



Harvey's 'Imperial Extra Double Stout' has been crowned 'Champion Bottle Conditioned Beer of Britain 2015' at CAMRA's 'Great British Beer Festival' in London.

The beer is an authentic recreation of a style brewed in London during the late Eighteenth Century which was later successfully exported to the Baltic regions and became known as 'Russian Stout'. It was brewed with a high percentage of roasted malts and matured for many months before being bottled, producing a beer of great strength and complexity that withstood the long journey and changes in climate.

The decision to export is attributed to a Belgian merchant called Albert Le Coq. In the early 1800's he purchased strong stout from London brewers, bottled it under his own label and then shipped it abroad to many Russian cities including St Petersburg. A well-judged gift of five thousand bottles to the military hospitals of Catherine the Great was rewarded with an Imperial Warrant of Appointment and 'Imperial Extra Double Stout' was born.



Harvey's commission to recreate the style in the 1990's came with the blessing of the Le Coq Brewery in Estonia, who had asked that it should be brewed by a small independent brewery with experience of Porter style beers. What they could not have known was that the mineral composition of Lewes water is not dissimilar to that of South London and this would give an unexpected authenticity.

As with many Harvey beers, if you delve into history, there is also a local provenance. In 1929 the town was the venue for secret talks between the British and Soviet governments to explore the resumption of diplomatic relations between the two countries. These were held at the White Hart, Stanley Baldwin later stating in the Commons 'I may say that you get the best of ale there'.



Seventy-five years previously, during the Crimean War, Lewes had been chosen for the confinement of 'Russian' prisoners. These soldiers of the Russian Imperial Army were mostly Finnish and Swedish. They were treated well and were allowed to sell items they carved from wood and bone to the townsfolk, who frequently visited them in the town gaol. When they were repatriated at the end of the war, the town turned out to wish them well and a local band joined the procession to the railway station. A subsequent letter from the Tsar thanked the people of Lewes for their kindness and an obelisk was erected in St John's churchyard to honour those who had died in captivity.

In recent years 'Imperial Extra Double Stout' has been served in the Russian Embassy. It has been the recipient of over fifteen international awards including the 'World's Best Stout and Porter' and has been named the 'Most Authentic Russian Stout'. It is said that Lewes produces the 'Tsar of All the Russian Stouts'. At 9% alcohol by volume, it should be treated with respect and drunk sparingly. It is a splendid substitute for Port, after a meal, with local cheeses.