

THE MARCH MEETING

BEER

By Jack Woolford

On 12th March Councillor Frank Woodbridge, Leader of Dover District Council who was to have spoken on 'Life in Dover in World War 2', gave ample notice of unavoidable absence abroad. Vice-Chairman Derek Leach suggested contacting Faversham Brewery's Shepherd Neame for a substitute speaker. Shepherd Neame immediately nominated Chairman Ian Dixon who compiled an address on a sophisticated combination of video projector and CD Rom but also became unavailable two nights before 12 March. So Head Brewer (no less) Julian Herrington was drafted (draughted?) in, brought with him ample samples, to our surprised delight, and improvised the Dover Society's most unusual address ever.

After appointing four eager volunteers (including Chairman Jeremy Cope and Vice-Chairman Derek Leach) to distribute samples, and briefly lauding the purity of Faversham's water supply from artesian wells, so pure that it had made Faversham's population second only to that of London in the reign of Queen Mathilda (1135-54 on-and-off), Mr Herrington cheerfully told a tale of woe.

National production of beer 1977-99 was down from 40 million barrels a year to only 36 million. What had been formerly bought and downed in pubs was increasingly sold in off-licenses, including supermarkets, and drunk at home. Much more wine was drunk, particularly in restaurants rather than pubs. There was also 'Red Square' (whatever that is). The word 'smuggling' was heard from the audience and Mr Herrington agreed that this was a special problem in Kent although it was now decreasing because of increased ferry and tunnel fares. Germany

had a similar problem because of the higher drink duties in Scandinavia and Finland.

During the same years the number of national brewers had shrunk from seven to four and of these only one, Scotco, was wholly owned in the UK. It had 34% of the market. Others, including Bass and Whitbread, now Belgian-owned, had 36%.

Regional breweries, including Shepherd Neame which could brew only 200,000 barrels a year, had only 14% and it was consequently difficult to make money. Because of the economies of scale their pint was 10p dearer. Their fermenters brewed only 500 rather than 2000 barrels, but raw materials, labour, customs and VAT were no cheaper.

Marketing regional brands like Shepherd Neame's 'Spitfire' nationally on TV was prohibitively expensive. Eighteen regional breweries had closed since 1997. One reason had been the continental lager trend. It was more refreshing and better-brewed though the gap had now been closed here by independent inspection. Beer and stout drinking had halved. Lager was the preference of the younger generation.

Although by this time the audience was not exactly in tears, before speaking lyrically on the actual brewing process itself, Mr Herrington unleasht his volunteer pourers with a round of samples of 'Early Bird', a lightly golden brew starring East Kent Golding hops. Some of them (no names, no pack-drill) poured much more generously than others.

'Early Bird' was followed by 'Bishop's Finger', a darker, stronger brew (5.4% alcohol) starring crystal malt. Meanwhile Mr Herrington spoke of mash tuns and malting, barley and liquor, cask beer and keg beer, finings and pasteurising, carbon dioxide and nitrogen, 'Kingfisher' lager and beer from Bangalore.

It was not only a home-brewer of 30 years standing like me (also, hint hint, a connoisseur of bitter whose favourite is Shepherd Neame's 'Spitfire') who relished this copious flow of inside information. The level of conversation in the body of the hall waxed from murmurings to competitive volume and Mr Herrington graciously passed from speaking to answering the flood

of questions from every part of the floor. Acknowledging the praise which surged from the Chairman and John Owen, he told us to help ourselves to the remaining bottles and retired to tumultuous applause. I myself managed to seize the last bottle of 'Bishops Finger'. Thanks (*hic*), Mr Herrington. Thanks also to Cllr. Woodbridge who has, of course, been re-booked for 14 January 2002.

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**A talk by Dr. Frank Panton,
12th March 2001**

A TALE FROM CANTERBURY

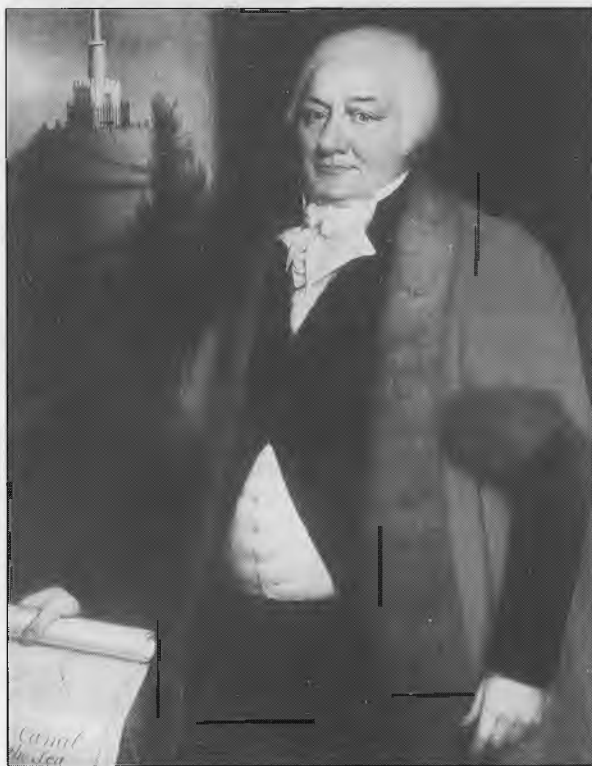
Reported by Maurice Wilson

James Simmons was born in Canterbury on the 21st January 1741 and became a pupil at King's School from 1750 to 1756. Then he went to London to serve an apprenticeship as a stationer, becoming a Freeman of the City before returning to Canterbury in 1767 where he also became a Freeman of Canterbury by virtue of his father being one before him, at the time of James' birth.

So with his London apprenticeship, James set about founding a stationers' and printing business. His aim was always high and he attacked with determination and skill, his primary aim being to provide Canterbury and East Kent with a quality newspaper. Naturally he was opposed by established printers and stationers in Canterbury who did their best to spoil his plans, but after one or two initial setbacks he started the Kentish Gazette on 26th May, 1768. This paper is still being published today.

The story of this man, James Simmons, one time stationer, publisher, patent medicine seller, librarian, banker, councillor, alderman, mayor, MP, was the very interesting subject of Dr. Panton's talk to us as the second part of our meeting on the 12th March.

In those days, the late 1760s, the Gazette was published twice a week and at an initial cost of 2d. per copy the broadsheet of



James Simmons