

Two Decades of the Barum Brewery at The Reform Inn in Pilton

The brewing of beer came back to Pilton in September 1996 with the opening of the Barum Brewery. This is the story of its first 20 years. But let's set the scene first.

Brewing had, of course, been going on in Pilton for centuries, but there is definite proof of ale production as early as the 16th century (see Margaret Reed's publication **'The Public Houses of Pilton'** which is on this archive). There would have been brewing on the premises of The Reform Inn (or the Gardeners' Inn as it may have been called previously) at least until it was sold to the Taw Vale Brewery in 1878. That, in turn, became part of Starkey, Knight & Ford in 1897 and eventually



finished up as part of Whitbread. In rather more recent times, The Reform Inn was sold by Whitbread following the introduction of the so-called Beer Orders in 1989 which limited how many tied public houses a brewery could own. It was bought from Whitbread by the late Mark Kilminster in about 1993.

With the Mark's encouragement, Tim Webster of Bradiford (left) started brewing ale as a hobby in a large shed erected behind the public house on 21st September 1996. At that time there were no other breweries in Barnstaple and only one other in North Devon - the Jollyboat in Bideford. In the summer of 1997, Tim gave up his job as a software designer to run the brewery

fulltime. The first batch of beer was tellingly known as 'Hard Labour', because that's exactly what it had been, but it was then renamed 'Original'. It's a very drinkable and not very hoppy ale and, twenty years on, is still by far the most popular beer produced by the Barum Brewery.



Lord Basil was developed as the logo of Barum Breweries with the help of friends Fran and Nick Brennan. He now appears in many different guises on the pub's pump clips going off to discover beers. Some of the clips can be seen over the bar in The Reform Inn. Left is the 'Original' Lord Basil designed by Nick, a British cartoonist who then worked for D. C. Thomson & Co. Ltd publishers of the Dandy.

Over thirty different beers have been produced by Barum Brewery over the 20 years. A poster commemorating the 10th anniversary entitled **'The Adventures of Lord Basil #01 Firing Squad - Barum's Award Winning Beer'** was produced in 2006 with a brilliant storyline by Mike Dunton and 'piccies' by Nick Brennan. This poster is also in The Pilton Story archive.

Some of the more memorable beers celebrated historic events, e.g. 'Dark Star' was produced for the eclipse of the sun in 1999, 'Technical Hitch' came at the time of the so-called Millennium Bug, 'Jubilee' was produced for the Queen's Golden Jubilee in 2003, and 'Ding Dong' celebrated Tim's wedding to Penny. There have also been many successes with medals and awards, e.g. with 'Firing Squad' at the Great Western Octoberfest in Weymouth, and 'Breakfast', another staple brew, winning at Tucker's Maltings in Newton Abbot. A winter warmer, 'Barnstablata', was judged Champion Beer at the Exeter & East Devon CAMRA Festival of Winter Ales in 2001.

Barum Brewery is now into its third decade, still producing excellent beers from behind The Reform Inn in Pilton. Now the challenges are greater as, rather than only one other brewery, there are now fourteen small breweries in North Devon. We'll update the story of Tim Webster and the Barum Brewery in 2026.