

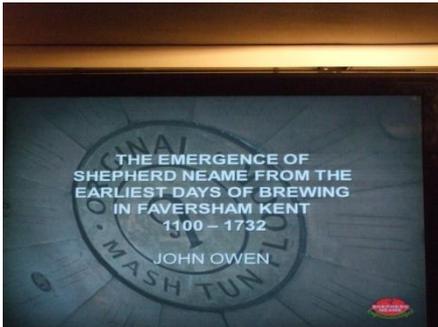
# Shepherd Neame, building a future based on the past

In October, Shepherd Neame held an event for CAMRA branch reps and London Young Members at the Old Doctor Butler's Head near Moorgate.

## History of Brewing in Court Street

### The first few centuries (not many breweries could say that!)

Shepherd Neame is rightly proud of its past and appointed a brewery historian. John Owen, who holds the post, gave a rundown of the brewery's history in Faversham. He began by explaining that, like most towns in medieval times, many houses in Faversham, produced their own beer. But it is known that there was brewing



in Faversham from C12th. In the C14th 60% of the households that were 'economically active' had an interest in beer from brewing it to selling it. All brewing production was monitored by the Council, who employed ale conners, whose role it was to check the beer quality. Interestingly, they could only do this role for a year before they had to move on.

In the C16th, brewing had started to consolidate and there is a record of a John Castlocke brewing on the current Shepherd Neame site. The local Abbey was known to have a sophisticated brewing kit and it is maybe of coincidence, but the last Abbot of

Faversham also had the same surname, and it was known that his brother was a brewer so there could be some link.

In Kent, then and for many centuries afterwards, there was an inheritance law that meant that when a person died, the inheritance had to be split amongst all offspring. This meant that when John died and his son took over, he had the capital base reduced. This law was to plague the Faversham Brewery on many occasions, particularly when there were many siblings. It could often take a lifetime for the new owner to buy out their siblings to fully own the brewery again.

However, John's son was also hit by another whammy. This was the time of the Civil Wars. He was a Royalist and the Town Council were Parliamentarians. To be a brewer you had to be a freeman of the town and the Council withdrew his freedom. So in stepped Mr Baldock, who was a supporter of Parliament and had been brewing down town. His son died and out of the blue came Richard Marsh, who brought his way into the business, taking full ownership of the brewery in 1698, which is where Shepherd Neame took their timeline from but in reality brewing on the site is clearly older.



### Enter the Shepherds

Richard's son, also called Richard, took over the brewery but Richard died and his widow kept the business going for a couple of years and eventually brought in the name of Shepherd by marrying a Samuel Shepherd, a man serial years her younger.

The brewery remained in Shepherd's hands for four generations until the early C19th when Henry Shepherd took on John Mares as his partner. It was known that, at this time, there was a range of beers under the labels X, XX and XXX referring to the strength and thus the duty paid on the beers. In the 1860s, they began producing Light Ales and IPAs; they analysed the beers being produced in Burton and decided to produce

their own versions. It was about this time that the Neame name came into the brewery. In 1864, the brother-in-law of Mares, a one Percy Beale Neame, a 28-year-old hop farmer, became a partner.

The survival of the brewery was helped by the arrival of the railway in 1877 which almost trebled production with beer now being sent regularly outside Kent. And, as a consequence of the continuing viability, the brewery has remained and has kept the name of Shepherd Neame ever since.



The current head brewer, Richard Frost, is not a local lad; he started his working life at Wolverhampton & Dudley Brewery and joined the brewery in 2012. He currently brews 40 different brews (some under license from overseas), accounting for 70 million pints. Around 1 pint in 100 in the UK of which around 55% is ale.

As a consequence of the variety of beers, six different yeasts are used; the one used for the Shepherd Name beers is 'neutral' impacting little to the flavours in the beer, but all of the beer uses the chalk filtered, hard water from the onsite Artesian well. This is of a good enough quality to be used for some brews without any treatment and even in the hot summer of 1976, the level in the bore hole only dropped back 1/2 metre. Richard stated that Shepherd Neame can take up to 66 million gallons each year but estimates that around 44 million gallons are actually used each year. However, they have invested £3 million in a water recovery plant to keep the water usage down.

The brewery uses six different malts, all of which are milled on site using a mill that is over 60 years old. The old malting kiln can still be seen but it is no longer in use. 95% of the hops are from Kent and their signature hop is East Kent Goldings, which is registered under the Protected Designation of Origin. Shepherd Neame also has a hop farm, which hosts the national hop collection fields, with around 180 different hops.

The majority of the beer is produced in the main brew house but they also have a 4 barrel pilot brewery, where they test new ideas and produce runs of small volume beers. Shepherd Neame are traditional British brewers in many ways with a core range that includes the well known Spitfire and Bishops Finger and, like a number of older brewers, they have taken advantage of their past, raiding the old brewing books to make beers such as Brilliant Ale and Double Stout. However, they are not backwards looking and have produced a number of more modern style beers under the Whitstable Bay brand and using the name of the Faversham Steam Brewery. This was the description of the Shepherd Neame Brewery in the late C18th when Shepherd Neame brought in a steam engine, the first outside London.



Richard took us through a number of Shepherd Neame beers, starting with three draught beers: Late Red, the autumn seasonal, Spitfire and then Spooks, a Halloween beer.

The **Late Red** is a 4.5% ABV dark ruby beer with sweet biscuit, fruit and a slight nutty roasted character. The finish is dry and lingering. The hops are Cascade and East Kent Goldings, which are added three times during production including in the cask.

**Spitfire** (4.2%ABV) has the Royal Warrant, thanks to Prince Charles' patronage. Amber in colour, it uses four British hops: Admiral and Target for bittering and East Kent Goldings and First Gold for aroma. It has a spicy hop nose and flavour that is balanced by some biscuity malt and a little fruit. The hops are present in the aftertaste that fades to a lasting dry bitterness.

Richard mentioned that Spitfire had 36 bittering units whilst the average beer in the UK was 20. Master Brew is even more bitter and sells well in East Kent, less well in West Kent and not at all in Sussex where they prefer sweeter beers, showing regional tastes do differ.

The last draught beer was a beer that had been developed in the Pilot Plant, known as No 18 Brewhouse. The beer, **Spooks** is a 4.7% ABV dark brown beer that uses pale, crystal, brown and chocolate malts giving a sweet chocolate nose and flavour that remains in the bitter finish. There is a little raisin fruit on the palate and the aroma has some herbal notes. The hops are Target, for the bittering, and Styrian Goldings.

We then went onto three bottled beers. The first was a bottle conditioned beer, **1698**, and very drinkable despite its 6.5% alcohol content. There was honey on the nose and palate with some peppery hops and orange fruit and a finish, which is dry and. The hops are Admiral and Goldings. This beer has reasonable distribution but the next one is much rarer. It was a strong almost black beer (10% ABV) described as a **Barley Wine**. It is a unique collaboration between Shepherd Neame and the Swedish brewers, Sigtuna Brygghus, and aged in oak Bourbon casks. It came in 33cl bottles packed individually into black boxes. It uses Pale, Vienna, Biscuit, Brown and Carabohemian malts; Magnum, Fuggles, Challenger and East Kent Golding hops. Reminiscent of port wine, a character that is created by the ageing of the beer (it has been in the bottle for at least 9 months) the beer has a little toffee character and a strong bitter finish with some fruity notes. A good beer to go with blue cheese such as Stilton.



The last beer of the evening, was also boxed but this time wrapped in tissue paper and in wooden boxes. **Mash Tun No1**, was brewed to celebrate the 100th anniversary of Mash Tun No. 1, one of the last two remaining solid oak tuns in the UK. The other is also at Shepherd Neame and both are still in use. It is a 7.2% ABV ruby brown beer, again produced in small quantities so get it while you can but lay it down for a while, like a good wine as the flavours will develop. The bottle we had was easy drinking and a little fresh, with a little SO2 on the nose, which will disappear on ageing, and some chocolaty sweet biscuit and a subtle raisin fruitiness. The aftertaste is dry with a little bitterness developing. The hops are a mix of British and American: First Gold, Centennial and Amarillo; and the malts are a complex mix of pale, crystal, amber, brown, chocolate and malted wheat. As with the Barley Wine, it would make a great Christmas present for a beer lover (if for the smart packaging alone!). See: <http://www.shepherdneame.co.uk/shop-categories/ales>

A great evening with some great beers and hospitality.

*Christine Cryne*