



# Resurrecting Prize Old Ale

Bringing Back a British Masterpiece  
With Henry Kirk



GALE & CO



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# What is Prize Old Ale?

Prize Old Ale was first brewed in 1920s when a Yorkshireman came down to be Head Brewer at George Gales Brewery in Hampshire and brought with him a recipe for a strong ale that has its roots in a type of ale called Stingo which was a catch all North of England term for a strong, heavily hopped ale that was aged in wood.

At Gales the Prize Old Ale was boiled for 3 hours in the genuine copper copper at the top of the tower brewery before being cooled via an enclosed heat exchanger and fermented in copper lined open topped wooden washbacks for two weeks where it was aerated 2/3rds through fermentation to reach terminal gravity. Once reached they were transferred directly into unlined oak hogshead barrels and matured for a year. After this time it was packaged into 275ml cork bottles bottle conditioned.

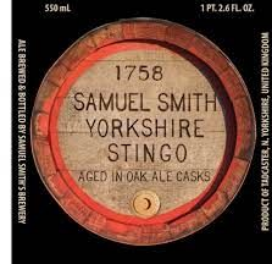
# Prize Old Ale labels over the years







# Wooden Washbacks



Samuel Smiths Brewery of Tadcaster still makes a Yorkshire Stingo and ages the ale in old oak barrels for 12 months the principle is the same, a little oxidation through the wood allowing LABs to develop.

Gales brewery had well known infection control issues and apart from the Prize Old Ale all beers were rough filtered before package whether in bottle, cask or keg. The open nature of the washbacks and the transfer to the hogsheads gave plenty of opportunities for a variety of bacteria and wild yeast to come into contact with the ale during it long maturation time despite the 9% ABV and low pH 3.8.

This was seen in the reputation of Prize Old Ale declining in the years upto 2005 as the quality and conditioning became variable.

# Fullers Enters the Fray

Gales Brewery started in 1847 but by the time of the death of the brewery's matriarch Granny Bowyer in 2005 her two sons had already been in discussions with Fullers Brewery of Chiswick West London and were primed to sell off the brewery and its 100 odd pubs.

Fullers bought Gales for its tied estate of pubs not for its brewery or beer range. Indeed they had been brewing Gales beers secretly in London for six months before announcing the sale. Only one brewing book (from 1989) survived the builders skip!

The question became what to do with Prize Old Ale, Gales most famous ale?

# Prize Old Ale finds a New Home

The decision was made to transport all remaining tanks of POA to Chiswick where the brewers there rebrewed a version of POA as a parti-gyle with other Gales beers (HSB and Butser Bitter).

After fermentation this new batch was blended 50/50 with the original Prize Old Ale together solera fashion and crucially matured in stainless steel cylindroconical 260hl maturation tanks for a year before packaging in 500ml bottles (bottle conditioned).

This type of blending was made famous by Madeira production and gave a new dimension to POA-

‘Old wines lent weight to lighter vintages and new vintages lent vigour and fruit to old and perhaps tiring wines’ - Henry Jeffreys Empire of Booze p99

The new 500ml bottle was released to great critical acclaim but poor sales with the last release in 2011 with the remaining 40hl lying unloved and unwanted in tank until...



Me! Henry Kirk cosplaying my dream job



I joined Fullers as Production Brewer in charge of the brewhouse in 2014 and at that time under Head Brewer John Keeling they were resurrecting lots of beers from their old recipe books with the help of Ron Pattinson- Strong X Mild, Double Stouts, Burton Old Extra, Pale Ales etc which were achieving strong export sales but there was still no desire to resurrect the Prize Old Ale.

It was now tasting very mellow, much of the toffee like sweetness had disappeared with a slightly balsamic note that instantly reminded me of Rodenbach Grand Cru and an underlying tremendous complexity with a ABV of 11% so we had a mystery- what was in there? Well the truth was as the beer had been aged for so long undisturbed in stainless steel that the microflora that had come in with the original POA all the way from Gales and that had been able to metabolise long chain starches to get from 9% to 11% had died off.

Undeterred by the lack of interest from the Fullers sale team I was determined that the Prize Old Ale would make it back on to the shelves and bars once again.

# Marble Brewery Interlude 2017

James Kemp had worked at Fullers in the lab and has now gone on to have a great career as a brewer (now Group Brewmaster at Brewdog) and by 2017 he was Head Brewer at Marble Brewery Manchester.

He knew of the magical Prize Old Ale and got in touch whereupon I filled two 50 litre kegs with it and sent them to Manchester where myself and John Keeling joined him for a brewday.

He made a thousand litre batch which he split between four different casks and what exceptional beers they were the POA proving an able foil for them all, each was barrel aged for 6-9 months-

Pinot Noir Barrel Aged (11.6% ABV), Madeira Barrel Aged (10.9% ABV), Barbera Barrel Aged (10.4% ABV) and Bourbon Barrel Aged (10.6% ABV)

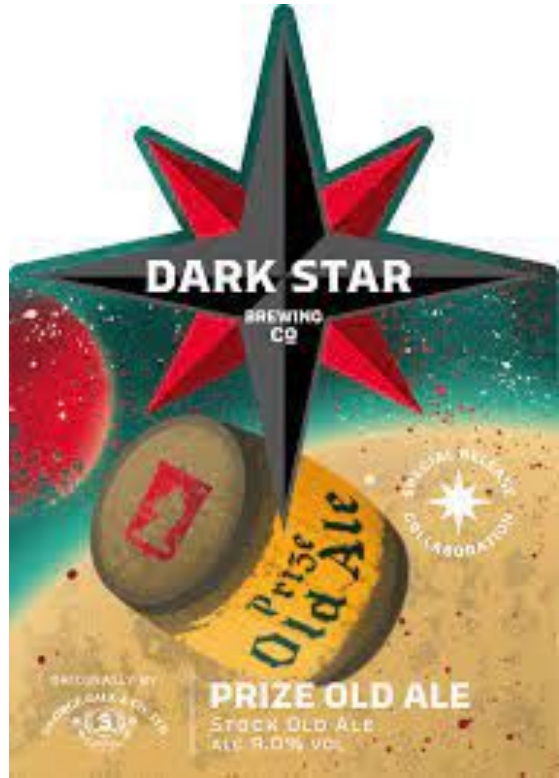


# Dark Star Era

I moved to become Head Brewer at Dark Star Brewery in Sussex in 2019 which had been purchased by Fullers in 2018, having still failed to convince anyone to let me rerelease the POA on a large scale.

As I was starting at DS I heard a terrible rumour that Fullers wanted to get rid of the tank that Prize Old Ale was in to make way for a water tank and drain the beer!

I managed to convince them to tanker POA to me at Dark Star whereupon I terrified Asahi (who had in turn bought Fullers in 2019) by asking them to pay £15,000 for a wooden vat from Austria, this delayed the project somewhat.





# Finally!

In April 2022 about 7 years after I first learnt of Prize Old Ales existence at Fullers and once I had managed to convince Asahi that I wouldn't need a wooden vat for the first brew I with some friends including Anthony Smith a former Gales brewer who had moved to Fullers brewed a new 40hl batch at Dark Star to the recipe from 1989 with invert sugar instead of glucose and only boiled for two hours rather than three!

We used Gales yeast from Fullers and aerated it once we filled the stainless steel cylindroconical FV and then again the next morning- it went from 1095 to 1025 gravity in 36 hours! After cropping the yeast we blended the new beer with the original blend six weeks after the brew day and left to mature for six months before bottling in November.

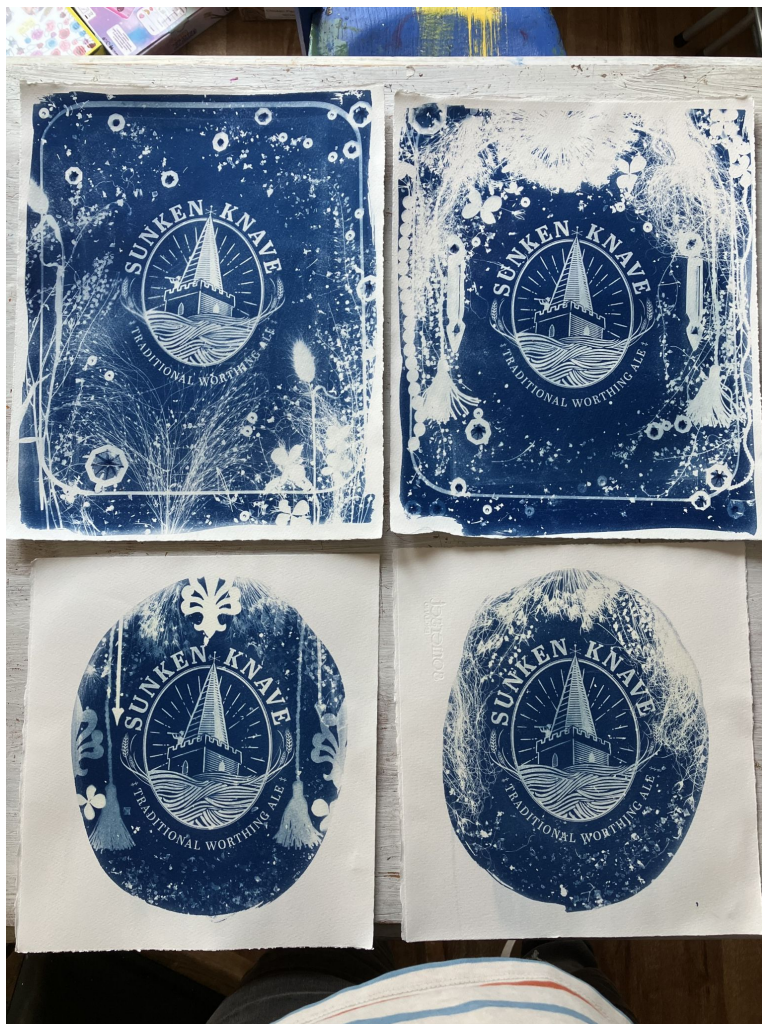
We released the new Prize Old Ale to great acclaim and then the following week Asahi told us they were shutting Dark Star brewery and we were all to be made redundant. This dramatically reduced the amount we could bottle.

Prize Old Ale will live on... but without me ;-)

We had about 35hls of the 80hl blend left. One of my last acts at Darkstar was to tanker back the POA to Fullers and I believe it is now at Meantime where they will release their own version at some point this year.

As for me...

# SUNKEN KNAVE BREWERY



ANY QUESTIONS??? AND MANY THANKS FOR  
LISTENING AND COMING ALONG CHEERS!