

BOOK REVIEWS

**The Botany of Beer: An illustrated guide to more than 500 plants used in brewing**

**Caruso, G. Translated by Kosmos, R.E.**

**New York, Columbia University Press**

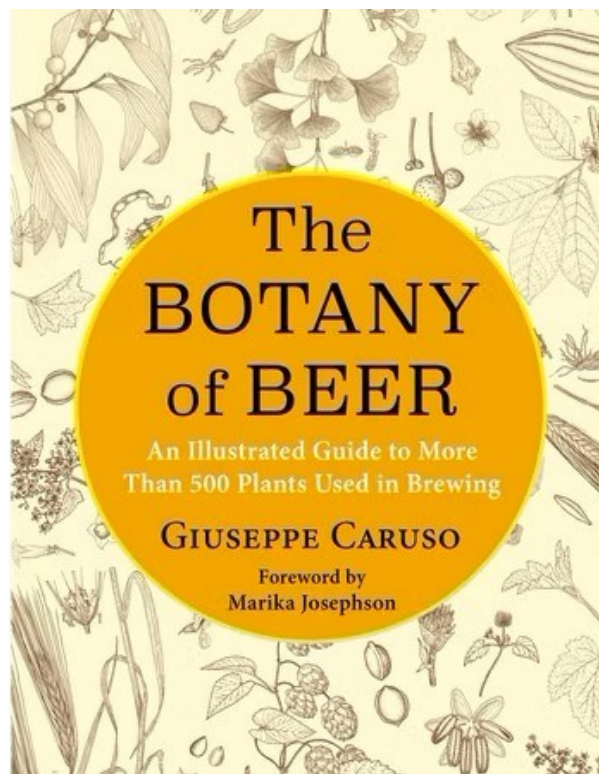
**2022, Pp.640, £28.00**

**ISBN: 9780231201582**

This is an impressive tome. A large format book over 600 pages long with lavish line drawings of many of the plants mentioned it contains a wealth of information. The stated goal is to establish as completely as possible a botanical beer-making compendium from the point of view of the botanist. But as a brewer I can't help but think that it's lacking in the information I'm really interested in, certainly the book is on much firmer ground with botany than with brewing.

Starting with an excellent overview of binomial nomenclature, something that confuses many non-scientific authors, the plants in the book are detailed alphabetically by their scientific name. This makes sense, particularly as the book is a translation from the original Italian, but the lack of a key using common English names means tracking down particular plants will probably require the help of a search engine. Common English names are listed under each entry, and synonyms for scientific names. The latter is necessary as scientific knowledge is constantly changing and this means that scientific names can change too. A physical description of the plant is given as well as subspecies and related species (if any). The criteria by which a plant is given its own entry is however not clear and at times the author's attempt to comprehensive with the compendium seems excessive. For example several species of crab apple, surely a minor plant as far as brewing goes, are individually detailed. Similarly the wide scope of the book, covering every plant that is or has been used in brewing means several trees that could potentially be used to make barrels that beer might be aged in are detailed. This means several species of oak (*Quercus*) that are not known to have any connection to beer get their own entries. More troublingly many toxic plants are listed. *Anamirta cocculus* (*cocculus indicus*)

was commonly associated with historic porter, as is mentioned in a comment for its entry, so I can see why it's included in the book. But deadly nightshade (*Atropa belladonna*) and hemlock (*Conium maculatum*) also get entries due to analysis of residues found on old pottery jars in the Orkney Islands. The opium poppy (*Papaver somniferum*) is in too due to its (presumably!) historic use in beer despite its current illegality. Symbols are used at the start of each entry to say if the plant is toxic or of historic use only (amongst other things) but in the copy I have the print was very faint. The author does advise caution when using new plants for brewing and makes clear some are only included for completeness sake, but craft brewers often have an 'anything goes' attitude when using novel ingredients which at times appears to outweigh their pharmacological or regulatory knowledge.



For major agricultural crops cultivars are listed, which in the case of rice (*Oryza sativa*) takes over two pages! The two most important plants in brewing beer, barley (*Hordeum vulgare*) and hops (*Humulus lupulus*) appear by happy coincidence as adjacent entries, though two-row and six-row barley do not get separate entries. The information on cultivars for both these plants however has room for improvement. Some historic barley cultivars, in particular Maris Otter, have enough of a following to ensure their continued cultivation but modern cultivars have on average only around seven years before they are superseded so none of the British barleys listed as being modern still have approval from the Maltsters Association of Great Britain or commercial cultivation. For the hops over 100 cultivars are listed but rather sloppily for an otherwise rigorous book the ancestry of many hops is given as being crosses between two female plants, an impossibility that obscures the altogether more complicated process of breeding new hop varieties.

Each plant has the geographical distribution, habitat and range listed, as well as an entry for the beer making parts. The later is disappointingly brief e.g. in many cases simply saying “fruits”. It would perhaps be expanding the scope of the book but information on where in the brewing process the plants have been used and in what quantity would be extremely useful.

Chemical composition of the plant is often listed in great detail but there is little information on flavour. There is some attempt to relate the chemistry to flavour for hops but in a drink with as complicated a composition as beer even when individual compounds can be related to particular flavour it’s no guarantee that it will actually be tasted in the beer.

Where possible the beer style or styles a plant is used in are listed as well as a commercial example. A brief style guide from the Beer Judge Certification Program (BJCP) is included at the start of the book. Unfortunately this lacks the scientific rigour of the botany in the book, the BJCP guidelines being a modern American invention for use in beer competitions where they provide a framework for entries. Their historical, or even contemporary, accuracy for the commercial beer styles they’re describing has frequently been brought into question and certainly the application of beer styles in this book seemed strange at times. For example, I’m sure the inhabitants of Cologne will be surprised at the wide range of plants that can apparently be used in the making of kölsch, and mum, an obscure mediaeval beer, is mentioned several times as the style some plants were/are used in despite the style not being listed by the BJCP. At times some uses of plants in beer is overlooked. The author can be forgiven for not knowing that hop leaves have been used in

brewing, as it’s possible that the beer we make using hop leaves at my current job is unique. The use of peas in Lithuanian beer is also perhaps obscure knowledge. But the use of sorghum in African beers, Nigerian Guinness amongst them, is not mentioned.

For plants that might be used to make barrels information on the wood is given, including often the Wood Specific Gravity. Sources for each entry are included and there is an extensive glossary and bibliography.

The judicious use of comments under particularly significant entries provides useful context and for barley (*Hordeum vulgare*) there are several pages on malt and malting. Various types of malt are listed and their colours given in SRM units. The description of malting seems a little confused, perhaps not helped by the text being translated. We’re told that standard malts are produced by steeping, germination and roasting. The careful drying of standard malts (pilsner, pale, etc.) is in fact called kilning, and is carried out in a malt kiln, the term roasting being used for the production of darker malts (amber, brown, black, etc.) carried out in a roasting drum. It’s also mentioned that a proline specific endoprotease might in the future solve the problem of beer containing gluten when in fact it is already in standard use at many breweries. Another niggle is that the excellent illustrations in the book are usually unlabelled, though I’m sure brewing students will be happy that the drawing of the barley grain is.

*The Botany of Beer* is described as an illustrated guide to the plants used in brewing and certainly provides a lot of information on a huge number of plants that are, were or might have been used in brewing. If a botanist wants to learn about these many plants it provides a detailed reference book. But for a brewer that might be using these plants to make beer and wondering at which stage of the brewing process to use them, how much to add and what flavour they will bring to the beer the information is generally lacking.

ED WRAY

### **The London Pub (Book 12: Vintage Britain)**

**Introduction by Brown, P.**

**London: Hoxton Mini Press**

**2022, Pp144, £18.95**

**ISBN: 978-1-914314-28-5**

Since arriving in London from Yorkshire to work in the City in the late 1980s I’ve navigated my way around the capital by pubs. One of the first areas I investigated was the smart

enclave of Belgravia and one of my favourite pubs remains The Grenadier, which I'd just visited before I read *The London Pub* (in the Vintage Britain series from Hoxton Mini Press) and found a photo of this very pub c.1935.

Visually on the outside it appears that very little has changed during the intervening 80-plus years and it is pleasing to say that the book highlights just how many characteristics appear to remain unchanged with the London pub. The glorious images that fill this photo album style publication show lots of smiling faces as the pub has always brought people together to socialise and share the joys of life. Many of the interiors of the properties very much resemble many of the city's pubs today and the wide age ranges pubs attract clearly remains very much intact today.

But there is also lots that have changed since these photographs were taken – dating between the years of 1874 and 1997. They mainly reflect male-dominated environments, there are rather a lot of images of young children hanging around on the street while their parents drink away inside, everybody seems to wear overcoats inside that suggests there was very little heating in many pubs (we might be heading back that way), and the only drink available seems to be dark beer.

It is also noticeable how the featured pubs, and London itself, looks rather dishevelled in a way that fans of The Sweeney will know very well as Regan and Carter chase armed thugs around the capital's streets that remained scarred from the Second World War and from a lack of invest in the city's infrastructure.

London's subsequent overhaul and rise to become a leading global city has undoubtedly, and very sadly, led to the de-

mise of rather too many of the pubs featured in the book. It is also a fact of life that people clearly have many more leisure options today on a Friday night than popping to their local pub and this has come at a cost.

Yes, this book does highlight some disappointing trends but the overriding feeling upon reading this publication is skewed way more towards joy. The terrific mix of images show just how integral the pub is to people's lives in the UK. Certainly my time in London has been massively enriched by spending far too much time in the cities hostelrys. I'm pleased to say that many are featured in this book and still drawing in people today. The French House, The Blackfriar, The Queen's Head & Artichoke, and Ye Olde Cheshire Cheese. And on that note ...

GLYNN DAVIS

**Devon Country Town Common Brewers and Public Houses - Tavistock 1752 to 2020**

**Mettler, A.**

**Tavistock: Tavistock Heritage Trust and Tavistock Local History Society (jointly)**

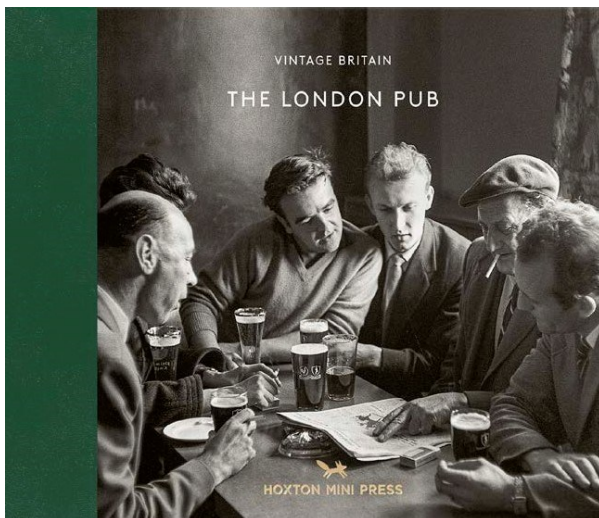
**2022, Pp548, £24.99 (paperback) and £34.99 (hardback)**

**ISBN:10-0-9544284-4-7 (paperback) and ISBN:10-0-9544284-5-5 (hardback)**

This book shows how common breweries operated and how both the tied and free public houses survived (or did not) and operated in the Devon county town of Tavistock. It might be considered that other towns would have operated in the same way but in some ways Tavistock is different because of the influence, direct and indirect of the Duke of Bedford who as the Russell family had been granted the lands of the Abbey of Tavistock on its dissolution in 1539.

The author, Alex Mettler, is a qualified chemist and not an academic brewery historian. He is however, a lover of the product. He is also very familiar with the town of Tavistock having been a founder member of the Tavistock Local History Society and written widely on the people of the town. This work can only be described as a labour of love.

Chapter 1, Introduction, is a general overview of brewing. The book then starts at Chapter 2, A Short History of Brewing, by giving brief details on the history of making beer before bringing in Tavistock and Plymouth, from the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and is brought up to date into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. There are a sub- chapters on Devon White Ale and Craft Beers. Chapter 3 entitled from Art to Science then gives good detail on making beer and the use of science to improve the quality, for example the use of thermometers for temperature



control and hydrometers for specific gravity. There is then a short chapter (4) on the town of Tavistock, giving some geographical details, its early history and later association with the Dukes of Bedford, 19<sup>th</sup> century involvement with the copper ore mining industry and finally its 20<sup>th</sup> century development.

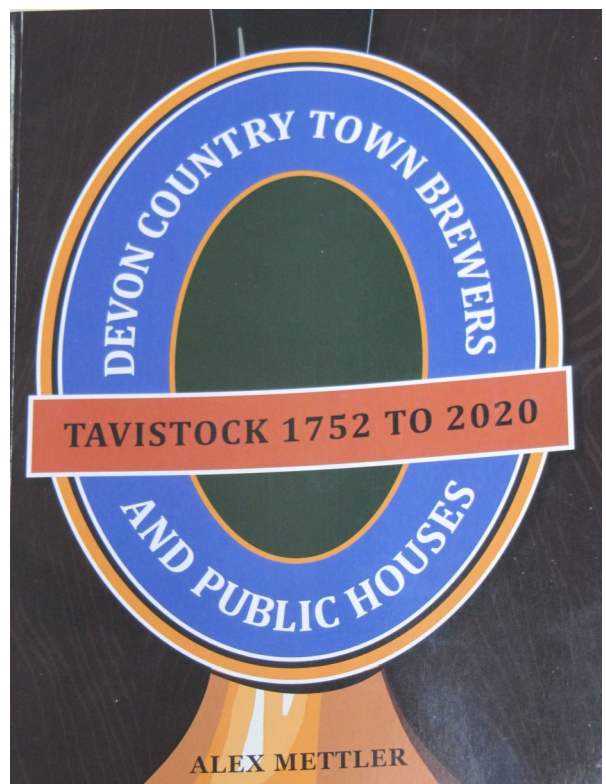
The history of the common brewers starts at Chapter 5 with a couple of pages of introduction to Tavistock's common brewers and lists them, as well as those in Plymouth in 1857. Importantly it also includes details from the census returns from 1841 to 1911 on the people involved to a greater or lesser extent with the brewing industry and therefore including such occupations as cooper, brewer's servant, brewer's bottle washer and wine and spirit merchant as well as the obvious ones of brewer and maltster.

The first of the two historic common brewers was the Market Street Brewery operational from 1798-1877. The location of the brewery and its development and history are given as well as details of its tied trade of public houses and inns. There are maps and photographs as well as illustrations in the form of sale notices and newspaper advertisements and notices. It is very detailed and includes the problems with the Duke of Bedford's Tavistock estate stewards. Once the newspaper, the *Tavistock Gazette*, was published, from 1857, notices relating to the brewery appear in and are included in full. Some of the most interesting and useful details relate to the persons involved in the ownership and operation of the brewery. Where appropriate detailed family histories are given. Although the brewery ceased operation in 1877 the history of the site did not end there and is taken onto the 1980s when the probably 17<sup>th</sup> century malthouse was substantially damaged by fire.

The second common brewery was The Brook Street Brewery (also called the Bedford Brewery and the Tavistock Brewery) operational from 1853 to 1926. The same type of information as that provided on the Market Street Brewery is provided on this brewery. Again there are plans and photographs and extracts from the *Tavistock Gazette*. However, there is one major difference in that in 1893 an agreement was drawn up with Flowers Brewery of Stratford-upon-Avon for them to purchase it. This is an interesting and important detail often overlooked by other authors. Details of Flowers are given but why they embarked on a West Country venture is not clear and the author has not been able to elucidate this fully although he does discuss the possibilities. The venture was not a success and was short lived ending 1899. Brewing ceased in 1926 when the brewery was bought by H. & G. Simmonds. For brewery historians this is a particularly interesting section of the book. Perhaps surprisingly other details include some on perforated ceramic malt kiln tiles.

There are then short sub-chapters on four extant breweries: the Dartmoor Brewery, the Bere Brewery, the Stannary Brewery and the Morwellham Brewery. The oldest of these is the Dartmoor which started operations in 1994. The next two date from 2016 and the Morwellham brewery from 2017. Their histories are much shorter, but they are well-illustrated.

It is fair to say that the majority of this book is on Tavistock's public houses and that is in Chapter 6. There is a reasonably lengthy introductory section which includes some very useful historical maps of the location of the public houses and inns in the town. The set up of public houses and inns is put into a legislative context with extracts from various relevant Acts. Also dealt with is the effect of the Duke of Bedford's Tavistock Estate. There are various tables on the inns named in what is referred to as the Wynne Survey, trades directories and licensed houses from the register of licenses and details of tenants and lessees. Then follows what is the main section, the details on the public houses and inns, starting with the Albert Inn and ending with the White Hart. Altogether there are details on 87 public houses. Sometimes the entry is just a few lines as is the case with Bull and Dog in Higher Back Street which became the Albert Inn where it has a much longer entry. Another short entry is in respect of the Crown and Cushion on Barley-



market Street which like the Bull and Dog changed its name and so has a longer entry. Both these public houses had relatively long histories starting in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and after name changes into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Perhaps one of the shortest entry is the four lines in respect of the Redgate on Ford Street but like other entries it had a change of name and a longer entry under that name. Some of the longest entries are for the Cornish Arms, on West Street, and the Queen's Head, also on West Street. The former has a history from 1752 although not under that name and it was still functioning as a public house, a gastro-pub, under the ownership of the St Austell Brewery and its 'mine hosts' John and Emma Hooker. The records for the Queen's Head start in 1710 and again it survived into the 21<sup>st</sup> century as a Weatherspoons pub. Not all the public houses have had a long history, one, the Virtuous Lady on the Plymouth Road, only started in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, opening in 1981 and closing by the end of the decade. Although no details are given on its name one does wonder whether it was after the 19<sup>th</sup> century Virtuous Lady copper mine near Tavistock. For all the entries whether short or long there are details which include the family histories of the tenants/licensees, maps, photographs historic and modern of premises and tenants, as well as plans and other illustrative material in the form of advertisements. All the entries are fascinating accounts of the public houses and inns. One may not want to read from A to W but it is enjoyable to dip in and explore.

There is a final chapter on the Temperance movement in Tavistock and the Temperance Inns of which there were five. Finally there is a short Epilogue.

There is a list of references, image credits and an index of brewers and inn keepers but no general index. All the chapters have copious notes.

This is a book with massive amounts of detail, and inevitably there are a few niggles. There are some repetitions but my main niggle is the inconsistency in how the notes are presented. For example, the location of the Devon Heritage Centre for Devon documents usually comes first but occasionally it is at the end of the reference, and sometimes the old reference of the Devon Record Office is used. Also, the referencing of documents relating to Flowers purchase of the Brook Street Brewery are presumably from the Flowers Brewery archives held by the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust in Stratford-upon-Avon, but this is not stated in the notes, although there is reference to them in the acknowledgements.

This is very detailed book on Tavistock's breweries and its public houses and inns. Overall there are a good variety of illustrations, historic and more modern on the people and the buildings. It is a book which will be appreciated by those interested in brewery and pub histories, and family historians who will be able to trace details of family involved in all aspects of the brewing trade.

AMBER PATRICK