

Wild Card, a changing brewery in changing times

It has often been implied that London brewers don't stand still and this couldn't be truer than with Wild Card.



It was in 2015 that the London Tasting Panel last went to see what the brewery had been up to and so we decided that a return visit was in order.

The origins of the brewery date from 2012 when two friends, Andrew Birkby and William Harris started gypsy brewing after being home brewers. A year later, they were joined by another friend, Jaega Wise. Initially, they were thinking of setting up a one barrel plant under the Warrant Officer pub but demand was such that they decided to go for a 6 barrel brewery instead. This was set up on the Ravenswood Industrial Estate in Walthamstow.

Growth and sales continued until they decided they had outgrown their building and they moved to Lockwood Way, near Black Horse Lane in 2017. But they haven't forgotten their roots. William explained, "This original site is host to a tap room and our barrel aged project. Our first release will be later this year (2021)",

The Black Horse site has a 13 barrel plant with eight 2,200 litre and four 4,400 litre fermenters/storage containers i.e. over twice the size of the Ravenswood brewery. Unlike some brewers that have these conical vessels, where the yeast sits on the bottom, all of the yeast used in the brewery is top cropping, including the lager yeasts.

Asa James, the brewer said, "We currently use only dried yeast but we might change in the future. We are installing a lab, which will give us the facilities to be able to move to our own house yeast, if we choose to".

Asa studied English Literature but left it behind to go into brewing. He joined Tap East, who paid for his General Certificate in Brewing and then his personal license. He moved from brewing in the Westfield Centre, Stratford to Wild Card three years ago. Asa explained "There are four people in the brewing team plus three in packaging. We moved away from bottles some time ago and have our own canning line".

William spoke about the beers, "The majority of the beers use American or New Zealand hops. We chill-drop some of the beers but we might consider buying a centrifuge in due course".

The site has a mezzanine with seating overlooking the brewery with a small bar downstairs. This outlet is home to a number of events throughout the year, although in 2020 most had to be put on hold due to the pandemic. The events include BrewCon, a home brew festival, an Octoberfest and, what has to be unique, the late summer, Lovely Dog competition. "Everyone brings in dogs and all of the money goes to dog





charities. There are three categories: small, large and dogs with jobs with pictures of the winning dogs appearing on our cans”.

In Spring 2020, Wild Card decided to increase their outlets, adding to their two tap rooms by taking on a nearby pub, the Tavern on the Hill, which, back in 2013 was known as the Warrant Officer! William said “We have a 15 year lease from a private landlord, who is a warrant officer; he owns the flats upstairs. We sat on it for a while because of the pandemic and it needed some work. There was a carpet on top of lino hiding a wooden floor”.

The pub has been tastefully modernised with the floors now exposed and varnished. They have also installed a kitchen. The pub dates from the 1700s and the five fireplaces give a hint to the past; this one bar pub originally had a

public bar, lounge and bottle & jug. Now the seating inside is complemented by outside seating at the front and rear of the pub.

With a pub this old, it has a number of interesting stories. One of which involves a women’s football team that played for the pub. However, it struggled to get enough women to field a team so recruited a number of men, who dressed up as women so they could compete!

Although Wild Card is known more recently for its keg beer, it did regularly produce cask when the brewery was originally set up and the pub has allowed them to return to cask. William said “This is a traditional pub so we thought it needed traditional beer so we put in two handpumps. We started with two Castle Rock beers, Harvest Pale and Perseverance and then started to brew our own when we were certain we could turn it over”.



The two beers currently being brewed are a modern Pale and a traditional Bitter, both at quaffable alcohol strengths at 4.2% and 4.3% ABV. There is a reflection of both the new and the old that applies to the design too: William said “We based it on the old Embassy No 1 cigarette design. Thunderbird blue!”

So a bit like the Tracy brothers, the Wild Card trio seem intent on taking advantage of new thoughts in brewing and beer styles while paying homage to the past and to play on the Thunderbirds’ motto “All for one purpose: to help others in need (of a good beer)”.

Tasting Notes

Pale 4.3%

Hazy yellow beer with white head and a smooth, creamy mouthfeel due to the added oats. Fruity, slightly citrusy nose and flavour of tropical grapefruit and traces of peach. Sweet biscuit throughout with earthy hops on the palate becoming spicy and bitter in the finish, which is still sweet and fruity.



Best 4.2%

Dark amber brown bitter with Victoria plums and malty coffee flavours overlaid with sweet, caramel toffee and notes of orange and sultanas. These notes are present in the aroma with a hint of hazelnuts on the nose. Spicy, hoppy dry finish with a gentle bitterness that lingers.

New England IPA 5.4% (keg)

Smooth, full bodied golden ale with lemon and grapefruit and a strong hoppy character that is both earthy and spicy. Finish has a gentle bitter dryness.

Blackcurrant Gose 4.4% (keg)

Fruity pink coloured sour beer with some saltiness. Some blackcurrant notes on the nose, more noticeable in the taste. The biscuity sweetness is balanced by a hint of bitterness.

Pilsner 4.4% (keg)

Easy drinking lager with lemon and sweet biscuit. Bitter finish with a dryness that lingers. Aromas of bready malt and fruit.

Stout 6.6% (keg)

Chocolate, roasty nose and flavour with tart dark plums throughout and some sweetness that provides balance. Dry roasty finish and a little black treacle in the aroma. Smooth mouthfeel.

