

## The tale of two breweries

Timing is everything. No matter how committed, how good your business proposition and plans are, life can floor you. The following are the stories of two London breweries and what Covid-19 has meant to them. One is small, new and in North London; the other is bigger, well established and in South London. Both give food for thought.

Firstly, the larger of the two breweries. It was back in 2014, I last visited By the Horns, just after they had expanded in to a second unit. Based in Wandsworth, the Brewery was set up two years earlier by two friends, Chris Mills and Alex Bull; the latter giving his name to the brewery.



Things have not stood still over these six years. Reflecting the Capital's interest in locally brewed beer, By the Horns have gradually expanded, more than doubling their brewing capacity in an increased number of units housing an eleven-barrel brewhouse; eleven 20 hectolitre fermenters (12.2 barrels) and two fifty hectolitre ones (30.6 barrels), most of which can double as storage tanks.

Alex explained the brewery's approach, 'We have a grass roots'

attitude; everything we do is done by us. We had no blue print when we set up, learning as we went along'.

Staffing levels have gone from two to six with three brewers to assist Alex, who still leads the brewing and commented 'We have a diverse age range. Our lead brewer is Ross, ex of Late Knights, who is in his 30's. Tom is from ELB and in his 20's and Steve who is in his 60's. Originally he used to come in and help out of interest and as we needed more help, we made him an employee'.

The other founder, Chris, takes the marketing and sales lead. He was due to be assisted by a sales person coming from Hackney Brewery but Covid-19 put a stop to that. To help, as the person hadn't actually left, Hackney has put them on furlough until they can join By the Horns. One wonders how many big brewers would have done that?

Another big change was the move from bottles to cans. Previously, beer was bottled of site but quality wasn't quite what they wanted and so the Brewery decided that rather than outsourcing cans, they would install their own canning line. This was in 2017/18 and they started to investigate crowd funding but they didn't like the process or the approach. Instead, By the Horns was fortunate to find a single investor, who was a Master Brewer and so understood brewing. This enabled them to purchase the equipment they needed and, as this story unfolds, it proved to be a lifeline.

The Brewery had formed a relationship with a beer delivery company called Flavourly, who state on their website that they: 'Collaborate with top craft brewers to bring you a selection of

quality, great-tasting craft beers. These are brewed fresh exclusively for the Flavourly community’.

To quote Alex; ‘Before the lock down, the business was 30% cask, 20% keg and 50% cans. Now, we have been delivering cans in our local area and then we introduced bag-in-the-box collection from our tap room. But after one and a half weeks of lock down, Flavourly contacted us and said they would take all cans we could supply. It was a real god send and we are brewing at total capacity’.

There is no doubt that the market is not the same as when By the Horns started. Alex reflected that cask sales had risen but the other side has risen faster. When asked about the current range of beers, he said, ‘We always wanted to do cask but there are too many people fighting on price. Different markets have evolved; it is complicated having three formats but not all beers are suited in every format. For example, Stiff Upper Lip (3.8% Pale Ale) is only in cask and West End Pils (4%) is only in cans and keg’.

Alex continued ‘Originally we were not branding orientated, we just wanted to brew beer but in the middle of last year, we decided to readdress our brand. We had gone down the craft route but we didn’t want to be in the craft beer bubble so we took the brand back to reflect our values. Our mission is to do traditional things in a progressive way’.

Their desire to progress is bringing in another major change. They are building a second brewery near Redhill, which will host the keg and canning lines. The brew length is almost twice the size of the current brewery (18.3 barrels) and is a bespoke kit, made in Scotland.

Alex explained ‘We held off the investment, initially because of Brexit but when the investors said yes, we got on with it. We are moving half of the fermenters to the new site and the existing brewery will concentrate on cask. This will allow us room to expand and refurbish the tap room and take advantage of the new Wimbledon Football Stadium, which is due to open this year’.

Plans are that this will all be in place in September and the beer they are launching it all with? It’ll be a traditional bitter. Well, Alex did say they like to mix the traditional with the new!

In contrast, the Goodness Brewing Company has no immediate plans for expansion; the 15 hectolitre brewhouse (9.2 barrels) with four hectolitre tanks is quite big enough for now. Based in Wood Green (N22), this brewery had only been brewing for around 6 months before lock down and Covid-19 has been very much a mixed blessing.

But the concept of the brewery started several years ago when three home brewing friends, Zack, Michael and Damien got together and created the Wood Green Hopping Project in 2016. The idea was for residents to grow hop bines and the hops would then be used for local brews. Zack said ‘It was a great way of meeting people in the local community but the challenge was finding a brewery to brew for us every year’.



After a little time, it was decided to take the plunge and do some cuckoo brewing. In Spring 2018, Goodness started brewing at Triple Point Brewery in Sheffield (previously Sentinel) and then rented the ex House Brewery kit at the Prince in N22. Later that year, Goodness thought they had enough of a following to establish their own brewery and so the hunt began for suitable premises. Luck came with Harringay New Generation Scheme and a contact with a guy who was looking at using properties due for demolition sometime in the future. Wood Green had some old warehouses and was open to letting them on a shortish tenancy. 'It was 'cooler' than knocking them down and we have a rolling lease until Phase 3 of the development begins. We'd be happy if we can get 5 years here'.



As always, it takes a while to set up a brewery and it took around 5 months to install the equipment with brewing starting in October 2018. This was preceded by the Tap Room, which used beer brewed in Sheffield and at the Prince. The business is now five people, the original trio plus Oliver, who has a sales background, and Jo, who has managed pubs and oversees the brewery's food and beer in the Tap Room. Jo's experience is useful as it includes an events space big enough to

hold 400 people. Zack explained that, before lockdown, the audience in the Tap Room varied each day encouraged by different themes: 'Friday night was the Pizza crowd and Sunday, a Family Fun Day with a bouncy castle. This enabled us to cater for families and people who wouldn't mind having children running around'.

The approach of trying to cater for everyone has had benefits for Goodness: 'Our pre lockdown activities developed a good will and good connections with locals. It's been humbling to hear people say 'We want to support you'. They have been signing up for our beer and pizza deliveries and buying 'Pay Now, Save Later' vouchers to use when we reopen' said Zack. He also added 'Pre lockdown, we weren't doing much canning, mainly just for street markets, with keg being the biggest format and some cask. Cask has actually been more than we envisioned but now it is mainly cans, which are filled off site'.

The first beer Goodness brewed was Yes, an American hoppy 4.5% beer, which is now complemented by two regulars (a lager style beer and an IPA) plus some seasonals and the 'Our Friend' range; each beer showcases a particular hop. Alongside the main brewery, a small pilot plant enables Goodness to brew some experimental brews for the Tap Room.

Covid-19 has had a number of negative effects on the Brewery. It came at a time when they were beginning to develop their business. Zack elucidated, 'We never got a schedule of outlets other than building up a few regular accounts. The business was a bit erratic, once every couple of weeks; lockdown didn't help. We were working towards something particular in our Tap Room and event space with a number of events planned for March, April and May'.

In contrast though, the lock down wasn't all bad news: 'When we started we were always on the back foot, constantly making decisions to cope with what was happening at the time, This period has given us a chance to reflect and consider; a space to breath and reassess things. This includes the event space and canning, which was new to us but maybe an opportunity for the future. We are also thinking about wholesale, which could be a possibility as more people get to know about us. On a practical note, we are spending a few weeks repainting and building a garden out the back, which will help once lockdown is eased'.

But despite the positive prospects, there are a few worries for this fledging brewery. 'At the moment, we are not paying staff and have a rent holiday but when we are open again, bills will start coming in and that is the time for some concern'.

So, this is a brewery that will really need people's support if it is to achieve the dreams it had just 6 months ago. This is summed up by the note on their website: 'With your help we can weather this storm and continue to bring you lots of fantastic beer, events and good times for years to come. In the meantime, please take good care of yourselves and your loved ones'.



But whether big or small, north or south, new or older, it would be great to report on these two breweries in a couple of years' time and feedback that both are thriving. But it really is down to beer drinkers to continue to support all of our London brewers to guarantee their future. Over to you.

For more details on By the Horn's brewery developments, see: <https://bythehorns.co.uk/> and if you'd like to see how you can help Goodness, visit: <https://www.thegoodnessbrew.co/>.

## **Tasting notes for the two breweries**

### **By the Horns Brewing Co**

#### Heatwave British Pale Ale 4%

Hazy gold beer with earthy sweet nose. Sweet biscuit, apricot and hints of tropical fruit overlaid with floral hops fading in the spicy bitter finish that lingers.

#### Squeezer Juicy Pale Ale 4.3%

Tart lemon on nose and flavour where earthy notes and a slight biscuit sweetness give way to a dry finish with just a hint of bitterness and peppery hops. Smooth, clean and light drinking straw with slight haze

#### Hopadelic session IPA 4.3%

Slightly hazy yellow well balanced beer with lemon on the nose and bitter lemon on the palate, which is softened by some candy sweetness. Hops are a little piney becoming more spicy with the bitterness gradually growing alongside a dryness. Contains Citra summit

cascade hops. well balanced

#### Cosmic Warrior Pale Ale 4.8%

Gold coloured beer with a fruity resinous nose. Biscuity sweetness is gently overlaid with a mix of citrus flavours becoming more peely in the bitter lingering finish where the sweetness is still present. Just a hint of spice initially in the finish. Hops are Amarillo, Centennial and UK Goldings.

#### Lambeth Walk 5.1%

Black ruby porter with black cherry and sultanas. Dark coffee roasts on the palate with a sweet treacle character. There is a developing dark bitter roast cocoa character that lingers. Chocolate, dry and dark plums on the nose. Full bodied.

### **Goodness Brewery Company**

#### Yes! Session IPA 4.5%

Gold coloured smooth beer with impactful strong flavours of citrus (grapefruit, lemon), mango, perfumed hops and sweet biscuit. The finish starts bitter but declines against a growing dryness bitterness and some warming spicy hops. The fruits and sweetness is also in the aroma. Golden Ale. Hazy

Hops: Simcoe, Citra, Ekuanot-cryo, Mosaic-cryo, Simcoe-cryo, Citra-cryo

Malts: Golden Promise, malted oats, rye malt,

#### Sunshine Kolsch style lager 4.7%

Pale yellow hazy beer with clean lemon flavours and traces of lemon zest complemented by sweet biscuit, which are also on the nose. Finish develops a spiciness and there is a lingering dryness with just a hint of bitterness.

#### Sunset - dry hopped red ale 4.7%

Cloudy orangey-red beer with light chocolaty malty roast notes and some sweet toffee are balanced by a zingy citrus. The finish is dry slightly malty becoming bitter and peppery and lingering faint chocolate. Smooth mouthfeel. Described as an American Red and hopped with Columbus and Citra.

#### Our Friend. Citra 5.2%

Cloudy smooth yellow beer with the appearance of lemon squash. Flavour is strongly of lemons and lemon peel with just a hint of mango and some piney hops. The increasingly strong bitterness is contrasted by a smooth biscuity sweetness. The bitterness lingers long in the spicy finish. Sulphury aroma gives way to soft zesty lemons  
This is described as a Cryo hopped Pale Ale; hops are Cryo Citra, Citra, Mosaic Cryo and El Dorado; contains oats and spelt



Our friend Idaho 5.2%

Lemon squash cloudy appearance. Citrus and tropical notes with a trace of sweetness on the nose. Well attenuated leading to a light drinking beer with traces of biscuit, grapefruit and passionfruit, spicy hops and a little floral hop. Finish is dry bitter and a warming spice. Oats provide a smoothness. A good beer for having almost frozen on a warm day. Hops are Idaho 7 Cryo, Simco Cryo and El Dorado

A Love Supreme ddh 6.4%

Hazy yellow beer with soft citrus notes aroma and a smooth full mouthfeel. Fruit is of grapefruit, candy sugar lemon with a trace of peel and zest. Finish is spicy, gently bitter for a ddh and dry and lingering. Well balanced but light drinking. Hops are: Amarillo, Amarillo Cryo, El Dorado, Citra Columbus