

A complicated Howling

The history of the Howling Hops brewery is one of the more complicated. It was set up by Peter Holt, owner of the Southampton Arms in Kentish Town - famous for its 'Ale, Cider, Meat'. Four years ago he bought the Cock in Mare Street, Hackney. Camden Brewery's old Hampstead brewery, situated in the Horseshoe, was purchased and this 6 hectolitre plant moved from one basement in a pub to another basement in a pub, this time the Cock.

The Cock had been closed for a time and the future looked doubtful so the purchase by Peter was warmly welcome. But installing the brewery was not plain sailing. Tim, Howling Hops' current head brewer, said 'It was a bit of a challenge to get it in. We only had a width of 2.2 metres but it all fitted albeit with only millimetres to spare'.

Since setting up, the brewery has gone through a number of brewers. The first one was ex Redemption, who then left to set up a soda company. Mario then took over but he then left to join Orbit. He was followed by another Italian whose main role was to set up a new state of the art brewery in Hackney Wick. But this is where Tim's brewing story starts. Australian by birth, Tim had worked at the Southampton Arms before moving to the Cock. His background was in engineering, specifically processing, and he was asked to give a hand setting up the new brewery and he has never looked back, taking over when the last brewer left. Today, he is assisted by three brewers, although Tim said his job now seems to be mainly paperwork! They brew about three times a week and are hoping to increase that to five in the next six months.



The new brewery is German in style and was purchased from Bavarian Brewing Services on Hungary and took about 6 months to install. It is a lot bigger with a 25 hectolitres brew length and 14 conical fermenters. They also have a whirl pool, which means they only use hop pellets, and they ferment and condition in the same tanks. They do produce cask as well as keg but the majority of the cask is distributed northwards.

A selection of beers were tried by the London Tasting Panel including two different Kolsch style beers. Tim explained that this beer had come about because of their review of their production of lager. Tim explained 'We have been producing a Pilsner for a while and conditioning it for 8 weeks after fermentation. Often, six of the 14 fermenters are taken up with the Pilsner. In comparison, a Kolsch¹ style beer will only take three weeks in total to produce so we are considering moving more to this style'.

Howling Hops like experimenting with different styles. A Biere de Garde was also tried; it's a 7.2% beer using Saison yeast and there are plans to try some barrel aged beer soon; red wine and Bourbon were mentioned.

The old Howling Hops brewery, with its four open fermenters and three Grundy tanks still remain in the basement in the Cock. It is now leased by Ian, an ex BBC employee who lived in Denmark for a while. He has renamed the brewer Maregade, which simply means Mare Street, the address of the Cock. The Cock is still

¹ A Kolsch will use top fermenting yeast rather than a bottom fermenting one that is used in Pilsners.

owned by Peter and so don't be surprised to see both Maregade and Howling Hop beers there. It just goes to show what a vibrant beer market London is and the changes in just years. Who know what might happen next!

For the tasting notes of the beers tried, visit the London breweries page of the London region website:

Tasting Notes

Pale XX5.1%

Golden Ale with a strong grapefruity perfumed and resinous hop aroma. Hops and fruit (melon, grapefruit and pineapple) dominate the palate with a biscuit sweetness that lingers in the bitter dry finish.

Unnamed 4.6%ABV

A Kolsch style beer with a soft sweet, herbal nose. The flavour is of delicate honey, peach and apricot fruit and some earthiness. The finish is slightly dry and bitter with a little fruit.

Chocolate Stout 4.8% ABV

Ruby black milk stout with a creamy mouthfeel. Sweetness and a chocolate roast character permeate the aroma, flavour and finish. They are balanced by some black cherry fruit on the palate and a little dryness in the aftertaste, which has a hint of dark roast bitterness.

Smoked 4.6%

A smoky Kolsch style beer using tea to get the smoky flavours that appear in the aroma and flavour but fade in the finish. There are some fruit and spicy hops on the sweet biscuit flavour. A touch of bitterness lingers in the dryish finish.

Biere de Garde 7.4%

Tart spicy aroma with traces of acidity balancing the sweetness in the flavour of this tawny, warming, rich unfiltered beer. Traces of caramelised toffee apple on the palate that is also there in the dry finish, which also has some peppery notes.

Really Red 5.2%

A tawny reddish rye beer. Chocolate on the nose with some fruit and a little spicy hop that is present throughout. There is some fudge sweetness with a blend of fruits: tropical, mango and tangerine. The aftertaste has a growing dry. bitterness