from our Chancellor:**

Well, another year has come and gone in the Guild. I'm pleased to see that we've held onto a core group of enthusiastic members, and have attracted some eager new potential brewers besides. We've typically been short on competition entries but long on samples passed around at meetings, and I like to think that's more important anyway. There will not be an official meeting at Twelfth Night, but I look forward to another fun year of meetings and samplings when the season rolls around again. So, keep your fermenters full and your brewpots busy!

### **Our Charter is Lost!**

Yes, it's true sometime between then and now, where it was and where it should be, it's gone missing. If you are experienced in wording a Charter, or would enjoy the challenge, please contact our Chancellor.

### October Crown – A period German beer.

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

### **Chronicler (and Webmistress)**

Aeschine Colquhoun

## ***Announcement***

The Brewers Guild will be having a meeting and tasting at Cynagua Fall Coronet on Saturday, October 28, at Woodland. This tasting will be about mead, and we hope to have four or five commercial meads and some samples of Johann's mead at various stages of maturation for comparison. All are invited to contribute their brews for tasting. If you're contributing a mead, we'll taste it with the others, but we'll be happy to accept any beverage within our purview.

The meeting will be held at 2 pm at Johann's gold and dark blue sunshade, and there will be a message posted to that effect at the A&S sunshade.

--Johann von Drachenfels  
Cynaguan Brewers Guild Representative

## ***Meeting Report from Cynagua Summer Investiture, AS XLV***

by Johann von Drachenfels, Cynaguan Representative

At Cynagua Summer Investiture we indeed had a meeting and tasting, despite low attendance and high temperatures. The focus was on ciders, although Tallon also brought four commercial beers and ales from the Sacramento Brewing Company and a mead from Honeyrun Meadery. There were from eight to eleven people in attendance, a few of whom were not brewers but turned out to be quite knowledgeable. The fact that the day was hot and the ciders were chilled probably helped explain the good turnout for the meeting!

The ciders are listed below, with various comments:

Blackthorne Cider (English) from Trader Joe's: The kind of English cider you'd expect to get from English-style pubs in America.

Aspall's Medium Draft Cider (English) from Corti Brothers: The kind of English cider you'd expect from English-style pubs in England.

Aspall's Dry Draft Cider (English) from Corti Brothers: The same as their Medium, only more so. At first, we thought it too dry, but by the second or third sip we changed our minds.

Zapiain (from the Basque area of Spain) from Corti Brothers: Very tart, but without the crispness of the Aspall's cider. It also had some off-flavors and aftertastes. It was one of two bottles that were not re-visited when the sampling was over. Tasted sour, as opposed to dry.

Two ciders from Johann: These were from the same batches that were sampled at Beltaine, but were now two months older and had smoothed out considerably. Mistress Anastasia liked them a lot. One was made with Barsotti's unfiltered apple juice from the supermarket, the other from juice from an organic orchard and sold through the Sacramento Natural Foods Co-op.

One cider from Kemnon: At first it was too warm to drink, but after some chilling it proved quite drinkable. No notes were provided on how it was made, except that it was a first attempt at making cider (and a successful one, we all thought).

Hornsby's Hard Cider. (from Albertson's) This one was Made by E&J Gallo of Modesto (yes, that E&J Gallo) and was considered basically an alcoholic version of the ubiquitous Martinelli "cider." Not nearly as dry as the others sampled, it would probably do for those who want a sweeter cider. Unlike the previous ones, this one used additional flavors to enhance it.

Ace Fermented Perry Cider (from Trader Joe's): This was the only perry cider, and was deemed, well, interesting. "My God! They've found a way to ferment

Stronger still than either ale or beer, Anglo-Saxon mead most likely contained 9-14% abv on average. As mentioned, its flavor could range from dry to sweet, though it will always smell and taste of honey. In particular, if a single variety of honey is used, its distinct characteristics will typically be readily apparent in the aroma and flavor.

**Wine (*win*)** was far less common than any of the above beverages, and generally about as strong as mead, being itself between 8 and 13% abv. While some wines were imported into England from the Continent, there was also a thriving wine industry within Anglo-Saxon England itself. It does not appear to have been as popular with the average Anglo-Saxon as their ales, beers and meads were, however. Nonetheless, it was used extensively by the monasteries and throughout England in Ecclesiastical contexts. Its higher cost and the religious connections may have been factors that inhibited its popularity among the Anglo-Saxon laity. Due to the relatively cool climate of England, Anglo-Saxon wines would have had a drier flavor than their Mediterranean counterparts; this is due to the adverse affect on ripening that is caused by a cooler climate.

**Cider (*æppelwin*)**, at least as far as recorded evidence reveals, was easily the rarest of beverages. In strength, it could be as high as 18% abv, making it the strongest of drinks known to be available in Anglo-Saxon England.

**Endnote:** This is the first installment in an open-ended series that will attempt to cover as many aspects of brewing in the Anglo-Saxon world as the author is competent of. When appropriate, recipes and their results will be included, as well as histories, etymologies, etc. The next installment will focus exclusively on Anglo-Saxon ales and contain the recipe and procedure for brewing one.



brewing a malted, bittered, beverage spread to the north, and beer was introduced to the Germanic tribes and their Anglo-Saxon descendants. The *gruit* which provided beer with its bitterness in the centuries before the introduction of hops were many and varied. Monasteries often became the source suppliers of *gruits* to the individual brewers, as they grew the herbs and sold them as part of their financial maintenance (frequently maintaining monopolies on the regional supply of *gruit*). The specific recipes for *gruits* were highly guarded secrets, but chiefly contained one or more of the following: sweet gale (bog myrtle), marsh or wild rosemary, milfoil or yarrow. Additionally cinnamon and other herbs available in England at the time were used complimentarily at times for added flavor.

Beer in Anglo-Saxon England had a higher alcohol content than ale, probably being able to attain such a higher malt content because the bittering agents offset the added sweetness sufficiently. The actual flavor, much as a modern beer, would depend very much on the specific herbs used in the *gruit* for bittering and their quantity. Other than these unique flavor characteristics, which I have not sufficient experience to comment on as of yet, beer in Anglo-Saxon England should not be considered as being too far different from some modern micro-brews or craft beers. In particular, those modern ales that would be classified today as a *stock ale* or *old ale* should be considered direct descendants of the old Anglo-Saxon beers, with the caveat that the modern versions are made with hops, rather than the *gruit* of old. Due to the malting process at the time, it is certain that it was similar in color to the ales of the time, probably being a light amber at the clearest.

**Mead (*medu / meodu*)** was by far the most popular, highest status, beverage in early Anglo-Saxon England. Mead was also far older than either ale or beer, and its production was common throughout the entire Germanic world. Due to the relative scarcity of honey as opposed to barley, mead was also more expensive than ale or beer. Partly for this reason, mead was held in esteem as something of a status drink, since many of the poor would not have been able to afford much of it over the course of the average year. Mead was also prized for its flavor, which could be either sweet or dry or anywhere in between depending on how it was brewed. Spices and herbs were also added to it at times, producing what is referred to as metheglin. The recipe for mead itself is amazingly simple, consisting of no more than honey, water and yeast.

"Bears!" was one comment. Another taster detected the taste of Circus Peanuts. The added vanilla was probably the culprit. This was the second bottle whose contents were tossed once everybody had sampled it.

The meeting then proceeded to tast the four products of the Sacramento Brewing Company, which were their India Pale Ale, a Hefeweizen, "River Otter Ale" and "Red Horse Ale." All were considered pretty characteristic of their class, and there was no clear preference, although the Hefeweizen fell a little short of the others.

Finally, we did two meads. The Honeyrun Meadery selection was "Ragnar's Reserve" and it proved to have a strong, sweet nose, very redolent of honey, and a dry taste. Those who liked dry meads thought it quite credible, although most of our tastes ran to somewhat sweeter meads.

At the other end of the spectrum was an item from Empire Winery and Distillery in New Port Richey, Florida, which the Corti Brothers wine buyer called the best he'd ever had. We found it to be almost overpoweringly intense in both aroma and sweetness. (Anastasia summed it up when she said "I think I just bit the top off a Honey Bear bottle.") We thought it possible that additional unfermented honey was added before bottling, or that it was repeatedly re-infused during the fermentation process to jack up the honey content without killing the yeast outright.

The meeting adjourned by and by (it was hard to tell exactly when). A good time was had by all.



## Anglo-Saxon Brewing (I)

(A Brief Introduction to Anglo-Saxon “Strong Drinks”)

By: Lord Alfred of Greyvale  
Greyvale Brewing

The brewing and imbibing of various alcoholic beverages was an important and integral part of Anglo-Saxon culture. At least five different types of alcoholic beverages are known from the period. Specifically, these include: ale (*ealu*), beer (*beor*), mead (*medu / meodu*), wine (*win*), and cider (*æppelwin*). This broad list encompasses most forms of alcoholic beverages except for liquors and cordials, which are not well attested in the documentation from the period. The process for producing a high-alcohol “brandy” mead, however, is not complex and it should not be assumed that these were not produced (although the evidence for such production is certainly scant or non-existent).

That there is a distinct difference by the Anglo-Saxon period between these five different attested types is not subject to dispute. While it is readily apparent that mead, wine and cider are distinctly different from one another, so too were ale and beer (which should not to be confused with the modern definitions of ales, lagers, beers, etc.). Each of these distinct beverages will be discussed herein, with a brief commentary on their respective characters.

**Ale (*ealu*)** 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, as 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 (1<sup>st</sup> 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 than either of the above. 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.

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 5<sup>th</sup> 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. Mouth-feel would nonetheless tend towards full and malty, with none of the “crispness” inherent in most modern lagers.

**Beer (*beor*)** was a stronger drink than ale, as mentioned above, and probably contained 4-8% abv. The word *beor* itself was used to connote both beer and strong drink, and should probably be taken to encompass both. Thus, beer was a stronger drink than ale. While this could refer to both its alcoholic strength as well as its flavor, it is likely that it really conveys both. In other words, not only was beer a more intoxicating beverage, it also had a stronger, bolder flavor than the sweeter, more mellow flavors of ale. While ale derived into a malted grain beverage from mead, as described above, beer was invented purely as a malted beverage, in more southerly and westerly regions than the Germanic homeland, and its flavor was further augmented by a *gruit* of various herbs which were used to both flavor, preserve and bitter the beverage. In the course of time, the knowledge of