

BOSS 25th Anniversary Ale – Allsopp's Arctic Ale

A Beer of Legend

Legendary: it's an overused word. But some beers literally are legendary, in the sense that far more people will have heard of them than will ever see them or taste them.

One indisputably legendary beer is Allsopp's Arctic Ale. The powerful, rich Burton Ale, original gravity 1.130, north of 12 per cent alcohol, brewed in Victorian times specifically for expeditions to the Arctic Circle by British explorers. Only brewed three times in the 19th century, once in 1852, again in 1857, and finally in 1875, it is considered to be "The Holy Grail of Ales".

Historical Significance

As it turns out, the story of Allsopp's and its trademark "red hand" has deep historical significance. Allsopp's had a rich brewing heritage long before their IPA gained acclaim in the early 19th century. Before the 1820's, an outstanding strong, sweeter ale was Allsopp's claim to fame. It contained a small amount of "high-dried" barley, and was dry hopped prior to aging. It was so rich and luscious, that if a little were spilled on a table the glass would stick to it. The style was simply called Burton Ale, and it accounted for 70% of total production.

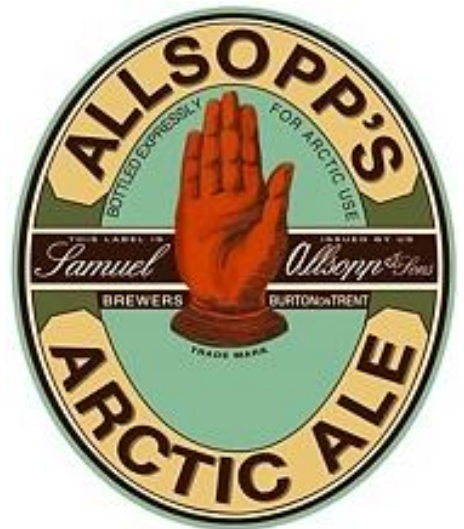
In the 17th and 18th centuries, the main market for Burton Ale was Russia and the Baltics. Both Peter the Great and Catherine the Great were extremely fond of Burton Ale. But that market began to dry up due to the Napoleonic Wars. Then in 1822, Russia slapped prohibitive tariffs on almost every article of British manufacture. The Burton Ale trade to the Baltic was wrecked. What the Russians didn't tax, however, was Porter and Stout. This gave Barclay Perkins and other London Porter brewers the chance to expand their sales of what became known as Russian Imperial Stout. It was while searching for contracts that could replace those of the lost Baltic trade, that Samuel Allsopp was approached by The East India Company and given samples of Hodgson's India Pale Ale to replicate. Allsopp's version was lighter and more sparkling. And because of the advantages of Burton water, it was considered a far superior beer to Hodgson's. Bass and the other Burton brewers quickly caught on and followed Allsopp's lead. The rest, as they say, is history.

Although Allsopp's continued to brew Burton Ale throughout the 19th century, it was no longer the same beer that was shipped to the Baltics. It was considered "too heady, too sweet, and too glutinous, if not too strong" for the domestic market. So in 1822, Samuel Allsopp changed the recipe. He brewed it with 100% pale malt, lowered the strength, and increased the hops. It is this version of Burton Ale that would eventually evolve into the modern day style of Barleywine. So when an opportunity arose to once again brew the original Burton Ale recipe, Allsopp's jumped at the chance.

In 1845 Rear-Admiral Sir John Franklin led an expedition to the Canadian Arctic in an attempt to navigate the Northwest Passage. Unfortunately for Franklin and his men, the mission failed. The ships were lost and the crew died. Franklin became a national hero and Queen Victoria demanded that efforts be made to find any remains of the ships and crew. Along with the Admiralty, The Queen asked brewers in Burton, famous for their strong beers exported round the world, to create a "life sustaining ale" to supply five ships commanded by Sir Edward Belcher. Burton brewers Bass, Salt, Truman and Worthington all competed to produce the beer, but the contract was awarded to Allsopp's.

In 1852 Sir Edward Belcher set sail with several hundred bottles of Allsopp's Arctic Ale on the journey to discover the fate of the Franklin expedition. It was Captain Belcher himself who reported that Allsopp's Arctic Ale, containing over 12% alcohol and packed with hops, proved to be "A most important and valuable aid. Found, by experiments made at -42° F on deck, to stand +12 hours before affording any symptom of congelation... Very good, and very important".

But Belcher's mission also failed and he was forced to abandon 4 out of the 5 ships in his fleet. One of these ships, the H.M.S Resolute became stuck in the frozen sea and left for ruin, only to be found later adrift in the Baffin Bay. It was towed back to the United States, and eventually returned to England. When it was decommissioned, timbers from the ship were used to create the "Resolute Desks", one of which sits in the Oval Office of the White House.



Arctic Alchemy

In August of 2007 a bottle of Allsopp's Arctic Ale was auctioned off on ebay. Although he didn't participate in the bidding, beer historian and home brewer Chris Bowen became fascinated by the story surrounding this bottle of beer



1875 Arctic Ale found in the vaults of Allsopp's Brewery, Burton-on-Trent by Christopher Bowen (pictured) October 2nd, 2010

brewed in 1852 and its highly unique history. When the bidding was over, this bottle reportedly sold for \$503,300. And while the sale was never completed, the mystery of its origins became all that more intriguing to him.

So, for the next two and a half years Chris dug through all available resources – the deepest of all journals, records, and brewery notes - to discover everything there was to know about this obscure ale. By chance, Chris met the man who had purchased the old Allsopp's brewery. The man offered him a tour, during which Bowen discovered a basement stash of Arctic Ale bottles that had been gathering dust for decades. He even found the original recipe! Chris then travelled by motorcycle to the Arctic Circle to brew 100 gallons of the recipe and made a film to document the adventure. He also collaborated with Beau Baden of Fegley's Brew Works to brew Arctic Ale commercially. It has gone on to win multiple medals at the Great

American Beer Festival (GABF).

Tasting Notes

Alfred Barnard, the celebrated brewery writer of the Victorian era, on a trip to Allsopp's in 1889, was able to taste a 14 year old 1875 vintage of "The celebrated Arctic Ale of which we have heard so much in days gone by", and found it, "of a nice brown color, and of a vinous, and at the same time, nutty flavor, and as sound as on the day it was brewed." A tasting of the same vintage, 123 years later by Chris Bowen and a few select beer writers, describe the beer as, "Deep ruby in color with an astonishingly complex aroma of dry chocolate, molasses, leather, and vinous fruit. The palate offered creamy malt, sweet fruit and further chocolate and cocoa hints, followed by a bittersweet finish with dark fruit, rich malt and light hops. Finishes smooth without any unpleasantness or sourness. Words can't do it justice."

Chris Bowen, the members of the National Brewery Centre in Burton-on-Trent, and the Campaign for Real Ale (CAMRA) are extremely guarded about the surviving bottles and the recipe. So much so that after a tasting in 2012, members of CAMRA threatened to file suit because they were not notified that a bottle had been opened.

"Maybe we that found it and rescued it should have been asked our permission to open it. It is a major part of our brewing history. We had two tastings in Burton by a select group of Burtonians, The Mayor, brewers, and the town's National Brewery Centre Managers, amongst others. All signed a certificate to agree that no other bottles should be opened, sold, auctioned, or recipe used, by any other persons. EVER!"

Unbeknownst to CAMRA, the person who opened the bottle was none other than Chris Bowen!

BOSS 25th Anniversary Ale

As part of BOSS's 25th Anniversary celebrations, the BOSS board of directors wanted to have a barrel aged beer brewed to mark the occasion. The only caveat being that this beer had to be something truly special. Being familiar with the story of Arctic Ale, BOSS board member Jim Todd suggested that it be brewed as the BOSS 25th anniversary ale. He volunteered to research the history and get the recipe. Chris Bowen is extremely protective of the recipe, and CAMRA believes the recipe is some sort of state secret that only they are privy to. Nevertheless, after some very extensive research, Jim found an obscure internet blog where Chris Bowen had posted the recipe back in 2011. Sorry CAMRA.

Jim brewed a batch of Arctic Ale and presented samples to the board. The board agreed that this would be a great beer to barrel age. Brandon Banbury, owner and brewmaster at Hailstorm Brewing, offered to brew, barrel age, and bottle the beer on a commercial scale. Brandon brewed 30 barrels of Arctic Ale. The finished ale has an ABV in excess of 14%! He then filled 18 Koval barrels with Arctic Ale. The non-barrel aged version was put on tap at Hailstorm, while the barrel aged version became the BOSS 25th Anniversary Ale, of which, each BOSS member will receive four 22 oz. bombers, reputedly worth \$2,013,200 of what is considered to be "The Holy Grail of Ales"!