



On-Tap

Greg Evans

A Ram a Griffin and Some Mighty Fine Beer

Dr. Samuel Johnson once said that "when a man is tired of London, he is tired of life." Having had the good fortune to have lived there in the 1970s, I would have to agree. As a young man freshly graduated from university, I found myself living and subsequently working, in that great city after the obligatory grand tour of continental Europe, in an old Austin A40 no less.

I quickly immersed myself in the local pub culture and found myself quaffing the standard brands of the day - Watney's Red Barrel, Courage Mild Ale and Ind Coope Long Life Bitter. They were certainly different than anything I was used back home and seemed to hit the spot. Everything changed however, when Liam Connelly, a colleague at Smith's Industries, explained that I really should be drinking the products of Young's and Fuller's, independent London brewers who, he said, still "brewed the old fashioned way." It was a fine suggestion that soon earned him a few free pints.

In seeking out the pubs that carried their products, I also soon learned that London has a long and rich brewing heritage. The city is most often associated with porter, the first massed produced beer. Legend has it that Ralph Harwood of the Bell Brewery in Shoreditch, was its inventor. It was common practice amongst workers in London to drink "three threads," a mixture of three types of beer. Harwood combined the three beers into one and called it 'Harwoods Entire.' Its popularity with the porters of London's markets led to its renaming. But that's a story for another time, so back to Young's and Fuller's.

Young's, located in Wandsworth (once a small village in Surrey), is arguably the oldest site in Britain on which beer has been continuously brewed. Its roots stretch back to 1581 when Humphrey Langridge was brewer at the Ram Inn. In 1831, the Young family purchased the expanding brewery and they have been in charge ever since. In honour of the brewery's rich history, not only does a ram remain as the trademark of

the company to this day but a live one is kept at the brewery to embody this symbol. Young's also continues to deliver some of its beer by horse-drawn drays, another reminder of a rich brewing past.

Almost as old, is the story of Fuller's of Chiswick, who can trace brewing on their present site back at least 350 years to a facility, possibly a public house, known as the Griffin Brewery. This mythical creature was adopted as their trademark in 1892. Earlier, in 1845, Henry Smith and John Turner joined John Fuller in creating the present company which still has descendants of the original partners on the board today. Often a leader in marketing, they demonstrated this in 1892, when they purchased a hot air balloon on which was emblazoned "Fuller's Beers of Honest Repute." It was often seen floating above agricultural fairs and special events.

What made these world-class breweries special was the fact that they continued to brew and promote traditional draught beer at a time when others were not. In the early 1970s, the fledgling and now hugely successful, Campaign for Real Ale, embraced and promoted their products. Since then, both breweries have gone from strength to strength.

But you don't need to rush out and buy airline tickets to experience some of their fine, multiple award-winning beers. Many of the local liquor stores here in Victoria carry their products. Most readily available are Fuller's London Pride, Extra Special Bitter and London Porter, along with Young's Special London Ale and Double Chocolate Stout. So have a pint and toast Dr. Johnson!

Greg Evans is the Executive Director of the Maritime Museum of B.C. and a brewing historian.



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