

# The Herald Tribune



Volume #23 Issue #1

Newsletter of the Ann Arbor Brewers' Guild

January 2009

## January Meeting

This month's meeting of the AABG is Friday Jan. 9th and will be hosted by **Rolf Wucherer**. See the map and directions on the next page. The featured style is **Strong Ale**.

## Old Ale

Old ale is a term commonly applied to dark, malty beers in the UK, usually above 5% abv, often also called Winter Warmers;[1] also to dark ales of any strength in Australia.[2] Sometimes associated with *stock ale* or, archaically, *keeping ale*, in which the beer is held at the brewery. American brewed old ales will tend to be of a barley wine strength.

## AABG 2009

January .....	Rolf Wucherer .....	Strong Ale
February .....	.....	English Pale Ale
March .....	.....	1.080+*
April .....	Matt & Rene Greff .....	Extract
May .....	Stephen Krebs .....	Scottish and Irish Ale
June .....	Mark Zadvinskis .....	Spice/Herb/Vegetable
July .....	.....	Fruit Beer
August .....	Tom Roach .....	Amber Hybrid*
September .....	Jeff Renner .....	European Amber Lager*
October .....	.....	Pilsner
November .....	Chris Frey .....	Belgian Strong Ale*
December .....	Rolf Wucherer .....	Sour Ale

\* Denotes AHA Club Only Competition Style

All meetings are the second Friday of each month beginning at 7:30 p.m., except for the July meeting (BeerBQ) which is the second Saturday.

## AABG Pico System

The guardian of the club's pico system is Mike O'Brien. Anyone wishing to use it should contact him at: 734.637.2532 or e-mail: mobrien315221MI@comcast.net

## 19. STRONG ALE

- 19A. Old Ale
- 19B. English Barleywine
- 19C. American Barleywine

### 19A. Old Ale (Rolf Beer)

**Aroma:** Malty-sweet with fruity esters, often with a complex blend of dried-fruit, vinous, caramelly, molasses, nutty, toffee, treacle, and/or other specialty malt aromas. Some alcohol and oxidative notes are acceptable, akin to those found in Sherry or Port. Hop aromas not usually present due to extended aging.

**Appearance:** Light amber to very dark reddish-brown color (most are fairly dark). Age and oxidation may darken the beer further. May be almost opaque (if not, should be clear). Moderate to low cream- to light tan-colored head; may be adversely affected by alcohol and age.

**Flavor:** Medium to high malt character with a luscious malt complexity, often with nutty, caramelly and/or molasses-like flavors. Light chocolate or roasted malt flavors are optional, but should never be prominent. Balance is often malty-sweet, but may be well hopped (the impression of bitterness often depends on amount of aging). Moderate to high fruity esters are common, and may take on a dried-fruit or vinous character. The finish may vary from dry to somewhat sweet. Extended aging may contribute oxidative flavors similar to a fine old Sherry, Port or Madeira. Alcoholic strength should be evident, though not overwhelming. Diacetyl low to none. Some wood-aged or blended versions may have a lactic or Brettanomyces character; but this is optional and should not be too strong (enter as a specialty beer if it is).

**Mouthfeel:** Medium to full, chewy body, although older examples may be lower in body due to continued attenuation during conditioning. Alcohol warmth is often evident and always welcome. Low to moderate carbonation, depending on age and conditioning.

**Overall Impression:** An ale of significant alcoholic strength, bigger than strong bitters and brown porters, though usually not as strong or rich as

barleywine. Usually tilted toward a sweeter, maltier balance. "It should be a warming beer of the type that is best drunk in half pints by a warm fire on a cold winter's night" – Michael Jackson.

**History:** A traditional English ale style, mashed at higher temperatures than strong ales to reduce attenuation, then aged at the brewery after primary fermentation (similar to the process used for historical porters). Often had age-related character (lactic, Brett, oxidation, leather) associated with "stale" beers. Used as stock ales for blending or enjoyed at full strength (stale or stock refers to beers that were aged or stored for a significant period of time). Winter warmers are a more modern style that are maltier, fuller-bodied, often darker beers that may be a brewery's winter seasonal special offering.

**Comments:** Strength and character varies widely. Fits in the style space between normal gravity beers (strong bitters, brown porters) and barleywines. Can include winter warmers, strong dark milds, strong (and perhaps darker) bitters, blended strong beers (stock ale blended with a mild or bitter), and lower gravity versions of English barleywines. Many English examples, particularly winter warmers, are lower than 6% ABV.

**Ingredients:** Generous quantities of well-modified pale malt (generally English in origin, though not necessarily so), along with judicious quantities of caramel malts and other specialty character malts. Some darker examples suggest that dark malts (e.g., chocolate, black malt) may be appropriate, though sparingly so as to avoid an overly roasted character. Adjuncts (such as molasses, treacle, invert sugar or dark sugar) are often used, as are starchy adjuncts (maize, flaked barley, wheat) and malt extracts. Hop variety is not as important, as the relative balance and aging process negate much of the varietal character. British ale yeast that has low attenuation, but can handle higher alcohol levels, is traditional.

*Old Ale continued on next page...*

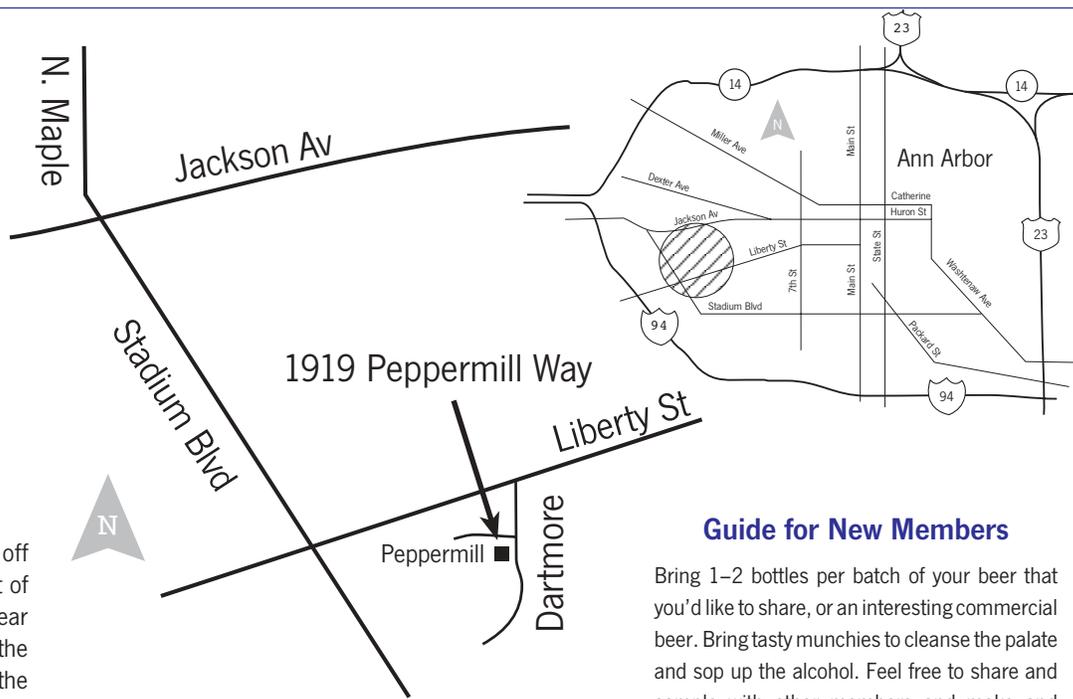
## When and Where

Friday, Jan. 9, 7:30 pm

**Rolf Wucherer**  
1919 Peppermill Way  
Ann Arbor MI  
665-5184

### Directions

Rolf's house is the first right off Dartmoor, which is off Liberty east of Stadium (and west of Seventh), near Eberwhite Woods. The house is the first one on the left. Park around the cul-de-sac and in the street.



### AABG Policy

AABG encourages responsible, legal consumption of homebrewed and craft beers. You must be at least 21 years old to attend AABG meetings.

### Guide for New Members

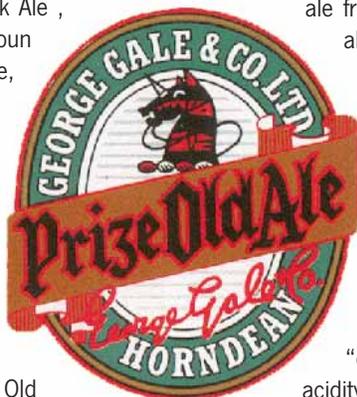
Bring 1–2 bottles per batch of your beer that you'd like to share, or an interesting commercial beer. Bring tasty munchies to cleanse the palate and sop up the alcohol. Feel free to share and sample with other members and make and accept constructive comments. Please use good judgment while imbibing and don't drive while intoxicated.

... *Old Ale* continued

### Vital Statistics:

OG: ... 1.060 – 1.090  
FG: ... 1.015 – 1.022  
IBUs: ... 30 – 60  
ABV: ... 6 – 9%  
SRM: ... 10 – 22

**Commercial Examples:** Gale's Prize Old Ale, Burton Bridge Olde Expensive, Marston Owd Roger, Greene King Olde Suffolk Ale, J.W. Lees Moonraker, Harviestoun Old Engine Oil, Fuller's Vintage Ale, Harvey's Elizabethan Ale, Theakston Old Peculier (peculiar at OG 1.057), Young's Winter Warmer, Sarah Hughes Dark Ruby Mild, Samuel Smith's Winter Welcome, Fuller's 1845, Fuller's Old Winter Ale, Great Divide Hibernation Ale, Founders Curmudgeon, Cooperstown Pride of Milford Special Ale, Coniston Old Man Ale, Avery Old Jubilation



### Some History

Historically, old ales served as a complement to mild ales, and in pubs of the era typically the landlord would serve the customer a blend of the sharper stock ale with the fruitier, sweeter mild ale to the customer's taste. In London especially, the aged ale would take on a sour, lactic acid note from the continuing fermentation in the cask. Because of the time required for the aging process, some investors would buy mild ale from brewers, age it into old ale, and sell it at the higher price. Eventually, brewers began to keep some beer behind at the brewery, age it themselves and sell it to the pubs. In some cases old ale was a blend of young and old. The "stock ale" was the brewery's very aged ale and was used to inject an "old" quality, and perhaps acidity to the blend.

### The Enigma of Old Ale

— Ray Daniels

They say you're only as old as you feel. The phrase implies that age is a matter of perception—that what is old to one person is young to another. In the sometimes confusing world of beer style definitions, the same might be said of old ale.

It appears that the "old" descriptor has little meaning these days. Furthermore, it's hard to identify a cohesive profile of the beers marketed under this banner in the United Kingdom or the United States. Confounding all of this is the fact that current commercial practice bears little resemblance to the historical antecedents of the style.

In the past, old ales really were old. Records from the 19th century clearly indicate that beers carrying this moniker were aged for a year and even longer before being released from the brewery. Two commercially produced recipes from a collection published in 1868 give the brewing details for XXX Old Ale, one from London and one from Dorset. Compared to other XXX

*Enigma* continued on next page...

ales of the day, they were fuller-bodied with less alcohol and only slightly less bitterness. Both resided in the brewery vat for a year or more.

During aging, the old ales of a century ago developed an acidic flavor component from the action of bacteria and wild yeast. In 1890, a British brewing industry consultant noted: "There was formerly a taste among English consumers for old ale, which had to be vatted for at least a year and probably more, before it was consumed, and acquired a sub-acid flavor, particularly relished by the consumer."

A reference from 1881 substantiates this, with analytical data for two- and three-year-old samples of Somerset Old Vat. The samples range in alcohol content from 6.5 percent to 8.6 percent and show substantial levels of acidity.

The acidity, as well as the bitterness, of these old ales would have prevented them from having a sweet, cloying flavor. Instead, they were most likely tart, even sharp, but full-bodied and rich with malt complexity. Also, as they were made exclusively from pale and white malts,

They were probably no darker than deep amber.

Contemporary US style definitions, published by the Association of Brewers, in large part reflect this turn-of-the-century characterization of old ale. Such beers are said to be amber to copper in color and medium- to full-bodied, with evident bitterness and a balance of malt and/or caramel sweetness.

In a nod to the aged flavors found in classic old ales, these contemporary descriptions note that fruity/estery character and higher alcohols may contribute to the flavor profile. Still, this stops short of requiring or even allowing the acidic component that has certainly been a hallmark of the style historically.

In truth, these contemporary definitions describe that half-brother of old ale known as strong ale. Like old ales, these beers contain 6 to 8 percent alcohol by volume. But unlike old ales, they are not aged at the brewery before distribution, and the consumer is expected to enjoy the product shortly after purchase.

This type of strong ale constitutes the vast majority of all the commercially produced beers that might be called old ale today. In the United States, only 140 products, or less than 2 percent of all beer brands, are classified as strong ale by their brewers. Within this group, only 17 brands use the word old as a descriptor for the beer's style.

I know of only one US-made product that is available as a true old ale. Commonwealth Special Old Ale comes from the Commonwealth Brewing Co. in Boston and it is aged for periods of as long as six months before serving. The sample that I tasted at the 1996 Real Ale Festival in Chicago had a mellow complexity with dark fruit notes and some vinous alcohol character. This sample was also complemented by a touch of acidity that may have been the result of aging in the special wooden cask that was sent to the festival.

Many of the strong ales made in the United States are described as winter or Christmas beers of one type or another. Others are simply considered to be strong examples of other styles such as bitter, amber or pale ale. To find more truly old ales, we must look to England, where old ale originated. At the 14th annual White Horse Old Ale Festival held last fall in London, I was able to sample a broad selection of British old ales. I found that the contemporary old ale scene in the United Kingdom provides some interesting contrasts to that of the United States.

Both consumers and brewers in Britain are very sensitive about alcohol content, so some beers offered up as old ale have less than 5 percent alcohol by volume, a level that is roughly equal to that found in regular-strength American beers. In addition, sugar is commonly used in brewing these beers and this leads to a significantly lighter mouthfeel than is common in American strong ales.

While American strong/old ales are generally amber to copper colored, many UK examples fit what British ale expert Mark Dorber refers to as the strong, mild type of old ale. These are quite dark and may be opaque. Also, while American brewers tend toward a liberal use of hops, these examples allow malt to dominate the flavor profile, and many are quite sweet tasting. Examples include Sarah Hughes Dark Ruby Mild, Mauldon's Black Adder, and Harvey's Old Ale.



Other British examples are more typical of what Dorber calls the strong, and perhaps dark, bitter old ale category. These are nicely balanced with hop character and many offer a wonderful fruity complexity or perhaps some nutty or woody notes from the yeast. Pleasing examples include Burton Bridge Old Expensive and McMullen Stronghart.

Among the British offerings, only a few can lay claim to old ale authenticity. Thomas Hardy's Ale is one with true age that is well known in the United States. But perhaps the most notable of authentic old ales is Gale's Prize Old Ale, a 9.5 percent ABV beer that is aged for a full year at the brewery before distribution.

Prize Old Ale was first brewed at Gale's more than 70 years ago and it is still made using the same brewing equipment today. After fermentation in open-topped wood fermenters, the ale is transferred to aging tanks for its long maturation. Gale's brewers do not acknowledge the presence of bacteria or foreign yeast in the aged Prize Old Ale, yet it displays an undeniable lactic acid note.

This special beer is bottled, corked and labeled entirely by hand. Although Gale's produces fewer than 150 US barrels of Prize Old Ale each year, the beer is now being imported into the United States with established distribution in the mid-Atlantic states and plans for broader expansion.

If you are lucky enough to visit England in the winter, you may also find Gale's Winter Brew, a caramel-spiked blend of Prize Old Ale and the brewery's ordinary bitter. At 4.2 percent ABV, this beer displays a hint of the Prize Old Ale's aged complexity. Oddly enough, the brewery staff considers this Winter Ale, rather than their Prize Old Ale, to be the most representative of the old ale style as it is currently perceived in Britain.

With this observation, we are reminded that beer styles, like most human products, evolve over time. All old ales were once truly old. Today, it's enough for a beer to simply look like an old ale, regardless of its age. And why not? If people are only as old as they feel, perhaps a beer should be as only as old as it looks. 🍷