

MAKING FULL MASH BEERS AT HOME - by "HUMULUS Lupulus"

From mid-1997 until its final edition, the printed version of "What's Doing" carried a series of articles on making beer at home. For the benefit of younger and/or new readers, these are being made available on line for the first time.

Part One: Grain or Extract?

I shall start by considering the relative merits of grain and extract. Some home brew 'kits' have improved considerably since this article first appeared, and I do not decry them, for those taking their first nervous steps as brewers, but if you wish to progress beyond this stage, read on:

Amongst home brewers and writers about home brew, one argument has long raged; whether beer made from freshly mashed grains is necessarily superior to that using malt extract, or even hopped malt extract (beer kits). Restrictions on home brewing were removed in April 1963 and most literature is later than this. One of the earliest authors, H E Bravery, in 1965, spoke of 'making the very best of top-rate beers using grain malts'¹. However, many of his recipes use frighteningly high proportions of sugar, syrup, crystal and roasted malts. Some omit pale malt altogether and one wonders why he even bothers to mash his odd collections of ingredients.

Even earlier, in 1963, C. J. J. Berry wrote, To make quality beers, it is true, one needs to use malt in its granular form, but malt extract has the overwhelming advantage of simplicity². However, he gives some mashing recipes with decent proportions of pale malt.

The champion of extract beers was undoubtedly the late Ken Shales. In 1967 he stated, "The full mashing process is messy and time-consuming"³. All his recipes use malt extract, but this is diastatic (with active enzymes) and he does usually include a short mashing period to convert the minor grain adjuncts used for flavour and colour variations. In 1971, the same author said of 'grain' brewing, 'given the needful plant and skills, good beer can be prepared this way'⁴. He then likens the viability of mashing at home to growing bananas in Yorkshire (in the greenhouse). Of malt extract beer, it can be equal or superior to commercial brews'.

For many enthusiasts, the 'high priest' of grain beers was the late Dave Line. In his first book⁵ in 1974 he says that 'most of the criticisms of home brew can be traced back to the malt extract syrups used in the majority. Progression from extract to 'grain' beers is a natural path of evolution of home brewing. Dave was a member of CAMRA (South Hampshire branch) and understood not only the importance of correct brewing methods but correct serving methods, too.

Wilf Newsome, in 1978, wrote almost exclusively about grain beers⁶. With the simplified mashing techniques described by Dave Line, it was generally accepted that making grain beers at home was not difficult and was definitely worthwhile. Then Bob Pritchard, in a long series of articles in 'Winemaker magazine, where he described both grain and extract beers, declared in November 1981, 'Mashers still decry extract brews and speak of the malt extract tang! I totally disagree with this and invariably make up any home brews with malt extract'.

These and other ideas concerning the use of CO₂, were condensed into a book⁷ and led to an exchange of heated correspondence, with, amongst others, Tony Millns of CAMRA.

My own preference, after early experiments with extract, is strongly for mashed, grain beers and it is with these that I shall be mainly concerned in future articles.

References:

1 Home Brewing Without Failures by H E. Bravery.

Max Parrish, London

2 Home Brewed Beers & Stouts by CJJ Berry

Amateur Winemaker, Andover

3 Brewing Better Beers by Ken Shales,

Amateur Winemaker

4 Advanced Home Brewing by Ken Shales,

Amateur Winemaker

5 The Big Book of Brewing by Dave Line

Amateur Winemaker

6 The Happy Brewer by Wilf Newsome,

Amateur Winemaker

7 All About Beer and Home Brewing by Bob Pritchard,

Argus Books, Hemel Hempstead.