

Beer and cheese - perfect partners

By Sophie Atherton

I can't really tell you just how much I love cheese.

When I was a little girl, aged about four, I recall standing with my Mum in the local deli as she queued at the cheese counter. I pointed to the glass cabinet and declared, loudly, I wanted to get inside and be left there all night to eat the cheese within. A friend told me she'd become allergic to cheese after having a baby. I felt like sending a sympathy card rather than congratulating her on the birth of her child... Ok, maybe I *can* tell you how much I love cheese.



It goes hand-in-hand with my love of beer. When I first drank beer my brew of choice was always Bitter and there were some that cried out for cheese as if they were shouting, "Cheese! Cheese!" from the first sip. My brother could also hear these cries and he still often mentions the idea of a 'cheese beer', knowing I'll understand exactly what he means.

A pint of Bitter and a ploughman's is such an obvious pairing that it's easy to overlook. Some top tips for 'cheese beers' to put with these platters are Goddard's Brewery *Duck's Folly* (5.2%), a proper pint of bitter with lip-smacking, marmaladey bitterness or Quantock Brewery *Wills Neck* (4.3%) where the pronounced bitterness is more mandarin orange than marmalade.

But there's much more to pairing beer and cheese than the ploughman's and you can do much more with beer and cheese than you can with wine and cheese. Beer has carbonation on its side, (that's not to say it's gassy - in many cases we're talking gentle, tongue prickling carbonation - a natural by-product of the brewing process), which acts as a fantastic palate cleanser. This is brilliant if you're tackling a cheeseboard.

A sip of the right beer between each cheese prepares you for the next as if it were the first. Beers also possess many flavours akin to things that already go with cheese. Biscuitiness from the malt; spicy, peppery and fruity flavours from the hops and so on, and there are plenty of higher ABV beers packing strong fruity characters not dissimilar to cheesy favourite port as well as dozens more with rich fruitcake flavours that often work well with cheese. So here are some suggestions for heavenly beer and cheese matching.

Sacred drop: Goddard's Brewery, Isle of Wight - *Quarr Abbey Ale* (6.5%) - The UK doesn't have much of a monastic brewing tradition any more, but this Benedictine style ale brewed with sweet gale and coriander combines light fruitcake sweetness and hoppy dryness. Try with ripe Cornish Camembert or a White Stilton with apricots.

Profanely good: Williams Bros Brewery, Clackmannanshire - *Profanity Stout* (7%) - This unusual stout from Scotland could well be my favourite beer - ever. Rich and chocolatey with a tangy hop character it makes me want to dance even before tasting it. Try with Stilton and the flavours of both are ramped up to epic proportions.

Thumpingly versatile: Woodforde's Brewery, Norfolk - *Headcracker* (7%) - Despite its name this barley wine is brisk and citrusy but with a heft you'd expect from the style. A versatile match for a variety of cheeses I selected it for last year's British Guild of Beer Writers annual dinner paired with an Alsop & Walker cheeseboard featuring Mayfield, Sussex Camembert and Sussex Blue.

Heroic effort: Tring Brewery, Hertfordshire - *Death or Glory* (7.2%) Another less than romantic name for a heavenly beer. Strong, fruity and rich in the manner of Christmas cake this beer is brilliant with strong, vintage Cheddar.