

## BOOK REVIEWS

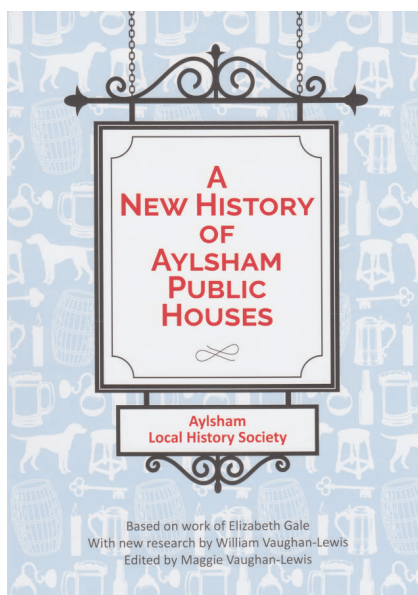
**A New History of Aylsham Public Houses**  
Edited by Vaughan-Lewis, M.

**Aylsham: Aylsham Local History Society**  
2018, Pp.229, £15.00  
ISBN 978 0 9573488 0 6

The very active Aylsham Local History Society has an excellent record of publication. Its history of the Aylsham Navigation was widely acclaimed. Their latest venture into print is a major update of Elizabeth Gale's 2001 account for the Society of the town's inns incorporating much new research in the town's court rolls and poor rate books by William Vaughan-Lewis. Its introduction provides a succinct history of brewing in Aylsham, from the Black Death onwards, to a well-illustrated, extended directory of the town's 36 ale houses, inns and beer houses dating from the early sixteenth century. They run the gamut from the Black Boys, established from the early sixteenth-century, with its good Georgian assembly room, extensive stabling and bowling green to the couple of scruffy beer houses which survived a couple of years in the 1830s.

Although the parish of Aylsham was a large one it never boasted a large population. The first census of 1801 recorded only 1,667 inhabitants; the rapid population growth of nineteenth-century Britain passed Aylsham by. In 1931 there was still only a count of 2,646 souls, a total little more than a century earlier. Yet the number of functioning public houses in the town numbered as many as 17 in the late 1800s. In 1905 when temperance driven magistrates were looking to close surplus public houses there were 19 licences of various descriptions, providing an outlet for every 155 inhabitants in the town. Today only three survive for a population now growing quite rapidly beyond 7,000. How their more numerous predecessors allowed tenant publicans to eke out a precarious living is here vividly recorded.

First, most of the public houses after the mid eighteenth century never seemed to have brewed their own beer. It reinforces recent research that shows from at least this period publican brewing shrank rapidly unlike in the Midlands and North-West where it flourished way into the nineteenth century. In Aylsham the only brewer, William Rannells, who had claims to be considered a common brewer had died by the early 1740s. Then the town's publicans obtained their supplies from common brewers across neighbouring Norfolk, from Trunch, Weybourne and especially Birchalls of Reepham and the three Coltishall breweries (now thoroughly detailed in Margaret Bird's edition of Mary Hardy's diary and the four forthcoming volumes of commentary based on them) aided by the opening of the Bure navigation in the 1770s. Then in the nineteenth century the big four Norwich breweries, Youngs, Crawshay and Youngs,



Bullards and particularly Steward and Patteson and Morgans gradually tied all the town's public houses as swallowed up their smaller competitors in the county.

Secondly, the directory provides a remarkable account of public house ownership and the publican tenant from the mid-sixteenth century onwards. From the detail provided for each house the fragility of the livelihoods of the latter stand out. Sales by 1900 of a typical Aylsham pub were little more than a barrel a week, a few dozen bottles and a gallon of spirits. Such a turn-over led to most tenants pursuing another occupation leaving their wives largely to run the day to day business on the tenancy. Cattle-dealer, butcher, wheelwright, hairdresser, stonemason are amongst those recorded. Similarly, tenants were from a variety of backgrounds, most linked with agriculture and retailing, usually of quite local origin though in the twentieth century they were more often drawn from well beyond the Aylsham neighbourhood.

Because running a public house was a precarious business, with the majority of tenants having very little capital there turnover, with few exceptions such as the Alphas of the Cross Keys, their turnover was massive. For example, the Ship in White Hart Street which opened as a beer house in 1850 and 'evolve into a very small hotel' had 23 tenants before it closed in the early 1980s, each staying on average only six years.

The sheer detail that members of the Society have trawled is remarkable. They are to be congratulated in providing an important dimension of the social history of their town which probes deeply into a level of society often ignored in comparison with the more frequently discussed emerging, prosperous professional classes.

RICHARD WILSON

**Barrel-Aged Stout and Selling Out: Goose Island, Anheuser-Busch, and How Craft Beer Became Big Business**

By Noel, J.

Chicago: Chicago Review Press

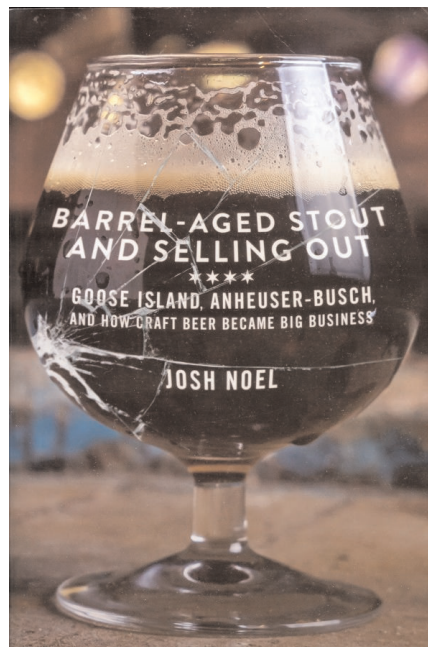
2018, Pp.386, £19.00

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I was fortunate enough to read Josh Noel's *Barrel-Aged Stout and Selling Out* in the city where the majority of

this story takes place, Chicago. However, it could be argued that the most important aspects of Goose Island Beer Company's history take place 300 miles to the south-west and 900 miles due east, in St. Louis and New York respectively. And this is one of the great strengths of the book, for to understand the Goose Island story is to understand the story of Anheuser-Busch and 'craft beer' as a whole. Moreover, as I write this in July 2018, within the last three weeks two influential craft breweries in the London have announce buy-outs, Beavertown and Four Pure, which makes this work as relevant to those interested in the British brewing industry as for those wanting to better understand the U.S. market.

The parallels between the two scenes are both pertinent and interesting. Goose Island was established John Hall, someone who already had an impressive business history. To some degree this set him apart from the majority of 'first wave' craft brewers such as Ken Grossman (Sierra Nevada) and Sam Calagione (Dogfish Head) both of whom had started as home brewers. John's business acumen led him to consult and employ a number of highly talented people rather than brew himself. He was also fortunate enough to have a son, Greg, who became a highly talented brewer and, more



importantly, one with a desire to experiment and innovate.

This combination of the father's business expertise and the son's brewing skills saw Goose Island quickly establish a reputation for high quality beers as well as being at the forefront of new methods such as barrel-aging. This in turn resulted in the brewery winning multiple medals at the annual Great American Beer Festival and a flourishing national and international status.

Noel's narrative of Goose Island's growth, which was not always smooth, is mirrored by another story, that of Anheuser-Busch Inbev's early dismissal and then growing concern with the rise of craft beer's impact on the American beer market. This is the strength of this book. The establishment, rise and eventual sale of one of the U.S.'s most revered craft breweries could be seen as a narrative unto itself, but it is not. Noel also provides the essential context - a picture of the American brewing industry before, during and after the takeover - and this is just as interesting. 'Big beer' realisation that 'craft

beer' was not a flash in the pan and their subsequent moves to first produce faux craft beers and then start acquiring craft breweries are well described by the author. He also does a fine job of describing the emotional reaction that the sale entailed, both among the owners, their employees and those who drank their beers.

As the author has himself commented, Barrel-aged stout and selling out can be seen as making up part of a trilogy on Anheuser-Busch, following on from William Knoedelseder's *Bitter Brew: The Rise and Fall of Anheuser-Busch and America's Kings of Beer* and Julie MacIntosh's *Dethroning the King: The Hostile Takeover of Anheuser-Busch, an American Icon*. However, its breath takes this book beyond its two predecessors so making it required reading for anyone wishing to understand not only the history of Goose Island, but also contemporary American brewing history.

TIM HOLT