

The Faces Behind Our Food

Interview with Rory Walker, the Borough Brewery

Interviewer: Anna Clayton

Johnny Bean and Lauren Walker also present

Duration: 16 minutes.23 seconds

Date and time: 12th September 2016 1:30pm

Location: Rear of Brook Street, Lancaster, LA1 1SL

Time (minutes.seconds)	Interview transcript
0.04	<p>[Ok, the batteries are full now]</p> <p>So Rory (laughs), can you tell us a little about yourself and the Borough Brewery?</p> <p>Yep, we started the Borough Brewery in about February 2013, although we didn't really get our beers on the bar regularly at the Borough for about six months as we had to develop our business plan, get equipment, and develop our recipes.</p>
0.31	<p>But since then we have brewing pretty much every week for the last three years. We are a really small brewery, producing about 20 casks a week, so we have to brew regularly to meet demand. I make three core beers. One is a pale (which is 3.7%), with lots of American hops – the big sort of full flavoured, grape fruity ones [mmm]. I've got a Bitter, which is a traditional English Bitter style at 4%. And I do a seasonal dark. At the moment we have got a summertime dark which is 4%, and we do a wintertime dark which is 5% - it's more like a stout, a bit heavier. And then I, ummm, make lots of different beers as well.</p>
1.19	<p>So, on the bar at the Borough, ummm, at the Borough there is always a fourth pump on from the Borough Brewery. And at the moment we've got a Kilimanjaro, which is an, ummm, an ale, that's a sort of session bitter. A Kilimanjaro, ah yeah... It's called Kilimanjaro because a gentleman called Shaun Gash has just pushed himself up Kilimanjaro in a wheel chair [oh wow] – raising money for a local charity. So, the Borough and the Borough Brewery have been able to support him as he went. But I also do... I've also got a RyePA in the store room and a golden which is a nice, crisp, golden-coloured beer with lots of caramel malts which make a really nice flavour [mhmm, OK].</p>
1.51	<p>So, what led you to brewing beer? What key events have resulted in you having your own, urgh, microbrewery and soon pub!</p>
2.00	<p>Yeah, yeah, ummm, well, about five or six years ago I was home brewing with fiends. On a couple of occasions we, urgh, started home brewing because the weather was, ummm, so appalling that we couldn't go for a walk in the lakes. So I always remember it as just being that we were meant to be going for a walk on Saturday and, as the Lancastrian weather is, we were like "no, it's too wet to go for a walk". So one of the guys was like "oh, let's go and brew some beer!" And urgh, it went from there really. And then I was trying to set up a brewery with</p>

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	<p>those friends but life took its, life took its route, and they both moved away and set up in different places. At the time I was working on the bar at the Borough - to pay my bills really. And Hannah, who runs the Borough, said “come and have a chat with us about doing it together”. That was November 2012. So, I had been trying with friends for a couple of years. And then, within about six months of that conversation with Hannah, we were up and going.</p>
3.04	<p>So why did you move out of the Borough? Urgh, I was brewing for three years in the cellar of the Borough. The Borough is a fantastic, busy pub. And, urgh, I’d managed to find myself a little corner in there when we set up. But, ummm, that was in negotiation with the chefs, and everyone else that uses a really busy space down there. And then urgh, I was ready to go. And I think everyone was ready for me to leave (laughs). We also wanted to expand. As I said, we are about as small as any commercial microbrewery is really, brewing just 20 casks a week. And ideally we’d grow a bit and have some extra people working with us as well. In order to do that, we had to find a new space. So we found a new space and got a new fermentation tank - so we could make more beer! [Great].</p>
3.56	<p>So, your beer is vegan– so it doesn’t [yep] contain any animal products. So what goes into other beers and why have you chosen make vegan beer? I chose to make vegan beer because vegan beer just generally tastes better. It, the product that goes in to make beer non-vegan is a product called isinglass, which is a, ummm, product brought from the swim bladder of fish, generally sturgeon fish, and it just helps, ummm, most breweries to standardise their beer. So they can brew it and send it away and it will still come out looking as they want it too. But, urgh, lots of my favourite breweries, including my own, don’t use it. And ummm I think it shows in the taste. Yeah. [OK].</p>
4.48	<p>So, what else goes into your beer and where do you get your ingredients from? Urgh, water is the main ingredient. We use mains’ water but we treat the, what we would then call, ‘liquor’. When you’re turning it into beer, just to make it a little more complicated, it’s called liquor rather than water. And, if we’re making a pale, we can add certain salts and ummm organic compounds to it to make it more suitable to pale flavours. And if we are making a dark then we can add different things to it as well. So we treat the water a little bit to make it ideal for the beer that we are making.</p>
5.24	<p>I get my malts from Fawcett Malts in Yorkshire, in Castleford, which is one of the oldest urgh family run UK companies that are in existence in the UK. It is also about five minutes from where my dad went to, urgh, school. Urgh, so that’s quite nice. So, sometimes I forget to order the malts and I have to go and pick it up. So I can get to go and see my grandma (laughs) and walk past where my dad was from. Which is nice; it makes the best situation out of a bad situation.</p>
5.58	<p>We use a variety of hops. The pale that I do (the 3.7%) uses American hops. And the, urgh, style of hops that are very popular at the moment are ones with big fruity and huge flavours -lots of, ummm cloy, sort of fruit and pine forests. All</p>

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	those sorts of flavours tend to come from parts of the world that don't have a climate like England – ummm, so lots of sunshine and lots of dry, arid soil [OK] generally.
6.29	Ummm, the UK makes fantastic hops that we use in our bitter and our darks use UK hops predominantly. And that's the sort of style of hop that the UK creates generally around like Kent and that sort of place. More earthy, sort of more sensible, sort of, non, non- pokey hop. (laughs)
6.59	Ok, and is there anything else? And then we add, ummm, we use yeast as well. We use dehydrated yeast; we don't have our own culture of yeast. One of the reasons for that is because we make vegan beer. What the isinglass does is clear the beer, and ummm in order to get our beer clear we use a specific type of yeast that creates a very clear type of beer. Umm, so we use, ummm, it's a bit boring, but its Safale 04, a German based yeast manufacturer. But it's great. (laughs) And that's pretty much it. The rest is time, temperatures and a bit of process. [OK, Ok do you want to tell us?]
7.41	So how do you make the, a general or an average beer? And how long does this take? Describe your day. Yeah, ummm, I should know this by heart shouldn't I? But why am I looking for my notes? Ummm, it takes about seven hours. You heat the water up and there is a mash tun which is like a big tea bag. So the barley grain goes into the mash tun and it mashes like a tea bag mashes. It steeps in the water for about an hour and a half. And then, as I draw the, urgh, liquid out, now called wort, (its no longer called liquor), I put it into another boiler which we call the copper (because they used to be made of copper rather than stainless steel).
8.45	But then I'll be rinsing more liquor water through the mash in order to rinse out all of the sugars and all of the flavours (sound of train passing) that are in the mash. To fill up the copper basically is the idea. That's probably about half way through the day. And then, we bring the copper up to boil, and we put in the hops. Ummm, so at the beginning if you put in hops, you tend to put in the bittering hops because it's a more efficient way of getting the flavour out of the hops to create a bitter flavour. And then towards the end of the boil (which I normally boil for an hour and a half). Towards the end of the boil you, ummm, add in some flavouring aroma hops. And because they have only been in for maybe three to five minutes, they don't have the effect of turning into a bittering flavour – you'll get the, a more wider group of flavours.
9.37	But, you also pick the hops specific to the job you want it to do [hmmm]. So, you don't put in a delicate hop at the beginning because its just going to disappear. You put in the really pokey ones at the beginning and the more delicate ones, or the ones more suited to a bigger flavour, at the end. And then you cool it down really quickly - it goes from about 100+ degrees of boiling ummm, boiling beer to about 23 degrees through a counter flow chiller, ummm into a fermentation tank. Because you are about to add the yeast and the yeast would just die if you put it in at a really hot temperature -so you want to bring it down really quickly and put

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	<p>it into the fermentation tank. Add the yeast, set the temperature, chillers, set the temperature on the chillers so that the yeast doesn't create too much heat and hurt itself (and hurt your beer), ummm and then you leave it for about a week. It ferments for about five days and then you put the chillers on for 48 hours and it just makes any, any remaining yeast just go dormant, drop out. Put it into a cask; seal the cask; put the cask into storage; leave the cask for about a week just to condition- urgh, to round off any flavours and just to make it a nice sort of well-balanced beer, and then it's ready for service. [OK] (laughs).</p>
10.41	<p>So, based on your experience of trying to set up your own microbrewery (it's taken you quite a long time), do you have any advice for other younger people who want to establish their own food or drink business?</p>
10.54	<p>(sound of pages turning) Urgh, yeah, urgh Lancaster is a brilliant place to be setting up businesses. There are a lot of people open to supplying or supporting people of any ages in setting up, setting up businesses- particularly within the food market I think. I would say to, what helped me a lot, was ummm having done a lot of research prior to actually becoming commercially active. Partly because, that was drinking beer, but also because the brewing industry locally is a really sort of friendly and supportive industry where I'd go up and introduce myself to local brewers and say 'I'm thinking of setting up on your doorstep, can you tell me how you do what you do?' And they would tell me how they do what they do, which, I don't suppose there are many other industries where people do that?</p>
11.52	<p>So: do your research and know your market. Ummm, unless you start with a lot of money, you are going to have to work doubly hard. (sound of train) And, I would ummm also say, keep your costs low and grow gradually. Because one of the dangers of starting a business is not keeping your costs low, and not having the growth you expect to have or not having the sales you expect to have and then you run into problems straight away. So, try and be realistic about, ummm, how it's going to go and then good luck! [OK]</p>
12.31	<p>Are there any other opportunities or challenges facing you and your business that we haven't covered?</p> <p>Ummm, not, no, not for... We're looking, we're looking good at the moment. Things are looking well. We have just moved out of the cellar in the Borough, moved into a nice new home. Our sales have been good from day one and we are confident that with our expanded capacity then we will continue to look good and to grow. Ummm, we are going to do that by offering different products and maintaining our core products as well, but sort of expanding what we offer.</p>
13.09	<p>Ummm, I do think, one of the things that I really struggled with when I was setting up prior to working with the Borough, was, ummm, finding space to be able to... ummm, well it was basically making the jump from my kitchen - brewing in my kitchen - to a commercial space that we could, we could just use to make the jump. There isn't really the provision in Lancaster for, ummm, it doesn't, it shouldn't, it doesn't have to be fancy it just has to be somewhere you can go, maybe for a year and get a cheap lease, and apply your trade and see how it</p>

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	<p>goes. I think that would be really good. [OK]. That's it's.</p>
<p>13.55</p>	<p>And what about, you've just bought a pub [yep]. Do you want to tell us a liittle about that?[yeah yeah] And what opportunities that gives you?</p> <p>Ummmm, so we've just, myself and the people that I run the brewery with, from the Borough, have just bought the Britannia on Ullswater Road, which we're really happy with. It's a great pub and it's got a great history, and we are just really looking forward to getting stuck in and ummm putting our mark on it and opening the doors. Ummmm it's going to be mainly, mainly a tap for the brewery, so we'll be serving what the brewery has to offer, but we are also going to bring in really great regional beers and a great selection of wines and spirits – something a little bit different. Ummmm, and yeah, and some lovely pizzas as well, that's what we are planning [Pizza?] Yeah, yeah. Vegan, gluten free, everything...[sounds good] yep (laughs).</p>
<p>14.53</p>	<p>Ummmm, I, there is one more question that I would like... So what's the difference between (sound of fridge) your beer and that which is produced on mass, or on a larger scale? Are there any key things you could bring out?</p> <p>Not rea...no urgh, no urgh, yeah, no... It's pretty much the same process from me brewing in my kitchen, to brewing in a cellar, to brewing here, to somebody that's brewing, that's producing a hundred times more than we are. People used to make beer over a wood fire in their mud hut 300 years ago. And although we have like refined the process and have got much better ingredients, and we've probably got, we've got a much better process now, it's the same as it was. Which I think has a sort of nice appeal for me; you can perfect the sort of, bits of it, but generally it's an age old tradition.</p>
<p>15.50</p>	<p>But the beers that we are drinking today are like the best beers that anybody in the world has ever drunk. Like, they kind of nailed wine a few hundred years ago and they have been making that as they have. But the beers we are drinking today are literally some of the best beers that have ever been made- every time you drink a pint of beer. And so you've got to make sure it's a good beer. Cause otherwise you're just wasting the opportunity! (laughs)</p> <p>OK, thank you. I have no other questions. Sooo...[thank you very much]. [you just press the stop button, alright...]</p>