



Beer of the Month Club

August 2006 Selections

Carnegie Porter 2004

Carlsberg Sverige AB, Stockholm, Sweden

5.5%abv \$6.50/500ml

Scandinavia has long been an important trading partner for Scotland, which has been isolated from the rest of Europe at various times by a belligerent England, as well as various other political and religious differences over the centuries. In the late 1700 and early 1800's, when Scotland was ruled by Catholic Kings and Queens, Protestant Scots were even more reliant on trade with their similarly Protestant neighbors in the Baltic, as well as the newly formed United States. Due to severe religious discrimination, many prominent Scots families sent the younger generations overseas, if the families themselves didn't leave altogether. It was at this time that one of the most famous Scottish merchant families of all time began their spread around the world, and the Carnegie dynasty was truly born. One of the most famous sons of that family landed in the fledgling US. Andrew Carnegie would go on to become one of the most important industrialists in the world, and ultimately the greatest philanthropist of all time (until the recent marriage of the Gates and Buffett fortunes for philanthropic pursuits). But, more important to our tale here is the story of Andrew's cousin David, who was sent from the family home in Scotland to Gothenburg, Sweden, to work in his uncle's shipping business. One of the very first things that Carnegie noticed about his new home was the lack of good beer – Porter, to be exact, which was far and away the most popular style in the British Isles and United States at the time. With no other option, he purchased an old sugar refinery and brewery building in Gothenburg, and began brewing his Carnegie Porter in 1836. In the early 1900's, Carnegie and another regional brewer called Pripp's combined forces to become the largest brewer in Scandinavia. In more recent times, the brewery was taken over by the Danish firm Carlsberg's Swedish arm, and is now brewed in a state-of-the-art facility just outside Stockholm.

Porter, as a style of ale, reached its zenith of popularity around the time of the founding of our country. From the early to mid-1700's through the end of the 1800's, Porter was by far the most popular style of beer in all of the English speaking countries, and was becoming increasingly popular in Scandinavia and the Baltic States of eastern Europe. By the late 1700's, the style was so popular and important that most breweries made anywhere from two to four different Porters of varying weights and strengths. This is when breweries began to differentiate between their products by adding descriptive terms to their labels, such as 'Taddy Porter' to describe a lighter style, and 'Stout Porter' for their heaviest effort. Over time, the latter dropped the Porter designation from their labels, and are now known as Stouts, although in some of the more far-flung Porter brewing regions, the term Stout was never appropriated. By today's terminology, the Carnegie Porter would qualify as a Stout. Carnegie's version is brewed today as it always was, with dark and chocolate malts imported from Scotland and England, and the traditional Scottish and English hops, albeit these are augmented these days with Swedish-grown eastern European varieties of hop, as well. While the Carnegie Porter is not bottle-conditioned (meaning re-fermented in the bottle, as most age-worthy ales are), it is a vintage-dated beer, and is well known for its aging potential, taking on a rather red wine-like mellowness and fruitiness with up to ten years of bottle age. Like most dark ales, it is best served somewhat warmer than refrigerator temperatures, in a tall pint glass.

The Carnegie Porter pours with a deep, coffee color, and a creamy, foamy brown head. It has classic Stout aromas of coffee, toffee, chocolate, and roasted grains. The palate is quite rich, with all of the roasty flavors that come in the nose, but also with a depth of red and black fruits that mellow to an almost Madeira-like subtlety with age in the bottle. The finish is long, and quite smooth, with a pleasant herbal kick from the hops. Try it on a cool summer evening on its own, or age a bottle for a year or two, then try it with roasted game or strong English cheese.

Meantime IPA

The Greenwich Brewery, Greenwich, England

7.5%abv \$9.50/750ml

In 1675, King Charles II of England commissioned the building of the Royal Observatory on a hilltop in the small village of Greenwich, just to the east of London. The Observatory was one of the most important scientific centers of England and all of Western Europe for much of the next two hundred years. At the end of the 1600's, one of the most pressing and important advances that scientists were pursuing was the creation of a way to tell time while at sea (pendulum-driven clocks do not work aboard ships rocking in sea swells!), and thus a way of detecting and measuring longitude. When the British beat the French to this discovery, they made the Royal Observatory at Greenwich the site of the 0° Meridian, also known as the Greenwich Mean Line, and the beginnings of 200 years of naval dominance and world exploration were truly launched.

In 1999, Alastair Hook, a brewer, beer writer, and brewing visionary, began assembling around himself a group of like-minded friends and family to launch a new brewery. Following the lead of several ground-breaking American micro-brewers, Hook began by amassing investment capital, found the ideal brewery location in Greenwich, and in early 2000, opened the most complete and expensive new brewery in England in well over 100 years. While the idea of bringing back to England a true, high quality, small-batch brewery was not new, no one to this point had put forth the same effort and dedication to the craft that Alastair was prepared to do. Within one year, accolades from the trade and the press began rolling in, and several of Britain's largest and most influential restaurant and retail chains began coming to Meantime to contract brews for their own premises. While this contract business provided needed capital to the young company, it was not the direction that they ultimately wanted to follow. As the business grew and expanded its facilities over the next few years, much of the contract brewing operations were sold off, primarily to British brewing giant Greene King, and the company was able to focus on its own line of award-winning brews.

As we have discussed before (pardon my repetition, but we do have some new Club Members since the last time this was stated!), the India Pale Ale, or IPA, is a style of beer that was invented in Colonial London. In the late 1600's, as the British Empire spread its influence around the world, the need for beer that would survive long journeys aboard ship, in and out of tropical climates, became huge. The types of pale ales and porters commonly brewed at the time had neither the alcoholic strength, nor preservatives, required to survive such strenuous shipping conditions. By brewing a beer with higher alcoholic content, and three or more times the amount of hops traditionally used (hops being a natural preservative), the brewers of London were able to make a product that not only survived such harsh conditions, but was ultimately more crisp and refreshing, and thus more suited to the tropical climes where they were being shipped to. The home of the IPA was originally the East Side of London, downstream from the London Bridge, where a majority of the British overseas trade was based. This makes Greenwich Brewing Company the natural source for traditional IPA, and, in fact, they are the only producer in England now making traditionally-styled India Pale Ale. Produced from a selection of British Pale and Crystal malts, it is lavishly hopped with both English Goldings and Fuggles hops at three points in the brewing process, with an ultimate total of about two pounds of hops to each barrel of ale. To enjoy it best, pour it into a traditional pint glass very slowly, to decant the beer from the heavier lees in the bottle, and start with it at a fairly cold temperature, say 45°F or so, but allow the beer to come up in temp as you enjoy the first glass. I found my ideal temp at about 52°F, but this will vary according to personal tastes.

The Meantime IPA pours into the glass with a dark, and slightly cloudy, deep orange color and a pale, lacy head. The aromas are both more malt-driven than one would expect of a West Coast IPA, while at the same time more hop-driven that just about any other British beer in recent memory. Deep citrus and pit fruit scents are balanced by hints of pine and herbs. The palate is quite rich for a pale beer of this weight, with an impeccable balance of sweet, roasty malt notes, and bitter, citric hop flavors. The balance and intensity of flavor echo all the way through the end, making for an intensely drinkable IPA that is far from the boundary-pushing style so prevalent in American brewing at the moment. Try this most traditional of IPA's with your favorite pub grub, such as Bangers&Mash or Steak & Kidney Pie, or go even more traditional, and pair it with your favorite Indian curry.