

# A maturing Bexley

Cliff and Jane may come from disparate worlds but both of them are committed to beer maturation!

Cliff's background was in IT and he was getting bored, so in 2014 he persuaded Jane to abandon her life as a teacher and set up a brewery. 'Not that much persuasion was needed' said Cliff. 'The timing was right. I was in my early 50's so it was now or never and we took the plunge'

Cliff and Jane were fortunate that, through the grapevine of the local rugby club, they were put in touch with a builder who had an industrial unit to rent near Slade Green.

The unit is on an industrial estate, close to the Thames and about 20 minutes walk from Slade Green Station and 4 miles from where they live, just outside Bexley. But although the unit is great, offering plenty of space for growth, Cliff would have loved to have been able to have brewed in Bexley village where Reffells used to brew. Cliff explained, 'The brewery shut in 1956 and the buildings are now residential. There isn't much in the way of industrial units in the area so we were forced to look further afield'.

Their brew length is 6 barrels with three fermenters (one 2000 litres and two 1000 litres) but there is space to add more if necessary. It was the third fermenter that let Cliff do what he really wanted to do, which was to mature the beer after fermentation before putting it into bottles or casks. All of the beers are kept in the fermenter (which is sealed) for 7-8 days to allow the beer to mature. It is then put into casks and, depending on the type of beer, it is kept for between 2 and 6 weeks to mature further before the casks are finally sent out.

Around 85% of their beer is cask and the rest is bottled conditioned, which they do in house by hand assisted by their son, who is currently working with them. Bexley don't do keg. Cliff said 'There appears to be little demand for it in this area at the moment. The drinkers seem to be traditionalist, preferring amber, brown and copper coloured beers to golden ales and our porter, which was originally brewed as a seasonal, has really taken off. We brew this all year round'.

Their beer is taken by four of the five micro pubs in the region and the award winning, Robin Hood & Little John, has been a strong supporter from day one. They have regular deliveries to pubs around Thanet, Maidstone and Tonbridge but the pubs local to the brewery are dominated by M&B so there is little chance of being stocked. Locals can purchase the beer at Bexley and Chislehurst Farmers Markets, from the brewery each Friday lunchtime and twice a month at the brewery's bar (Saturday lunchtimes).

Besides their one-off beers (under the brand of Howbury), all of the names of their beers have local links. There are four beers in their core range: Golden Acre is named after , Redhouse is from the Arts & Craft movement in Bexley Heath, BOB is Bexley's Own Brew and Black Prince is a nearby inter section! In addition, the London Tasting Panel tasted their autumn seasonal, and a green hop beer made with East Kent Goldings and Bullion hops from a nearby hop farmer. The farmer only grows 3 acres of Bullion, a hop that was once used in massive amounts by Guinness. Bexley's next seasonal is Crooklog, a 5% ABV Old Ale that is designed especially for the winter months. Look out for it!

For more information on the brewery (and some good directions as to how to find them) visit : <http://bexleybrewery.co.uk/>. The London Tasting Panel's notes on the beers they tasted are as follows:

**Red house 4.2%**

Copper coloured best bitter with a comfortable blend of delicate roast and sweet orange marmalade. Finish is dry with a touch of chocolate, which is also present in the aroma.



**Golden Acre 4%**

This was Bexley's first beer. A smooth golden ale with perfumed hops and a hint of peach in the aroma. There is a biscuity sweetness, floral hops and a little citrus on the palate. The finish is bitter with spicy hops and a lingering dryness. It uses Maris Otter malt and a blend of Australian and American hops. The name comes from a small green in Bexley Village.

**Bullion 4.1%**

Dark gold beer using Bullion green hop. Cedar wood on the nose with some fresh peppery hops.

This carries into the flavour, which has biscuity sweetness and tropical fruit with a little bitterness and perfumed hop. The aftertaste that is lingering, dry and slightly spicy. The malts are Maris Otter, Crystal. The hops come from a nearby farm owned by Tom Hukins.

**Bob (Bexley's Own Bitter) 4.2%**

Pale brown beer with a balance of fudge, floral hop, stone fruit with a little bitterness. There is a growing dry bitterness in the finish with a marmalade character. The aroma is of caramel and fruity hops. Maris Otter, Crystal; Mutueke, Sovereign hops

**Old Mill 4.5%**

An easy drinking smooth brown autumn beer with touches of chocolate fudge in the palate that is balanced by some caramelised orange and tropical notes. The finish is dry with spicy hops and a little roast, which are also present on the nose. Maris Otter, dark crystal, crystal, chocolate malt. Golding hops.

**Black Prince 4.6%**

Brewed every couple of months, this dark brown porter has treacle on the nose with hints of dark roast, cedar and fruit. Flavour has dark mocha, damsons, citrus and toffee. Finish is dry with a little damson. The malts used are brown, chocolate, black and crystal.