



# Hops and Heritage: A Concise History of Canterbury Christ Church University's Annual Green Hop Ale

## Introduction: Heritage, hops & 'sense of place'

*Whoever drinks beer, he is quick to sleep; whoever sleeps long, does not sin; whoever does not sin, enters Heaven! Thus, let us drink beer!*

**Martin Luther** (one-time monk and leader of the Reformation)

This essay is a love letter to 'liquid bread'... beer! And our relationship with it, as an environmentally conscious university located in a heritage site of international importance. It explores how hop cultivation, beer and brewing have become such a focal part of our sustainability agenda, our celebration of the seasons and our unique 'sense of place'. The story of our own green hop ale is recent but has deep historic roots.

Much of Canterbury Christ Church University's main campus lies directly within the outer precinct of St Augustine's Abbey, one of three key elements of the Canterbury UNESCO World Heritage Site. The other two elements are Canterbury's world-famous Cathedral and the Saxon church of St Martin.

Sadly, very few architectural remains of the abbey remain exposed above ground within our campus; this has led us to develop our *Biodiversity* initiative –

a celebration of our unique heritage through our stewardship of green spaces that acknowledge the monastic and other histories but do not attempt to mimic them. Examples include our orchard and nuttery, containing rare local varieties of apple, and our physic garden with its mix of culinary and medical herbs.

The only significant medieval monument is the gable end wall of the old monastic brew and bakehouse. This has inspired our engagement with brewing and the development (with the Canterbury Brewers and Distillers) of our iconic green hop ale.

Traditionally beer and ale has been distinguished in terms of the addition of hops or not, but this meaning has been eroded and our 'ale' features each autumn in Kent's celebration of its hop growing heritage during Green-hop beer fortnight.



Kent green hop beers and ales must meet certain criteria: they must be brewed in Kent and contain only Kent-grown, fresh, undried hops which must be added to the brew within twelve hours of picking. This means mobilising a dedicated team of students and staff each year to ensure we get the hops to our brewer in a timely manner! This green hop brew results in a characteristic fresh tasting ale because the hops retain oils that are otherwise lost when dried.

### **Historical Context: From monks to modernity**

St Augustine's abbey (founded AD 598) is one of the earliest and most significant monastic sites in England; it included the burial place of kings of Kent and early archbishops. But even before this, the site had a long history, with excavations providing evidence of Bronze Age, Roman and significant Saxon occupation prior to the construction of the abbey. Finds include a recent (2018-19) excavation of a Saxon woman buried with a silver garnet-inlaid Kentish disc brooch, a necklace of amber and glass beads, and other indications of her elite position.

A is for Augustine (Christ Church Heritage A to Z) - <https://medium.com/the-christ-church-heritage-a-to-z/a-is-for-augustine-929ed054fd5f>

Remodelling of the monastic site in the 13th century led to some significant changes that included expansion of the precinct to the north (the site of our campus) and the construction of an outer court with a cellarer's range, brewhouse and bakehouse, and later, in the early 14<sup>th</sup> century, a walled vineyard. The western gable of the brewhouse is all that now remains on our site. During this period the Great Court was enlarged and a new main entrance was added to the western precinct wall, and next to our campus. It is now known as Fyndon Gate - a magnificent, towered edifice, later to become a brewery! (See below.)

After the Dissolution of the Monasteries on the orders of Henry VIII, the abbey was retained by the Crown and the buildings within the Great Court transformed into a royal residence (1539). The palace and the monastic precinct were later leased (from 1612) by Lord and Lady Wotton who engaged John Tradescant the Elder, the famous gardener and horticulturalist, to create formal gardens and orchards at the site. Tradescant was celebrated in the naming of our 2019 annual green hop ale.

T is for Tradescant (Christ Church Heritage A to Z) <https://medium.com/the-christ-church-heritage-a-to-z/t-is-for-tradescant-21583a1553e7>

A more recent link between the abbey site and brewing is the use made of the splendid Fyndon Gate and adjacent buildings, now part of King's School (directly abutting our campus). According to Historic England *"By 1659 the property had been acquired by the Hales family who retained it until the 19th century. During their tenure the palace was used as a brewery, maltings and public house known as The Old Palace, with the courtyard laid out for bowls and skittles, and a cockpit in the Fyndon Gate."*





Paul Sandby (1731-1809) The Great Gateway of St Augustine's Monastery, Canterbury c.1782-1786 (detail) RCIN 914719, <https://www.rct.uk/collection/914719/the-great-gateway-of-st-augustines-monastery-canterbury>

While the brewery was named after Augustine, the public house took its name from the site's Tudor use as a royal palace. Its name appeared regularly in notices in *Kentish Gazette* and other papers to announce events, auctions, marriage and death!

From the *Kentish Weekly Post or Canterbury Journal*, Tuesday 22 September 1801.

**FIREWORKS,**

On the Bowling-green, at the "**Old Palace**," Canterbury, on Saturday evening next, 26th of September, 1801, (if the weather permits, if not, on Monday).

Admission One Shilling each person.

Rockets will be fired as a signal a quarter of an hour before the exhibition begins. Doors will be opened at half past seven, and the Fireworks begin at eight o'clock.

From the *Kentish Gazette*, 20 September 1836.

**OLD PALACE INN AND TAVERN, CANTERBURY,**

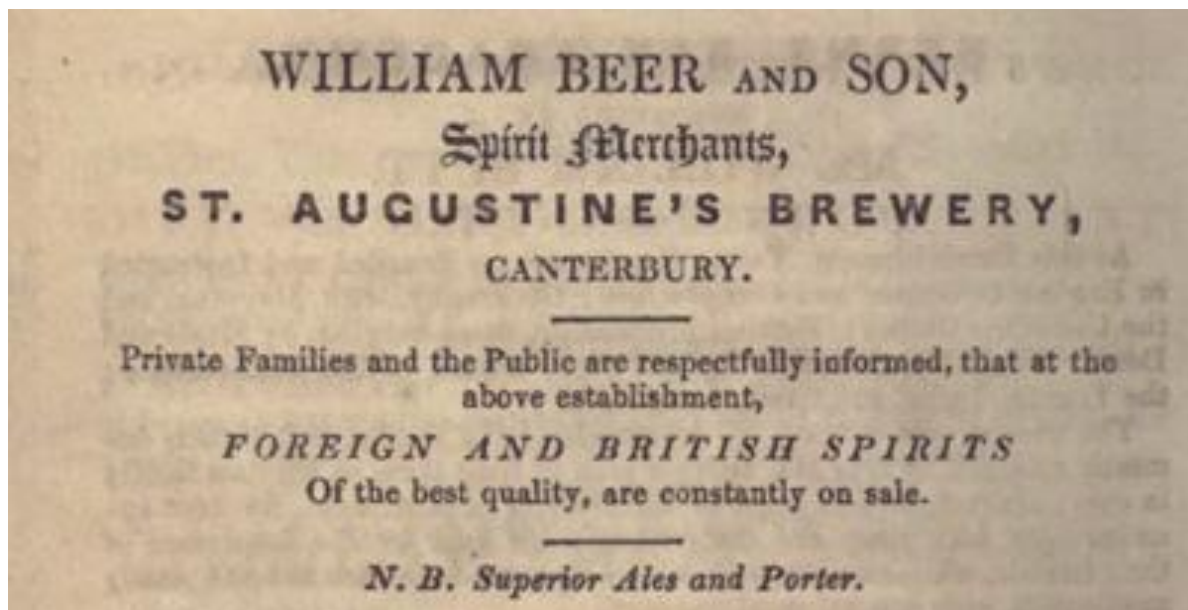
**TO LET, with Possession on the 11th of October next.**

THE above comprises a spacious Bowling Green, Fives' Court, Tea and Pleasure Gardens, &c., &c., all of which have been recently much improved and laid out with great taste and convenience by the present proprietor.

For particulars, apply to Mr. Jarvis, on the premises; or at St. Augustine's Brewery, Canterbury.

A print of the early nineteenth century clearly shows a massive sign on the building immediately adjacent to the great gate proclaiming 'BEER'S BREWERY'.

William Beer & Son advertised themselves as 'Spirit Merchants' as well as excellence brewers:



The brewery and the public house were remarked on by a number of writers, including a detailed reminiscence from a 'Man of Kent' (published 1866) that is worth relating at length:

At the time I am writing of, St. Augustine's monastery at Canterbury was desecrated to the purposes of a brewery—such are the base uses to which some of the noblest buildings which man can erect are subject to—and the gardens adjoining, once the resting-place of the nuns and monks of the holy order instituted by their illustrious founder, were used as a bowling-green and tea-drinking place for the plebeians of Canterbury. A part of the original building was used as a fives-court, or racket ground, and I have seen in my early days some good matches played there between the citizens of Canterbury and some crack players from London.

The tea-gardens connected with the public-house adjoining the brewery, and part of the sacred building of St. Augustine, on Lady Wootton's Green, presented, at the time I am referring to, a kind of Cremorne\* on a small scale. Fireworks, balloons, and the Blondin of those days, attracted crowds of Canterbury lads and lasses, and the old people as well.

\*Cremorne Gardens, a pleasure ground on the Thames.

The site was eventually purchased in 1844 for use by the Church of England as Saint Augustine's Missionary College before becoming an annex of the King's School.

M is for Mission (Christ Church Heritage A to Z) <https://medium.com/the-christ-church-heritage-a-to-z/m-is-for-mission-moshueshue-mckenzie-and-majaliwa-459e873554c2>

During the early twentieth century a further link to the brewing industry was a commercial malt kiln or malthouse located in the centre of what would become

the main university campus. Malted barley produced in malthouses such as this was the source of the sugars (primarily maltose) that are fermented into beer. The barley was soaked then allowed to begin to germinate before being dried with hot air – this develops the enzymes required for changing starches into sugars needed in the brewing process.

### **Heritage, Hops & Honey**

We love alliteration at Christ Church (we started as Canterbury Christ Church College after all!) ‘Heritage, hops and honey’ neatly sums up our approach to combining our history and our concern for the environment. The idea of bringing the heritage of the brew and bakehouse wall to life through the beer and bread production on site had been mooted a number of years ago. The launch of our *Bioversity* initiative in 2012 – to create a unique ‘sense of place’ based on stewardship of our green spaces within the UNESCO World Heritage Site - provided a new impetus. This was backed by the university’s strategic focus on sustainability as a key cross-cutting theme. Central to embedding beer and bread into the culture and experience of the campus also entailed finding legitimate and creative links to formal curriculum (from life science to business studies – see below).

Hops had grown wild on the North Holmes Road campus, but to take advantage of the unique location of our site within East Kent Goldings Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) Region, a small formal hop garden was planted with East Kent Goldings bines at the top of the “Tangled Bank”, a wild flower area close to the heart of the campus. Known as the “Tangled bank hop garden”, it became productive in September 2015, and harvested to make the first batch of green hop ale (Green Chapel Ale) in collaboration with the Canterbury Brewers & Distillers.





## What is in a name?

To paraphrase ... *“What is in a name? That which we call our ale by any other name would taste as sweet.”* Apology to the Bard!

The naming of our annual green hop ale has now become an important element of our engagement with the wider university community. It was originally thought important that we establish a brand for our ale that reflected our sense of place, our identity as a Church of England Foundation, and our sustainability credentials. After some discussion it was decided that ‘Green Chapel Ale’ would work, with ‘Green’ referencing the Student Green Office, our environmental concerns, and the fact that ale is a green hop brew. Two students from the Media and Communications programme worked with the sustainability team to develop the label. They also undertook consumer research, and helped developed our links with the Canterbury Brewers, as well as working on other marketing materials. The light, fresh green bottle label featured a white line drawing of our iconic, modernist four-pointed chapel tower – a central landmark and the heart of the university. The name and label were used for both the 2015 and 2016 brews.





In the following years it was decided that the ale might be re-named annually to represent different facets of our heritage or engagement with the sustainability agenda and give other students a chance to be involved.

In 2017 it became St Thomas Pale Ale, sporting a stained-glass portrait of the famous archbishop, an all too obvious nod to Canterbury's most famous personality. The label drew attention to our concerns for both heritage and the environment, especially our use of green spaces within our site to produce herbs, hops and honey, as well as bake bread. The following year the brew was dubbed St Gregory's Ale. The parish church of St Gregory (deconsecrated), now a university performance space close to our main campus, is set in a burial ground full of statuesque Irish yews and monstrous 'baobab' planes - named for their grotesque, bloated trunks.

B is for Baobab (Christ Church Heritage A to Z) <https://medium.com/the-christ-church-heritage-a-to-z/b-is-for-baobab-plane-in-our-a-z-celebrating-30-years-of-the-canterbury-unesco-world-heritage-site-ddfac0f12b30>

The St Gregory's was selected by our Senior Chaplain as a celebration of the 100th anniversary of the signing of the Armistice at the end of the First World War and recognition of an historically important memorial in Canterbury's Buttermarket to those from the city who lost their lives on active service in the war. The cross atop the monument is the central motif on the label set within a trifoliate design reminiscent of the Christ Church logo.



Unusually, listed among the dead on the monument is Parker E. F. M. Originally distinguished as a 'woman' on the list provided by the Parish of St. Gregory, this fact is not obvious on the monument, although her full name Ethel Frances Mary

Parker is given on the memorial board within the parish church itself. Our label notes:

The experience and sacrifice of the Great War was shared by every community in the country. St Gregory's memorial reflects the sombre effect on one of Canterbury's poorest parishes, commemorating the sacrifice of the men and women whose memory we honour.

Ethel served in the Queen Mary's Army Auxiliary Corps; sent to France in April 1918 she was killed by an enemy bomb a month later. Ethel and her fellow workers are believed to have been the first women to die on active service.

The ale that year was also made in memory of Rob Thrower. Rob was a key member of the university's estates team and was committed to a sustainable future for the institution. It was Rob's vision that we should one day brew our own beer to celebrate the fact that our site contains the monastic brew house.

The 2019 ale revisited another interesting chapter in the history of St Augustine's Abbey and our campus site. John Tradescant the elder, an important figure in English horticultural and garden history moved to Canterbury in 1615 to become the head gardener to Lord and Lady Wotton. The university has celebrated the nine-year period that Tradescant remodelled the gardens through its *Tradescant 400* initiative. The mid-point of the celebrations seemed an appropriate time to recognise his importance to our heritage by naming our ale for him. The larch on the label recognises his role in introducing plants to England. The Tradescant 400 Ale label says it all:

Between 1615 and 1623, John Tradescant 'the elder', the father of English gardening, designed the gardens at St Augustine's Abbey, Canterbury, on the site which Canterbury Christ Church University now shares.

In 2015 a larch was planted on campus to celebrate Tradescant 400 and to represent the wide range of plants that he introduced to England. It is believed that he introduced the larch following a journey to Arctic Russia in 1618 and, three years later, brought back "apricockes", gladioli and the horse chestnut from the Mediterranean. Our Tradescant 400 Ale and celebrations form part of our Bioversity initiative, which focuses on the creation of a unique identity and sense of place based on our location within the Canterbury UNESCO World Heritage Site. Brewed using heritage hops grown on our campus, this ale is truly one of a kind.

The branding was designed by Andrea, a visiting Spanish Erasmus student, who created a simple monochromatic design, with a white background and black elements focused on the silhouette of a larch, double stripes for framing and

clean typography. The result was classic, elegant and simple but still maintaining a modern and minimalist look.

Sustainability Blog: What's it like to design a beer brand?

<https://blogs.canterbury.ac.uk/sustainability/whats-it-like-to-design-a-beer-brand/>

2020 proved to be a difficult year. The hops were carefully tended by the 'skeleton staff' allowed on site during COVID-19 restrictions. Thankfully their hard work paid off and resulted in a decent harvest, duly blessed by the Dean of Chapel (in PPE) beside the St Augustine Abbey bakehouse wall before being walked through the Cathedral grounds and Buttermarket to our brewer.



The 'new normal' also meant that the usual student-based design project was placed on the backburner and members of the sustainability team took on the design brief in its entirety. It was decided something different was required, something to lift the spirits, thus 'Hop Picker's Tipple' was born (as the label notes *"try saying that after a couple of pints!"*). The 2020 label was designed to celebrate the students and staff who have contributed over recent years to the growing and harvesting of the hops that go into our annual ale and features a painted portrait of John Hills, the university's sustainability projects officer who tends the hop bines. The acknowledgement was fully deserved as John did more than anyone to ensure we had a viable 2020 harvest.



**Hop Picker's Tipple** - try saying that after a couple of pints!

This tongue-twister of an ale has been brewed to celebrate the hop growing heritage of the county of Kent and the hard work of staff and students at Canterbury Christ Church University who grow and harvest the hops that go into this green hop ale. The hops that go into this green hop ale. The hops are grown on our campus which lies within the precincts of St Augustine's Abbey (part of the Canterbury UNESCO World Heritage Site).

Our campus contains the remains of monks' medieval brew-house, where the harvested hops are blessed each year before being walked through the city to our brewer.

Graphics: John Hills  
Art © Peter Vujakovic, 2020

**Best before:**

Alc. 4.6% Vol.  
500ml


**Taste Notes:** The East Kent Goldings, Canterbury White Bine, Brambling Cross and Early Prolific hops impart a floral and citrus flavour with aromas of spicy marmalade and mandarin.


**Ingredients:** Kentish water, MALTED BARLEY, hops, WHEAT and yeast only.  
**Best served cold and fresh.**





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 Canterbury Christ Church University

 @cccusustainability

2021 sadly saw the continued impact of COVID but again a good crop of hops was grown and harvested. The latest of our ales is named The Three Choughs. The chough (*Phyrrhacorax phyrrhacorax*), a member of the crow family, was once a common sight on Kent's chalk cliffs. These wonderful glossy black birds with striking red bills and legs have however retained their hold on our imagination through the presence of the three choughs on the coat of arms of the City of Canterbury, adopted from the crest attributed to St Thomas, the murdered archbishop. The good news is that these birds may soon be reintroduced to the chalk grassland in and around Dover.

Find out more about Red Billed Chough Captive Breeding and Reintroductions here: <https://kent.wildwoodtrust.org/conservation>

A chough also features on the official crest of Canterbury Christ Church University!

### Conclusion – three steps to heaven

Three steps to heaven (...with apologies to Eddie Cochran)

*Just follow steps one, two and three (three steps to heaven, three steps to heaven)*

*Step one, you plant a hop you love*



*Step two, you harvest for the brew*

*Step three, you toast and drink it deeply*

*Yeah, that sure seems like heaven to me...*

We started with a suitable quote from Martin Luther who reminds us that beer, if drunk in moderation, might provide a stairway to heaven. Beer as 'liquid bread' was of course the nourishment of the Lenten period for some monastic orders, something to sustain the body during a period of solemn religious observance and fasting. We at Christ Church are pleased that we contribute in some small ways to celebrating the living heritage of the Canterbury UNESCO site through stewardship of our green spaces and production of food and drink, including our seasonal ale.

Let us leave the last word on beer and nature to Henry David Thoreau whose writing on natural history anticipated and influenced much modern conservation and environmentalist thinking:

*Instead of water we got here a draught of beer ... It was as if we sucked at ... the sap of all Millinocket botany commingled,—the topmost, most fantastic, and spiciest sprays of the primitive wood, and whatever invigorating and stringent gum or essence it afforded steeped and dissolved in it,—a lumberer's drink, which would acclimate and naturalize a man at once,—which would make him see green, and, if he slept, dream that he heard the wind sough among the pines.*

## Sources:

Cowtan, Robert (1866) *Passages From The Auto-Biography Of A "Man Of Kent"* Whittingham and Wilkins, London.

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<sup>i</sup> The name 'Tangled Bank' is a source of intense embarrassment to Peter Vujakovic, the author of this essay – he named it to celebrate Charles Darwin's famous closing paragraph in the *Origin of Species* (publ.1859), a eulogy to the complexity of life on earth. It should be called the 'Entangled Bank'. Darwin's house at Downe in Kent has been nominated for UNESCO World Heritage Site status.