



Wave of interest in island gem

How MD Ian Rogers and his team at Randalls Brewery in Guernsey have helped transform its fortunes from an impressive brewhouse on the seafront

Running a brewery on the Channel Island of Guernsey is a demanding business. The island used to be a holiday resort for Brits before the days of package holidays to Spain, and brewing was a highly seasonal affair.

Guernsey still gets visitors – French as well as British – and they add up to one million a year. But the island is now home to high finance, with banks and trust companies based in brash new buildings straddled along the seafront in St Peter Port, and they account for a third of Guernsey's employment.

It means that Randalls has a large and diverse audience to please with both ale and lager. It's a brewery that's changed out of all recognition since I first visited the island in the 1980s. It was then a large Victorian site, founded in 1868, and still run by the family.

But the brewery became run-down and in need of urgent refurbishment. Family feuds – not unknown in the brewing industry – put the future of the company in jeopardy and in 2006 it was sold, with its 18 pubs, to a group of private investors. They include Jon Moulton and Robert Barnes, who founded the Alchemy Partners private-equity firm, best known for its attempt to buy the Rover Group. Barnes is chairman of the brewery but he and Moulton act independently of Alchemy.

They installed Ian Rogers as managing director, impressed with his work in running Wychwood Brewery and Hobgoblin pubs on the mainland. His first task, after inspecting the brewery site, was to tell the new owners he thought it was "not fit for purpose" in the 21st century, especially as he



Grinning formula: Randalls MD Ian Rogers, third from right on the stairs

needed to brew good lager as well as ale.

Rogers has had several slices of good luck since he took over the day-to-day running of the company. His backers stumped up £1.2m to build a new brewery on the seafront in St Peter Port on a site known as La Pie-



Lighthouse link: the Hanois brew

tte – the Magpie. Its main claim to fame, before the brewery arrived, was that the Rolling Stones in their early days performed there, commemorated by a beer called Ruby Tuesday.

The second slice of luck was getting an agreement with global giant AB



Shining example: the brewery

InBev to buy the Dutch lager brand Breda. It was surplus to requirements at AB InBev but the 5% ABV beer is now Randalls' biggest brand by far. It's made in a smart, custom-built brewhouse, run by head brewer Matt Polli, built by the Italian firm Velo, and it can produce both ale and lager.

Ten-thousand hectolitres or 6,000 barrels of beer a year are brewed and Breda accounts for around 60% of Randalls' sales. It's a pure beer, made without additives or preservatives and is properly lagered or matured for a month. It led to Rogers' third slice of luck – the beer won a silver medal in this year's International Brewing Awards, which is front-page news in a small community like Guernsey's.

Patois is Randalls' regular cask beer, brewed with English Maris Otter pale malt, a touch of darker crystal grain and Cascade and Target hops. It's joined by such seasonals as Golden Guernsey (3.9% ABV); Ruby Tuesday (4.3% ABV); and a superb stout, Hanois (5.1% ABV), named after an island lighthouse.

Business is brisk. Rogers says the 18 pubs – all tenanted – are selling more beer every year. The brewery supplies 150 free-trade accounts and the company has bought a small chain of off-licences and has shops at the airport.

Randalls' beers are on sale in hotels, as well as several smart restaurants, many run by French restaurateurs and chefs: the island welcomes French visitors to the house in St Peter Port where Victor Hugo, author of *Les Misérables*, lived in exile for several years in the 19th century.

Guernsey, with the active help of Randalls, draws both visitors and business like a magnet. But even a beer called Ruby Tuesday is unlikely to entice the Stones back for a gig.

£1.2m

the level of investment in the brewery on St Peter Port seafront

60%

the proportion of Randalls' sales accounted for by Breda

4.3%

the ABV content of the brewery's Ruby Tuesday beer



Sparkling beer: the Rockmount hotel in Cobo Bay, Guernsey

Randalls lines up a real boost for business

As every publican knows, one of the least popular parts of running a pub is cleaning the pipes, but it's vital to drinkers' enjoyment. Dirty lines mean sour, flat beer – and that can wreck a pub's success.

Help is at hand. Randalls Brewery has pioneered the use of a new system of line cleaning developed by Cambridge Scientific Solutions (CSS).

It's a combination of CSS's 'microbial inhibitor system', BeerSaver, which treats all the beer lines in a cellar, and a bio-degradable and eco-friendly powder-based cleaner, Oximach.

The beauty of the system is that lines have to be cleaned just once a month.

Yes, I blinked too when I was told this in the Rockmount hotel at Cobo Bay in Guernsey. I know from visiting cellars over the years that cleaning the lines on a weekly basis is a chore that's about as welcome as a visit from the health and safety officer.

The Rockmount sells 60 casks and kegs a week and the beer in the glass needs to be bright and sparkling, with a good head of foam.

Randalls MD Ian Rogers and his team tested the CSS system at the Prince of Wales in St Peter Port and they have been sufficiently satisfied with the results to roll it out to their 18-strong estate. I saw the system in operation at the Rockmount, where the bar workers are delighted with reduced beer waste and its ease of use.

BeerSaver uses the power of radio frequency interference to dramatically slow the growth of yeast and bacteria, the stuff that can make the beer taste sour.

For the monthly clean, an Oximach



sachet is mixed with 40 litres of hot water. The powder is much safer to use than traditional caustic or chlorine-based cleaners.

When it's mixed with water, the solution lifts deposits and kills bacteria and yeast residues in the lines almost on contact, as a result of "free atomic oxygen". That means nothing to a dunce like me, but Martyn Crook at CSS says it means the powder is a per-carbonate formulation that's fully bio-degradable.

The liquid can be left in the lines overnight to maximise cleaning. Considerably less water is needed than with conventional cleaners to flush the lines. Sparklers and other dispense equipment can be soaked in a weaker solution of Oximach.

The powder comes with a 5.7-litre bucket with eight sachets of Oximach.

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