

Finnish bar that will sell you a PUP...

And visiting a brewer who, after raising four children, calls the brewery her 'new baby'

- [More about beer in Finland](#)

Sometimes I hunt on foot. It takes me four minutes to walk to my current local, which serves an incomparable pint of Fuller's.

My CAMRA branch held its annual dinner there recently, and the air was thick with members' beer stories, from Ceské Budejovice to Boston.

People tell me that CAMRA is thick with Little Englanders - not in West London branch.

"And where have you been lately, Michael?" someone solicitously asked.

"Finland," I replied.

"And what did you drink?" I swallowed hard and admitted:

"Fuller's."

There was more, of course, but ESB was superb on stillage at the fifth anniversary get-together of the magazine Olut (Beer), my excuse for being in Finland.

This event, built round a seminar on beer culture, took place in the former students' union, a neo-Renaissance building that houses one of the best beer bars in Helsinki, Vanha Ylioppilastalo.

My own contribution was translated for the audience by CAMRA member Peter Ovell, a Bristolian of Finnish extraction who recently graduated from the University of Helsinki.

Peter's pamphlet on Finland's Indigenous Beer Culture is available from CAMRA HQ.

While at Vanha Ylioppilastalo, I also sampled for the first time the draught version of the sweetish, smooth, chocolatey Kellerbier from the PUP micro-brewery in Nokia.

There was also a creamy, grassy-tasting schnapps, distilled from the dark lager of the Plevna brewpub, in Tampere. Both of these breweries were featured in this page in December of 1995.

What was totally new to me at Vanha was the very hoppy and authentic Bitter, identified by the English word, from the Palvasalmi micro at Saarijaervi, near Jyvaeskylae, a regional capital in central Finland.

I took a 200-mile plane journey to Jyvaeskylae to take a closer look, along with the Editor of Olut, Unto Tikkanen, and the landlord of Vanha, Markku Korhonen.

From this small city, it was a drive 40 miles north-west through forestry country to the town of Saarijaervi (Highland Lake).

The town was in the 17th century called Palvasalmi, which indicates a channel between two lakes. Like all Finnish towns, it is actually between several lakes.

On the day of my journey, the sun was shining through screens of silver birches on to the water and geese were heading south from Lapland.

A Russian-looking, domed, wooden church signalled our arrival in the town. The brewer at Palvasalmi is 45-year-old Kirsti Ratinen.

She told me that, with the youngest of her four children now 10, she felt ready to take on a new responsibility.

"The brewery is my new baby," she explained.

A partner in the venture is her sister Maisa, whose husband died in an accident four years ago.

Maisa, 47, is in charge of sales, making 200-mile round-trips to deliver the beer. The two women's brothers are also involved.

One, Antti Haenninen a farmer, looks after the brewing equipment. Another, Markus, an economist, originally had the idea of a micro-brewery.

"Our grandmother home-brewed," Kirsti told me. "She even grew her own hops.

"She last made beer in the mid 1970s, and died in 1981. I suppose all of the family are beer lovers.

"Every summer, We would get together to home brew.

"When Maisa was suddenly widowed, we began to think about doing this commercially."

Maisa's husband, who was a salesman for Finnish wood, used to travel in Britain and bring home bottled ale.

Kirsti had developed a taste for British ale.

"As a matter of fact, I don't drink lager - my stomach doesn't like all that gas."

The sisters bought their equipment from Total Brewing, of Worcester, and spent a fortnight there learning to use it. Total Brewing's Martin Soden then spent a further couple of weeks in Finland.

He helped with formulations, though the sisters have gradually shaped their own beers.

They use British pale ale and chocolate malts and Finnish crystal, and the hops are Goldings, Fuggles and Cascades.

The 20-hectolitre brewhouse is in wood-clad stainless steel. It is in the basement garage of the home of Erkki and Maire Haenninen, parents of the sisters and brothers.

It is a brick-built house, in the centre of town. A sign outside says: Palvasalmi Real Ale (The last two words are rendered in English).

Alongside the brewhouse, a cosy tasting room, with redwood dadoes and dark green wallpaper, is decorated with old pictures of the town.

In summer, it is open from Wednesday, in winter only Friday and Saturday, at 6.30 in the evening.

There are four seats at the bar, three or four tables, and a selection of board games.

The beers are conditioned in the cask, but sometimes served under pressure.

There is no cellar, and casks cannot always be left on stillage in a bar that is not open every day.

The Bitter, at 1045-7 (4.5 per cent abv) has an orangey colour; a leafy aroma; and plenty of hop flavour and acidity. It has a good bitter attack, and long finish.

A more reddish beer of the same strength, maltier but well-balanced, is called Hermann, after a great-great grandfather.

A burgundy-to-black brew is called Valte, an allusion to a dark-haired gipsy. It has a gravity of 1056 (5.2 per cent); a black-treacle aroma; a rummy palate; and a smoky finish. I would style it as an Old Ale.

Kirsti told me it was inspired by a recipe from "Brew Your Own Real Ale at Home" (Wheeler and Protz).

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