

Cask Ale in Pittsburgh

On the Pubnetwork™

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AND THE BARSTOOL OF ED VIDUNAS

Posted: April 2009

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Cask conditioned ale can be found at all of the brewpubs although seldom at the Penn and seasonal at John Harvard's. Local people except for John Harvard's and Rock Bottom being tied to corporations own all the places below. Fat Head's, Piper's, Map Room and some of the Sharpe Edge taverns serve cask on a regular basis. Other taverns have installed an engine or two but they seldom last. I have more about cask ale below.

Brewpubs & Bars Serving Cask Ale at one time, or, perhaps, another

Church Brew Works (Brewpub & Restaurant)

3525 Liberty Ave at 36th St

Pittsburgh (Lawrenceville) 15201

Phone: 412 688 8200, Web: www.churchbrew.com/

This brewpub has one engine usually serving an English Brown or Pale Ale. Although this brewery makes some higher gravity continental beers, the English versions are normal for their style; coming in around 5% by volume. Beer Styles: Predominantly English and German with Belgium at times. Look for Pipe Organ Pale on cask.

East End Brewing Company (Brewery, not a brew-pub)

6923 Susquehanna St

Pittsburgh (Homewood) 15208

Phone: 412 537 2327 (-BEER), Web: <http://www.eastendbrewing.com>

The East End Brewery is not a brewpub but a small regional brewing company. The beers of Scott Smith can be found in many local establishments in addition to those listed here. It is worth looking at Scott Smith's site as one can pop in at certain times to take home a growler. Opened in 2005 the beer styles are English & Belgium style beers. As for his cask ale, look for Fat Gary Nut Brown (3.7%) and Pedal Pale Ale (?). He recently came out with a Scottish-Mile ale (?). Look for more to come.

Fat Heads South Shore Saloon (Bar & Restaurant)

1805 E Carson St just east of South 18th St

Pittsburgh (South Side) 15203

Phone 412-431-7433, Web: <http://www.fatheads.com>

On Pittsburgh's South Side, it has one beer engine and it gets a workout. The only time it's off is when we finish it and they need time to replace it. Every so often it's Firkin Friday when they put a cask on the bar and serve it using gravity. The beer menu (39+ taps) is dominated by US Microbrews and the cask is usually from US brewers.

Map Room (Bar)

1126 S. Braddock Ave between W Hutchinson Ave and Sanders St
Pittsburgh (Regent Square) 15218-1238
Phone: 412 371 1955, Web: None

They have one beer-engine serving Scott Smith's East End Brewery's ale exclusively on cask. This is a nice pub that does things right and it is good for beer.

North Country Brewing (Brew-pub & Restaurant)

141 South Main St
Slippery Rock (Butler County) 16057
Phone: 724 794 2337, Web: <http://www.northcountrybrewing.com>

This is the only place that I have listed in my site that is NOT in the Pittsburgh area. Others up north may be doing cask ale but I have not included them here. Sean McIntyre (formerly of Valhalla, Pittsburgh) is the brewer and does a full range of styles. They have one beer engine incorporating a sparkler. They supple Piper's Pub with cask ale.

Penn Brewery (Brewpub & Restaurant)

Troy Hill Road & Vinial St
Pittsburgh (North Side) 15212
Phone: 412 237 9402 for the bar Fax 412 237 9406, Web: <http://www.pennbrew.com>

I am getting ready to delete the Penn from this page on cask ale in Pittsburgh. They no longer brew on site as of the end of February 2009 and although they are talking about doing so once more it is unlikely that they will never do cask beer. We shall see.

Piper's Pub (pub) NO SPARKLERS

1828 E Carson St between South 18th & South 19th Streets
Pittsburgh (South Side) 15203
Phone 412 381 3977, Web: <http://www.piperspub.com>

Drew installed three beer engines in May 2008 and he is committed in doing things right. He has casks conditioning so that when one is finished another is ready to go. The cask ales here come from local breweries. Initially from East End and North Country, look for beers from the other brewpubs to follow. For the most part, all cask ale in Pittsburgh goes through a sparkler but Piper's does not use one. More about the buggers below. Along with Drew, there are two cellar men working with him, Tim and Jonny Q.

Rivertowne Pour House (Brew-pub & Restaurant)

312 Center Road at Beatty Road
Monroeville, Pa. 15146
Phone: 412 372 8199, Web: <http://myrivertowne.com>

The sparkler is in use with the one beer engine. The brewers are tops in their craft so a delicious beer can be expected whether cask or draft. You will find about 20 on tap and a nice range of English in the pump.

Rock Bottom Brewery (Brew-pub & Restaurant)

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171 E Bridge Street (under the Homestead – Grays Bridge)
Homestead (The Waterfront), Pa. 15120

Phone 412 462 2739 Fax 412 462 4514, Web: <http://www.rockbottom.com>

Rock Bottom has two engines for their English Ales and they are just what you would find in the UK. They only serve one cask at a time and when that is finished the next one may not go one for a day or two. The gravity for the cask ales are normally under 5% as typically found in English pubs.

Beer Style: English with some German

Sharp Edge Creek House (Bar & Restaurant)

288 W Steuben St Rt. 60 (Crafton) 1520

Phone: 412- 922 8118, Fax: 412 922 3603, Web: <http://www.sharpedgebeer.com>

Only one engine here but it always has a cask working.

Sharp Edge Emporium (Bar & Restaurant)

302 S. St Clair St between Balm Blvd. and Friendship Ave (E Liberty) 15

Phone: 412 661 3537, Fax: 412 661 2713 Web: see above

Two engines stand on duty here and usually one is working but both have been called to action at times. Although they have had both working expect to find only one dispensing beer. They seldom run dry of cask ale here.

The Sharp Edge is a major player for cask in Pittsburgh. The Emporium and Creek House has 50 regular taps and about half of them are Belgium but the casks are US Micros.

Yes, I do know that I have omitted the Sewickley & Peters locations. Stay riveted to this site for up-dates.

Distributors Supplying Cask Ale

A.M. Lutheran Distributors, Inc. West Mifflin was sold to Frank Fuhrer

<http://www.fuhrerwholesale.com/> of the South Side in late 2008. No word yet as to what is going to happen to the brands.

Vecenie Distributing Co. Millvale Web: <http://www.beersince1933.com> (They sell to the public)

Distributors hold cask ale promotions at area bars from time to time. The bars listed above try to serve cask ale all the time while others not listed have it only for a promotion. Although a few of the brewpubs that served cask ale have closed, it seems that cask is far from dead in Pittsburgh. I like to think that I am helping. As more bars put it on for a night they may be willing to keep it on. But it does need customer support.

Cask Ale Notes

Taverns and brewpubs serve from metal containers but from time to time the beer can be in the wood. Unless the beer is served with gravity it is dispensed with a vacuum (created when the bartender pulls the handle) and almost always with a sparkler. I think sparklers

change the true taste of the beer, but that's my opinion. I think the owners think you have to use sparklers but you do not. They do force a head on the beer and there is nothing wrong (cough-cough) with that. I think I just drink too much in Southern England.

Here's a true story, boys and girls. In merry old England the word meaning to pull was draught. The draught horse is the primary example. So is drawing water from a well. The act of pulling the handle on a beer engine is a draughting operation. Maybe that's why so many draftsmen (of which I am one) drink?

True cask ale is a living beer. It is not pasteurized or kept too cold as the yeast is performing a secondary fermentation. Cask ale must be allowed to settle before serving. That allows the yeast and other solids to drop to the bottom of the cask. To help this along a cellar-man would add finings to the ale. The yeast in the ale is attracted to the finings and fall (called flocculation) under their combined weight. Cask ale when served should always be bright. Living beer has B vitamins that are good for us and drinking cask ale in moderation will help keep you regular.

Cask ale is not the same as beers served with nitrogen gas. Guinness and other brands that have a black utter for a spigot are served with nitro. The combination of nitrogen and carbon dioxide produces a creamy-smooth head but sometimes with a washed-out taste. This works well in Guinness and other dark ales but I think it takes away from Ordinary Bitter. But that just may be my tongue talking!

I will try and keep abreast of who is dispensing cask ale in the burgh but if I have missed something or you just want to chew me out then mail me at my address on my home page. For other sources of information on cask ale see my links on my Bar Buddies page.

The Swan Neck and Sparkler

The original beer engines had a spigot that allowed a lot of beer to pass through without being agitated. A good example of this can be found at the Churchill Arms in London. If done right a bartender could draw a pint with two pulls and the beer would be spot on. The Swan Neck and the sparkler were developed for a specific type of beer. The sparkler is a little white aerator at the tip of a swan neck. It acts like the aerator on your kitchen sink. It is made to disrupt the flow so that a head is produced, even if the beer is not supposed to have one. The sparkler can be adjusted (not everyone knows this) tight or loose for different ales.

Beer in England for use with a swan neck and sparkler is different than what it would be if served the "old way". It is made with a bit more bitterness. Beer forced through a sparkler (similar to your kitchen faucet) has an artificial head created. This agitation and aeration allows the bitterness to disburse through the head and provide aroma for the drinker. The trade-off is that the bitterness is now lacking in the taste. I don't think the Pittsburgh brewers alter their beer for this.

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The swan neck is thinner than the old spigots and helps restrict flow. This will give a larger than normal head even if the sparkler is not used. The neck also allows the sparkler to be placed down near the bottom of the glass. Not all bartenders do this but either way you get an induced head.

Not all beer should go through a sparkler. Actually none should; but that's my opinion. I can tell a difference and I do not prefer the bugger. Some bartenders will remove it and other will not. Tipping helps. Unfortunately all of the beer engines I have seen in the States have been with a swan neck. May the Churchill Arms never give up!

Alex Hall's Real Ale Page is good to find cask all everywhere www.cask-ale.co.uk
Beer Travelers have a good site worth looking into as they have an article that printed in Ale Street News in 1997:
http://www.beertravlers.com/indexes/wateringholes/real_ale.html

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