

Home brewing alive and

Birofilia 2010



During the memorable GNS Study Tour to Poland in 2008, three of our group were invited to judge beers submitted to the national craft and home brewers' competition. I was delighted to be asked to participate in this year's competition.

by **Ian Hornsey**

Accordingly, Bruce Awford and I met at Luton Airport at 0455 on 17th June in order to board our 0710 flight to Krakow. A couple of pints of Staropramen (no handpumps!) helped to hasten take-off time and before we knew it we were landing at the ancient Polish city.

Everything had been meticulously planned by competition organiser, Dr Andrzej Sadownik from the Food Technology Department at Warsaw University. We were met at the

airport, whisked to our accommodation at the beautiful Dwór Rychwald (a 19th century manor house) and thence to the nearby Heineken-owned Zywiec Brewery where we got straight down to the serious business of the preliminary judging of well over 100 beers. By 1300 Awford and I had started to wend our way through the 23 Scotch ales, 31 Baltic porters, and 29 milk stouts.

The competition, which has been running since 2003, coincides with a huge annual gathering of breweriana collectors and a beer festival in the grounds of the brewery. The event was the brainchild of Browamator, Poland's first homebrew supply company. With the tremendous increase in home-brewing activity in Poland over the last couple of decades, the event goes from strength to strength.

There is a set formula, with competitors asked to submit samples in six beer categories every year. Baltic Porter (which has historical importance in Poland, and is in

danger of 'disappearing') is always one of them, with the other five varying year on year. The idea is to choose styles from all over the world, thus serving to educate brewers about the tremendous diversity of beer. The 2010 choices were: Scotch Ale (Wee Heavy); Milk Stout; Weizenbock; Münchener Helles, and Belgian Pale Ale. Entries were whittled down in preliminary tasting sessions before finding the finalists and then the Champion beer in each category. These then went head to head to establish Grand Champion (Best of the Show).

Because of the unavoidable late arrival of one of the judges, we had to wade our way through 43 Münchener Helles samples – a fitting way to prepare for the final tasting session, I feel. To aid us with this task we thankfully had fellow judge Ralf Münch 'on our side'. Ralf, now a brewing consultant with world-wide clients, is a graduate of Weihenstephan (he was, in fact, one of the last students of Prof Narziss), and has worked for various German breweries. With his guidance we managed to select a set of very suitable finalists.

The other international judge this year was Rafał Kowalczyk (who was with us two years ago), management graduate and founder of Browarzyciel, a Warsaw-based company 'dedicated to everything related to beer'. He organises beer tastings, promotions, and writes about food/beer matchings, and by this time next year he will have his own microbrewery.

As we mingled with the crowds during our tasting breaks, we had the chance to sample the wares from a wide variety of continental brewers; beers being sold from small marquees. I managed to indulge myself in some interesting dark beers, and was particularly delighted to be able to reacquaint myself with Schlenkerla smoked beer. Also on offer was a magnificent smoked wheat beer from the same Bamberg brewery which the IBD Southern Section visited three years ago.

Talking to various people at this event, it was pretty obvious that Polish beer enthusiasts closely follow homebrewing/microbrewing

Acclaimed winner of Konkurs Piw Domowych, Dorota Chrapek with her Belgian style pale ale.



growing in Poland



Far left: The party getting started.

Left: Everything must go. As in the UK breweriana collectors will buy anything beery.



events here in the UK and I had the impression that what we are witnessing in Poland now bears certain resemblance to what was happening here during the exciting early days of CAMRA. There is, however one major difference; the festivities in Zywiec could not have taken place without the total support of a mega-brewery! Grupa Zywiec (GZ) is a subsidiary of Heineken and its President Christopher Barrow has gone out of his way to help the



organisers. He has been instrumental in helping with the imminent establishment of the Polish Homebrewers' Association. GZ is also doing its bit for brewing heritage by keeping the Browar Zamkowy (Bracki Castle Brewery), dating from 1846 in Cieszyn open complete with its traditional brewing equipment.

The beers that reached the final were all of

excellent standard and deciding between them was genuinely difficult. The Grand Champion, greeted with much acclaim, was the Belgian Pale Ale contributed by brewster Dorota Chrapek from Pogwizdów, near Cieszyn. As is now the custom, Dorota will get the chance to brew her beer commercially at Browar Zamkowy, and bottles will then be made available to the public.

All in all, a thoroughly enjoyable experience (apart from the 0-0 draw with Algeria), with especial thanks to our Polish hosts. You can be sure that the English contingent arrived home, in the words of Enid Blyton; "Tired but happy". ■

Above left: Overdoing things a little.

Far left: Rafal Kowalczyk and Bruce Awford take a sleepy break. Schlenkerla out of a bottle, Bruce?

Below far left: English judges make fools of themselves.

Above: Author Ian Hornsey about to get stuck in to some serious sampling.