

HEAD CHEFS

Convincing diners they can match beer with food seems to have gained traction, but getting more chefs cooking with it might be a different challenge, says **Susan Nowak**

BEER with food is beaut; beer with food is the new wine; but while beer flights alongside tasting menus are taking off, beer cookery, sadly, is rather in the doldrums.

So 'twas with hoppy heart I hied me to Devizes, capital of Wadworthshire, as the brewery has renamed it, to get down and dirty in the kitchen. Two hours later, I emerged triumphant with an orgasmic sticky toffee pudding enriched with 6X (4.3 per cent ABV) and small, but perfectly formed, wheat beer loaf to impress my friends.

In a state-of-the-art kitchen at the brewery, catering development manager Scott Ferguson has spent the past year devising cookery courses – some serious stuff for pub chefs, with fun versions for families.

Ranging from starters to puds, most have included at least one beer dish and, earlier this year, Wadworth launched its dedicated beer cookery courses for both pros and amateurs. They feature yums from Scott's new real ale recipe book – black pudding and bacon salad with IPA-poached egg, Farmer's Glory chicken with lemon and tarragon sauce, crispy squid with Bishop's Tipple chorizo salad, cranberry

and pecan crumble, and diet-defying Old Timer plum among the tempting treats.

"We've put together a seasonal recipe collection because some of our beers are quite seasonal," says Scott.

"It's about getting beer into recipes to add something to the dish, be it flavour or texture. It might be in a marinade for meat or fruit, cooking down beer to a reduction used in a sauce or glaze, a lively real ale in a light crisp batter...

"The past year was a real experiment to try to understand what pubs want, but we have deliberately incorporated beer. For instance, on a butchery demonstration day when they might learn to butcher a pig, we'll show them how to make sausages flavoured with beer."

Wadworth sales and marketing director Paul Sullivan says food has become the pub estate's big growth area, so it is a perfect way to promote its beers.

"In our managed houses and tenancies we're really trying to open up the beer and food



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conversation. I get very passionate about it, but the average Joe in the street just thinks pies and pints. Although we still have quite a way to go before people think of beer as a sophisticated alternative to wine."

But diners at the Barge Inn on the Kennet and Avon canal at Seend, five miles from the Devizes brewery, have already gone some of the way.

Manager Sarah Haynes showcases beer dishes, and suggests beer and food pairings from Wadworth's bottled Beer Kitchen range, including the award-winning Orange Peel Beer and Espresso Stout (not bottle-conditioned).

Several of the kitchen team have been on the courses, including her husband, Paul, the head chef, and youngest

chef Dan Gregory, who returned a convert.

"We use beer in a lot of our pies, the 6X (fruity bitter) with red meats, Horizon (a citrusy pale golden ale at 4 per cent) with chicken, and in our home-made chutneys," he says.

To prove it, he dished up a delicious beef potted in beer topped with marrow and a 6X chutney he'd made himself, followed by cod in the crispiest of beer batters, using cask ale from the bar.

At the Welbeck Estate in Sherwood Forest, a unique School of Artisan Food has created a virtuous circle of beer, bread, cheese, cider and meat on its curriculum.

At its heart is the Welbeck Abbey brewery, opened in June 2011, the last brewery set up by the late Dave Wickett. Head brewer at the fine 10-barrel micro is Dave's



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protégé, Claire Monk, who turned up at his Kelham Island brewery seeking a job, learned to brew and joined him on the Welbeck Project. It now does five brews a week, supplying a growing number of CAMRA-approved pubs.

"We produce four cask ales, Henrietta Golden ale (3.6 per cent), Portland Black porter (4.5 per cent), Red Feather Amber ale (3.9 per cent) and Cavendish (5 per cent), a citrusy blonde. We also do a monthly special," says Claire, who now has her own brewing apprentice, James Gladman.

She runs beer-and-cheese matching sessions with the dairy coordinator Lee-Anne Rennie, who also keeps a herd of goats. Pairings range from the "nutty, caramel aromas found in aged cheese and stouts" to "the relationship of rich barley to our favourite blues", which include Welbeck's noted Stichelton,

using unpasteurised cow's milk from the Welbeck estate.

One of the dairy graduates now produces a cheese with a beer-washed rind; students from the bakery visit the brewery to learn about the close link between brewing and bread making, then experiment with live barm in their dough. Beer also appears on butchery and charcuterie courses.

Cider and perry making is

tutored by Simon Reed, owner of Rough Old Wife Cidery

in Kent, who advises CAMRA on cider policy and also does publicity for Kent Beer Festival. Beer courses to link with the cider side are being considered.

It was a first for Simon when his cider appeared on an ice-cream-making course in a Bramley and dry cider sorbet. But his ciders, along with entire barrels of ale from the brewery, regularly find their way to Welbeck's main kitchen to flavour dishes for students and visitors.

"We mainly use game from the estate, such as venison and pheasants," said head of hospitality Gill Mason, who introduced Jamie Oliver to pasta with rabbit and beer sauce. "I tend to make casseroles that can be used in cobbles and pies – the beer gives a real depth of flavour."

Scott Ferguson's *A Taste of Wadworthshire*, price £6.50, with beer-and-food matching tips from head brewer Brian Yorston, who developed the Beer Kitchen collection, is available on the brewery website, where you will also find details of courses. For information on the Welbeck brewery and courses, visit www.schoolofartisanfood.org. Simon Reed also runs courses in Suffolk and his Kent cidery.



Susan Nowak writes CAMRA's *Good Pub Food* and has made many TV and radio appearances talking about cooking with beer

Here are two easy recipes from Scott Ferguson's *A Taste of Wadworthshire*:

Bishop's Tipple beer-battered Brie and cranberry relish

Serves 4

400g Brie
400ml Bishop's Tipple
100g plain flour plus extra for coating
sea salt
chilli powder
mixed salad leaves
olive oil

Slice Brie into four and marinate in half the beer overnight. Make batter by whisking the remaining beer and flour together, seasoning with salt and chilli powder.

Drain Brie and dust in flour. Coat in batter then deep-fry at 170°C-180°C for 1-2 minutes until crispy. Dress salad leaves with olive oil, arrange on a plate, top with the Brie and serve with cranberry relish.

Scallops with Farmer's Glory

Serves 2

1 small red chilli
half red pepper
juice of 1 lemon
50ml olive oil
100ml Farmer's Glory
2 drops of Tabasco sauce
pinch of fresh thyme
4 scallops in shells
butter
sea salt

Chop chilli and pepper finely. Mix lemon juice with chilli, pepper, olive oil and Farmer's Glory; add Tabasco and thyme.

Pour mix over the scallops in their shells and marinate in fridge for 20 minutes. Pre-heat oven to 200°C/400°F/gas mark 6; add a knob of butter and pinch of sea salt to scallops and bake for 4-5 minutes.