

## OLIVER BREWERY, BALTIMORE

TIM HOLT

A stone's throw from Baltimore's redeveloped harbour and on the street where the first blood was shed in the American Civil War is a very British institution, Oliver Brewery, housed in the cellar of the Pratt Street Ale House. The original building was constructed in 1888 and was used for various purposes before becoming a pub in 1980. Twelve years later it was bought by the present owner, Bill Oliver, who acquired the brewing equipment in late 1992 and produced its first beer in January 1993 - it is now the oldest working brewpub in the city.

The seven barrel plant is a Peter Austin system imported from the UK. Like a number of other of small breweries on the American East Coast it was installed by Englishman Alan Pugsley (now co-owner and head brewer at the Shipyard Brewing Company, Portland, Maine) who worked for Austin at the latter's Ringwood Brewery in the 1980s. It employs a traditional single infusion mash technique and open fermentation.

The English influence does not stop there. In 2001, after working at the brewery for two years, Stephen Jones became head brewer and has been so ever since. Steve gained a degree in biochemistry from Warwick University and then went on to begin a PhD. However, he found research less than satisfying and spent some time as a roadie for a friend's band. Then, in 1994, he answered a job advert in the *Coventry Telegraph* for a brewing position at local The Fowl & Firkin brewpub. He was interviewed by David Rawstorne, head brewer at the Holt, Plant & Deakin Brewery, Wolverhampton and who was to oversee brewing operations for the Firkin chain in the region. After a second interview, with Rawstorne and the company's area manager, he was offered the job and given only a fortnight in which to

learn brewing in Wolverhampton. After the two weeks was up Rawstorne spent one day with Steve at The Fowl & Firkin and then, much to his surprise, left him to his own devices. Ominously, not only had he to brew for his own pub, but also for another in Coventry and one in nearby Nuneaton. Despite some early trepidation Steve gradually relaxed into his role and eventually felt confident enough to undertake, and pass, a Diploma in Brewing from the then Institute Of Brewing.

Steve stayed with the Firkin chain, later moving on to the The Phantom & Firkin in Loughborough, until its closure at the end of 1999. However, it was just three weeks between leaving his post in England and starting work for Oliver Breweries in the December of that year. Despite having now brewed for longer in the States than he did in the UK he still thinks of himself as an English brewer and this is reflected in his beers. He leans towards the traditional English styles, brewing milds, porters and pale ales with imported malt and hops (both pellet and leaf) and Ringwood yeast. Steve is impressed with the beer coming out of the UK, especially from BrewDog and Williams Brothers and has met James Watt from the former and Bruce Williams from the latter. Fullers Vintage Ale is a particular favourite of his. He also enjoys continental beer styles and has brewed Belgian inspired beers, called the Cross Channel Series, in collaboration with Stillwater Artisanal Ales.

Steve sees the current brewing scene as one in a state of flux, very much driven by trends. One of his great hopes is that more session ales will be produced in the States. Personally he would like to be able to take advantage of new plant, increase the breweries capacity and so be able to reach a larger audience. If you find yourself in Baltimore, Steve's beers are certainly worth seeking out.



Figure 1. Pratt Street Ale House, home of the Oliver Brewery.



*Figure 2. The brewery's subterranean office/store room.*



*Figure 3. No space is left unused; brewing is shoe-horned into the entire footprint of the basement.*



Figure 4. The mash tun (left) and hot liquor back (right).



Figure 5. The brewhouse showing the hot liquor back (left), hop back (centre) and brew kettle (right). Whole leaf hops are steeped in the hop back and hot wort is passed through it prior to cooling during transfer to the fermentation vessel.



*Figure 6. The brick clad brew kettle. It is direct fired by a gas burner located underneath.*