

England's latest Ringwood yeast beers and other delights

Sixty or seventy small breweries in North America use the famously robust yeast that takes its name from Ringwood micro, in the town of the same name in the south of England. This yeast is noted for giving dry, orangey, flavors to the beers of St. Ambroise (Montreal, Canada), Shipyard (Portland, Maine) and Wild Goose (Cambridge, Maryland), for example.

Ringwood's founder, micro guru Peter Austin, originally fetched the yeast from the Hull Brewery, where he had previously worked, in the north of England. The Hull Brewery, a sizable regional, has long closed, but a new micro bears the name, and uses the yeast.

Hull is a port and fishing city, in East Yorkshire. I was there recently, and tasted its beers on their home territory. The new micro Hull Brewery has acquired a 1930s pub, the Red Lion, and placed it in the hands of former pro Rugby League player Colin Cooper. Round the walls are pictures of great moments in Rugby League.

Publican Cooper served me a burgundy-to-brown dark Mild: very smooth, with a chocolatey start, a lightly fruity middle and a leafy finish. At a typically modest 3.3 per cent alcohol by volume, an excellent example of the style. I liked a more chewy Amber, at 4.0, but was less impressed with the characteristically orangey Northern Pride, at 4.2.

While wandering in my native Britain, I enjoyed the malty, fruity, Feast Bitter (4.3), in the major northern city of Leeds, West Yorkshire. This beer is produced and served at a college pub called the Feast and Firkin, in a towered 1901 building that has previously served as a firehouse, police station and morgue.

At a pub called The Castle Vaults, in Shrewsbury (a historic town on the English side of the border with Wales), I tasted the very firm, dry, malty, Hobson's Best Bitter (3.8), from the nearby village of Cleobury Mortimer. Shrewsbury is a tourist town, well worth a visit. The castle offers British cask ales, Belgian, German, and Czech brews. It also has a somewhat adapted version of Mexican food; publican George Mitchell is married to a Californian.

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