

Friends reunited!

The creation of Walthamstow's Wildcard Brewery is all about friendship dating back to schooldays. But the idea of a brewery began a few years after that. William and Andrew met when they were both working at Boots before William went off to university. William said 'It was quite hierarchal at Boots. The top rung were the staff on the perfume counter, then the pharmaceutical counter followed by photography (where Andrew worked) and then the stockists who were the lowest of the low - and that was me! The job entail making sure all of the products were facing the right way so the labels could be read. I never want to see another bottle of Coca Cola. But the most annoying thing about working there was the eleven Christmas songs that were on a continuous loop. Too much'.

Andrew and Michael hit it off immediately, often having a drink after work and finding out they were both home brewers. After graduating, William spent some time at Castle Rock Brewery in Nottingham as a cask washer before going on to do a Masters in politics. On leaving, he was unemployed for a while before working for a recruitment agency. During this time, the two friends stayed in touch and one day decided that they wanted to make their living in brewing.

They started gypsy brewing in 2012 (this is where you brew your beer at another brewery) renting a day at a time at Brentwood Brewing. They gradually built up a following and then decided to go for it and have their own place in 2013.

This is when the third friend kicked in. Jaega had been at school with Michael. Her background was in the sciences and her post university job was in chemical trading. So she brought in the science angle to the passion of the other two and became the head brewer.

The original thought was to have a one barrel plant under the Honest Officer pub but to quote Andrew, 'Demand went through the roof and we realised that we needed something bigger'. The bigger was a six barrel brewery with four six barrel fermenters and now two will be shortly replaced by two 12 barrel ones. Although, this change reflects the growth that the brewery has enjoyed, it is clear that it hasn't all been plain sailing. They have few regular outlets for their cask beer; the local pub market being dominated by Enterprise. They have one distributor, Dam Tasty Beer, who take their keg and bottles. Even this had a hurdle. The beer had to pass the Kernel test. Kernel's owner, Evin O'Riordain, was asked by the distributor to see if the quality of the beer was good enough; fortunately they passed.

All the bottles are unfiltered and hand produced. They can be found in Oddbins and a number of restaurants, theatres and cafes. Wildcard also have a keg range (unfiltered) which is currently kegged for them elsewhere but will be brought in house when the new fermenters arrive. In addition to their external outlets, they open their own bar every weekend featuring their own beers alongside a few beers from other small breweries. They also run a beer festival every quarter. This internal activity accounts for about 5% of their beer sales and is a help to their cash flow. The idea of a bar came about in the early days of the brewery when someone turned up to buy bottled beer and asked if they could drink it on the premises. It's not just beer they stock, cider and other drinks with, and who would have thought it, prosecco being a particular favourite with customers.

The extra capacity, and the intention to brew six times a week, has meant that they are looking for extra sales. They have just recruited a sales person and was undertaking interviews for an Events & Marketing person when the Tasting Panel visited them This takes their head count to 15 of which five



are related to the bar. They also have a second brewer now, Jack, who joined from London Brewing Company. Andrew takes pride in the fact that they pay the London Living Wage.

Their core range of beers is named after playing cards: Jack of Clubs (ruby beer, 4.5% ABV), Queen of Diamonds (IPA, 5.1%ABV), King of Hearts (lager, 4.5%ABV) and Ace of Spades (porter, 4.7%). Jack was the only beer that has survived from the home brewing days. An interesting beer using Maris Otter, dark crystal, torrified wheat (for head retention) and American hops (Centennial, Mount Hood and Willamette).



Like most small breweries, Wildcard like experimenting and are currently playing with a series of pale ales with one hop dominating. They also like to do collaboration brews and something a bit different. For the third year running, Jaega has brewed a beer for International Women's day. 100 Brewsters (female Brewers), brew the same beer on the same day. This year it was a blood orange beer using just the peel to give it its flavour. It proved so popular that the keg sold out in one weekend and there were only a few bottles left. If you missed

it, you missed a refreshing drinkable beer.

The tasting description of all of the beers that the London Tasting Panel tried are below

If this has wetted your appetite, then you can try the beers for yourself by visiting their brewery bar, which is open Friday 5-12; Saturday 11-12 and Sunday 11-10. See www.wildcardbrewery.co.uk. Enjoy!

Amarillo 3.5% og1033

Refreshing golden ale, unfiltered and unfiltered. Sherbet lemon nose and flavour with some spicy hoppy character. The hops and citrus notes continue in the shortish finish which is dry and bitter To get the aroma, the beer is dry hopped with pellets.

Jack of Clubs 4.5% og1045

Complex ruby brown best bitter with malty nose and a trace of roast. The flavour has hints of chocolate, citrus fruit and malt, which are also present in the soft but slightly bitter finish.

King of Hearts 4.5% ABV og1044

Wild Card's twist on a lager using 50% lager malt and 50% Maris Otter and two American hops, Citra and Centennial. This easy drinking beer has a definite lager character in the flavour which is sweet and biscuity. Lemon and Parma violets are noticeable on the nose with the fruit developing on the palate. It fades in the clean finish, which is dry.

Cascade 4.6% ABV og1042

One off real ale as part of their Pale Ale series. It's an unfiltered yellow beer with a sweetish nose and a smooth mouthfeel. The flavour is sweet grapefruit with traces of pineapple and spicy hop. Dry bitter lingering finish.

Ace of Spades 4.7% ABV og1052

Black porter using a complex malt blend: Maris Otter, Chocolate, Roasted Barlet, Light Crystal and Torrified Wheat. The aroma is fruity, from the Centennial and Willamette hops, overlaid with a little roast. Licorice, caramelised fruit and roasted malt flavour followed by a malty, burnt toast aftertaste and a dryness that lingers.

Queen of Diamonds. 5.1%ABV og1049

Yellow coloured smooth golden ale. Strong citrus aroma with lemon and grapefruit in the flavour alongside biscuit notes. The finish is dry with a little bitterness. Drinks lighter than its strength! The hops (Chinook, Centennial and Columbus) are every 5 minutes during the 90 minute boil.

Unite 6.3% ABV

This smooth golden bottled beer is made with the rind of blood oranges, with Amarillo, Cascade and Chinook hops, Maris Otter Pale malt and torrified wheat. The rind was added at the end of the boil and left to mature for 30 minutes. The creation had a perfumed aroma with orange and a little malt. An orange peel character was present in the flavour balanced by honey. The fruitiness dips also in the finish where the bitterness becomes more dominant.