

# JOHN PORTER

*Cheers to great beer this Christmas*

I always think that one of the most heart-warming Christmas traditions is being told that all the other Christmas traditions are very recent inventions. I've no idea whether it's actually true that Santa Claus's red-and-white outfit was created by the Coca-Cola marketing team, or that Prince Albert came up with the Christmas cracker while recovering from an intimate body piercing, but I'm more than happy to reel out such dubious 'facts' over a festive pint or two in order to keep the conversation going.

I am, however, very confident in saying that my pint itself has a proud legacy that predates Christmas itself by at least a couple of millennia. Just as the celebration of that birth in Bethlehem was overlaid on a midwinter festival going back into prehistory, the tradition of brewing special strong beers at this time of year has also been around for a very long time.

In the darkest days of the year, our ancestors clearly needed a couple of gourds of something rich and strong, flavoured with whatever seasonal herbs and berries the druid brewers could scrape

together, to steel themselves for the long haul through to spring.

Beer is still an important part of any festive celebration – or at least, any party that you're thinking of inviting me to attend – and with so much choice now available on draught, as well as in bottles and cans, there's really no excuse not to enjoy a different beer with every part of the Christmas menu.

My extensive research, based on picking up a Christmas menu from my local Fuller's pub, shows that the food development team are right on the case again this year with beer as an ingredient in festive food.

It might, perhaps, seem fairly obvious that you'd serve the beer used in the recipe as an accompaniment, but that could be too easy. One of the principles of beer and food matching that we <ahem> beer sommeliers like to promote is that a contrasting pairing can be just as good as a complementary one. To illustrate my point, I've taken three dishes predominantly for the managed estate, and suggested alternative beer matches. Now it's over to you to experiment!

• **LONDON PORTER SMOKED SALMON:** The smoked flavour is a great match with the porter, but behind that you should also be enjoying the fresh, citrus flavours of the salmon. Try this with a glass of Oliver's Island, enjoying the crisp, thirst quenching gold ale after each rich, smoky mouthful of salmon.



The delicate floral and citrus aromas from the hops, as well as the beer's zesty tang, will all add to the enjoyment of the starter.

• **ESB BRAISED OX CHEEK:** Served with horseradish mash, red cabbage, and mushroom sauce, there'd be plenty of strong, rich flavours in this seasonal main course even without the addition of ESB, with its combination of caramel and pepper flavours. It will always take a robust beer to match this dish, so try it with a Chimay Blue from our friends at Scourmont Abbey in Belgium. At 9% ABV, it's



*Beer is on the menu this Christmas, as food writer and beer sommelier John Porter matches some delicious dishes with equally tasty ales, porters, lagers and more*



a beer to be sipped, but the deep flavours will accompany the food nicely.

• **BLACK CAB CHRISTMAS PUDDING:** Once again, we're back in rich food territory with this classic pud. The stout has deep flavours delivered by the chocolate malts used in the brew, and so break out a glass of Gales HSB to go with it. The complex beer has notes of raisin and soft fruits that match the fruit and spice flavours in the pudding, and a smooth finish to help ensure a clean plate at the end of a great meal.

Many customers will be frequent visitors to the pub in the run-up to Christmas, once all those social get-togethers with family, friends and colleagues are factored in, so enjoying a varied range of beers with different styles of festive food will help to keep things interesting.

The seasonal buffet is a definite challenge when it comes to beer matching. A decent plateful might include sausage rolls, quiche,



cheese, potato salad, a spicy onion bhaji, and a range of other delights. From Fuller's international beer range, Veltins Pilsener is an ideal buffet beer, with a refreshing, clean taste and a characteristic hint of bitterness that goes well with a wide range of foods.

When it comes to the cheeseboard, there's no finer match than a classic bitter, so that's the time to break out the London Pride. The beer is rich enough to cope with the intense flavour of a tangy mature cheddar, crumbly stilton or creamy brie, and refreshing enough to clear the palate to enjoy the next variety.

A turkey dinner with all trimmings needs something a bit special, such as a bottle of Golden Pride. The premium 8.5% ABV bottled ale is designed to be savoured like a fine wine, so it's ideal for sharing.

Some of us, though, look forward as much to the Boxing Day turkey curry as we do the main event. Once you've got the leftovers simmering away with garlic, ginger, chilli and



coriander, put a bottle of Bengal Lancer in the fridge. Purists might argue, but if you've got the curry right you'll be very glad of that extra few degrees of chill, and the floral and spicy notes of the beer should still shine through.

Chocolate is the nation's



favourite dessert flavour, and from a yule log to a fudge cake, the blackberry tang in winter ale Jack

Frost will help cut through the richness. Finally, don't forget the wassail – a spiced cider served to carol singers and other seasonal visitors. Cornish Orchard Gold, gently warmed and with a dash of added cloves and cinnamon, will go very nicely with a mince pie.

Whatever you're drinking this Christmas, compliments of the season – see you back here in 2017. 🍀