

LIBERATION BEERS

Liberation Beers – against all the odds

Dominique Huret visited **Liberation Brewery** for *Food & Drink Technology* to lift the lid on some of the secrets of the Jersey brewery's success

In one form or another, Liberation Brewery has been a traditional ingredient in Channel Islands' life for nearly 150 years. Against the odds, several generations of entrepreneurs have continued to brew beer in the Channel Islands for the Channel Islands. They have weathered two world wars, German occupation, depressions, recessions and cultural shifts. Yet here they are, proudly still brewing a variety of beers. Not any beer, Liberation beer is a multi-award-winning beer made without compromise or gimmicks.

Beer and bread in Jersey

Historically, Jersey is associated with cider, but the production of beer predates the great expansion of cider orchards and cider production in Tudor times. In mediaeval times, Jersey's countryside was very different from what we now consider to be traditional rural areas. Instead, there would have been big open fields growing wheat and barley. The produce of these fields was taken to mills to be ground into bread and in some cases into beer. In the 14th Century it was commonplace for small breweries to augment their income by baking bread as well, both needing yeast and either malt or corn to be ground. It was cheaper to own your own malt mill than to pay a miller to grind your malt for you. But in 1535 the States decided that bakers-taverniers had either to bake bread or to brew beer, but not, under any circumstance, to do both. There was enough produced for a small population of farmers and fishermen, but as soon as the population began to grow, by the mid-16th Century, some beer needed to be imported, primarily for the garrisons.

But thanks to malt ground at local mills, 17 windmills and 47 water mills in the 46 square miles of Island, beer brewing remains on Jersey.

Give me a pint Mary Ann!

The first record of beer being brewed in Ann Street is generally quoted as being 1871, when J S Palmer, an experienced brewer began his brewing operation in Saint Helier. On 23 September 1905 the Ann Street Brewery Co was registered as a limited company. The 'Mary Ann' brand dates from around this time. Whether it was inspired by a music hall song, by the name of the street, or because of a popular girl name on the island or the French name, 'Marianne', a personification of the spirit of the French Republic, nobody knows for sure. In 1923, the new MD, Mr Payn purchased no less than 15 hotels. The German Occupation during the second World War had considerable effect on the brewery by cutting off all supplies from the mainland. Hard times came between 1942 and 1944, with one short interruption to brewing and the force brewing for the Occupation forces from ingredients purchased in France. Shortly after the war, work started on the construction of a new brewery in Ann Street. The building, and an additional brewhouse, was completed in 1950 at a cost of £500,000. It was built on the traditional tower system whereby the raw materials were kept on the top floor and the various processes were carried out on descending floors finishing up with the bottling and kegging on the ground floor. The main value of this system was the elimination of pumping up. There were 12 fermenting vessels, each of



which could hold up to 3,600 gallons of wort, and capacity for 40,000 barrels.

The post-war years saw continued expansion: the company acquired the licence to manufacture and distribute Coca-Cola in the Channel Islands. In 1954 the company was licensed by Allied Breweries to brew and market Skol Lager, up until then the new company had only brewed ale. Ann Street remained a modest-sized business into the early 1970s. A turning point for the group came in 1971 with a new MD Mr Steven. Under his lead, Ann Street began developing its pub estate holdings, which grew to more than 100 across the Channel Islands. Followed an uninterrupted series of gold and silver medals at prestigious beer contests in the UK and on the continent. In 1995 the name of the company was changed to the Jersey Brewery, and was now listed on the London Stock Exchange's main board. It began seeking an extension onto the English mainland, building up a pub estate in southern England. While 2000, witnessed a steady decline in the tourism market on the Channel Islands and a changing economic climate, the brewery went for scaling up with CI

Traders funds. It was then listed on the London exchange's AIM market. The group then employed 2000 people with extensive interests in the brewing, bottling, manufacturing and sales of beers, wines, spirits and soft drinks plus a growing portfolio of hotels, restaurants and licensed premises. From relatively large production capacity (the 40,000 barrel brewery that used to brew large brands such as Skol under licence), the site relocated and downsized to a very modest 40-barrel plant in its new premises.

Long life to Liberation Brewery

In 2011 the brewery was renamed as 'Liberation Brewery' but it still uses the previously known brand names. The actual managing director, Mark Crowther, formerly a senior manager at Carlsberg UK, has made sure that the company was about pubs and a brewing: 'At a low point we were producing no cask ale at all, even quite recently only five per cent of our production was cask, the rest was all keg, and now were up to 20 to 30 per cent cask beer production, which is really pleasing for us as brewers.' Pat Dean head Brewer at Liberation brewing and co adds: 'Where once the Jersey Brewery, in its various guises, was seen as only active in closing pubs, the Liberation Group is opening and refurbishing them. The Brewery concentrates on seasonal ales, such as Christmas Ale, which features Black Butter, and looking at seasonal brews and to build on what we've achieved with Liberation and Christmas Ale. Ideally, we want two or three beers on the bar coming from us, with Bass or Pride as a guest, rather than the reverse.'

In 2013, the brewery won multiple awards including a Gold at the International Brewing Industry Award. In 2014, the Liberation Group acquired the Butcombe brewery and a pub chain in the UK. In 2016, significant investment in brewery plant and launch of new craft range. Gold Medal for Liberation IPA at the SIBA, followed by the Liberation Pale Ale Gold medal at the International Brewing & Cider Award, and several in a row in the year after.

'Most recently, we were fortunate



From left to right: Patrick Dean, Peter Corcoran, Chris Boudier, Nigel Dowden and Steve Neil. Image credit: Liberation Brewery

enough to win the much prized award for Best Premium Food Offering, Best Managed Pub Company and Best Accommodation operator at the coveted Publican Awards. In 2021 we created brand new beers: Waverider Pacific Pale Ale and the Longboard Lager inspired by Channel Islands surfing culture. We also brewed a 150th Anniversary Special Edition beer, the 1871', explains Pat Dean.

Pubs, bars and more

'Today, the Liberation Group consists of over 120 pubs, bars and inns. Based in the South West, our sister brewery Butcombe Brewing Co. has a state of the art brewery in Wrington, Bristol and over 60 pubs in Bath, the Cotswolds, Somerset, Bristol, Dorset, Wiltshire, the Mendips, Gloucestershire, New Forest, Boumemouth, Oxfordshire, Hampshire and London. In the pubs, Butcombe

and Liberation beers are proposed. In the Channel Islands, we own about 18 eclectic and unique pubs and bars, each one with its own distinctive feel and menu, both in design and content, focused on what works best for the local area.

'Our team of chefs from all over the islands collaborate to design, create and develop the food offer. Utilising the finest local produce including our own Liberation brewed beers, locally sourced meat, fresh produce and delicious Channel Islands seafood.

'With our overarching food brief to create a good value, innovative and exciting menu of dishes. You have understood that we are proud of our Channel Islands heritage. The Liberation Brewery has been supplying the Channel Islands with its award-winning beers for nearly 150 years. This remains an accomplishment we can take pride in.' 