

# Lincolnshire Fens flooded with Cider.

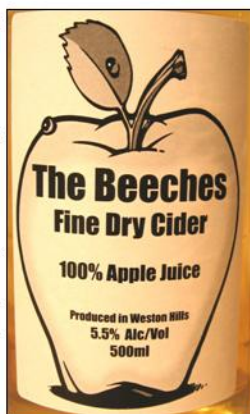
The Fenlands around **Wisbech** are littered with commercial apple orchards. Not the traditional 'standard' orchards of large, gnarled old trees, but neat rows of carefully trained, and heavily pruned bush apple trees. This is high-yield, agricultural fruit growing, some would say about as picturesque as a field of cabbages, though to my taste, these modern orchards have a certain 'regimented' charm.



With so much orchard fruit being grown, it's perhaps surprising that there are so few signs of traditional cidermaking in the Wisbech area. The **Gaymers Cider Co**, which originated across the border in Norfolk, still grow much of the fruit for their '**Olde English Cyder**' brand in this part of the Fens. Indeed there are still one or two large roadside signs advertising the fact locally. Gaymers (now part of the massive Constellation Brands Inc.) are of course no longer based in the area, but visit Wisbech in the Autumn and you're still likely to see apple-laden lorries leaving the county, heading south to the massive Gaymers' cider factory at **Shepton Mallet**.

But surely Gaymers alone can't account for all the fruit grown in this traditional orcharding area. Where are all the small-scale craft cidermakers, keen to make use of the high quality English apples our supermarkets are choosing to ignore? Is this a case of 'apples, apples, everywhere, but not a drop to drink'? It certainly seemed that way, until very recently, when word reached me of a small-scale cidemaker in the nearby Fenland town of Spalding. This cider-hunter's curiosity was piqued. I had to go and investigate.

My only clue to the presence of 'real cider' in the Fens came from a short news feature on the **Peterborough CAMRA** website. Apparently the **Gardeners Arms** at Springfield Shopping Centre, Spalding, has a local bottled cider from nearby **Weston Hills**. A visit to the pub seemed in order and I managed to procure a single bottle of '**The Beeches**' **Fine Dry Cider** (5.5%), a pure juice cider, which true to it's name is very dry, but also very sharp indeed. I suspect the blend of fruit used to make this cider contains a high proportion of sharp cooking apples. It's a clean, well made cider, but



perhaps one for the connoisseur. Unfortunately, the bottle doesn't give many clues about the maker, so I turned to Google for answers. No luck there either, but the plot thickened when to my surprise, the search turned up a second Spalding cidemaker...

**Spalding Scrumpy** (6.5%) is a very small-scale operation, producing less than 100 gallons of cider from freshly pressed local apples. Most of the cider is pure juice, and Spalding Scrumpy cidemaker Trevor, bottles all of his cider un-pasteurised, unfiltered and without the dubious 'benefit' of carbonation (see website for details: <http://cidertrev.co.uk>). Though described as a still, dry cider, I found the Spalding Scrumpy had a pleasant sweetness and a slight prickle from bottle-conditioning. This is a full-flavoured, fruity cider, and well worth tracking down. I acquired my bottle of Spalding Scrumpy at **Sergi's Delicatessen**, 10-11 Francis Street, Spalding, where I was even more surprised to come across yet another Spalding cider...



**JW's Dry Fen Cider** (4.5%) is a slightly larger concern. Almost 400 gallons of this dry, still cider are made at Pinchbeck on the edge of Spalding. The apples used are all local, and the cider is mainly bottled for sale in very attractive refundable bottles. Dry Fen Cider is certainly dry, but not too sharp. Quite light in style, an easy-drinking cider with a modest level of alcohol, ideally suited to Summer drinking. You can buy this cider at **Sergi's Deli** in Spalding, or **Charterhouse Wine Co Ltd**, 210 Spalding Road, Pinchbeck, Spalding.

So, my Fenland search was rewarded with a hat-trick of new craft cidermakers, much to my surprise, and delight. I'm still waiting for signs of a new cidermaking tradition to emerge in Wisbech, but the art of cidermaking is seriously contagious. I suspect it won't be long before the Fens are awash with the true taste of it's orchard heritage.

*Mark Shirley*

## Championship Cider & Perry 2009

(voting from the recent CAMRA National Championships at Reading)

- CIDER** - GOLD: Gwatkin, Yarlinton Mill, (Abbey Dore, Herefordshire)  
 SILVER: (joint) Orchards, Wye Cider, (Brockweir, Gloucestershire)  
 SILVER: (joint) Rosie's Triple D, Cider, (Llandegla, Denbighshire)
- PERRY** - GOLD: Broadoak, Perry, (Clutton, Somerset)  
 SILVER: Seidr Dai, Painted Lady Perry (Cardiff, Glamorgan)  
 BRONZE: Gwatkin, Blakeney Red, (Abbey Dore, Herefordshire).