

Bitter summer of the fuggle

LESLIE GEDDES-BROWN discovers why Britain's hop growers have good reason to cry into their beer

WITH the current hot weather prompting a raging national thirst, it would be forgivable to assume that the hop growers of England are raising their glasses in anticipation of increased commercial gain. Not so.

When 210 delegates from 16 countries met for the International Hop Growers' Congress in Hereford town hall yesterday, it was in an atmosphere outwardly convivial.

But tensions abound among this jolly band of farmers, who come from Australia and Bulgaria, Russia and America, to "swap lies", as one delegate put it.

For hop-growing has become a world-wide cut-throat business and one in which the English hop grower is at an increasing disadvantage. As Stuart Adamson, marketing manager of Kent-based English Hops Ltd — a firm which buys from the growers and sells to the brewers — explains, sales of lager have increased in 10 years from about seven per cent of all beer drunk in Britain to an astonishing 50 per cent. And English hops — grown mainly in Kent

and Herefordshire — have shrunk from a high of 20,000 acres in 1969 to only 6,000 today. In Kent alone last year, 100 acres were grubbed up.

It is not only to do with the fact that lager uses only two-thirds of the hops used in bitter. With the dramatic growth of foreign lager-drinking in Britain hitting home-grown brands, a large part of the problem is the foreign brewers' insistence that their native hops be used in their products, whether imported or made on licence in the UK. This, says another English grower, is sheer protectionism, as was the German "purity" law, thrown out by the EC, which meant that no non-Teutonic beer was acceptable in the fatherland.

Could it simply be that the

took advantage and, in the case of the Germans, even renamed the varieties to sound local.

Hops come in two basic kinds — those which are rich in alpha acids and give the bitter flavour to beer and those bred for aroma, called the aroma varieties. Sales of aromas are holding up, say the growers, because many brewers — and Bass is singled out for praise — support their fellow-countrymen in buying hops for lager.

But growers who have specialised in alpha-rich varieties are hit by a downturn in bitter-drinking and by overseas growers who can farm the hops more cheaply. And where once a brewer would buy his hops in sacks and by the hundredweight, pick them up and sniff them for quality, today, says Redsell, hop extract comes in tins like green treacle.

There are, however, encouraging signs, even if Adamson worries that the English hop industry will become extinct.

Traditional brewers, such as Timothy Taylor of Keighly in West Yorkshire, still buy real hops with pride and search especially for varieties like the fuggle which in the 1940s made up 60 per cent of

the crop and now is hardly grown. "We may be fourth division in size," says brewer Peter Eels, "but we're first division for taste." And beer buffs travel miles to sample their milds and bitters.

Timothy Taylor, unlike the major brewers, ignored the big-business techniques of the Sixties and Seventies which led to the abandonment of traditional bitter for keg beer and which, in turn, made drinkers turn away from UK beer in favour of foreign lager. So little-known has traditional British beer become that Barry Clarke, Whitbread's consumer affairs manager, felt it necessary to explain to me that it is darker than lager and served much warmer.

Whitbread, however, detects a move back to "cask-condi-



great English hop is not up to making foreign beer? Though UK brewers insist that their lagers — made for big names like Budweiser and Fosters — could not be the same without the secret recipes of hop blends insisted upon by the overseas companies, the growers growl that this is rubbish.

Anthony Redsell, the doyen of English hop farmers, explains that the taste and type of the water used is as vital as the variety of hop — “and anyway it’s extraordinary how, when hops are scarce, the brewers soon throw secret ‘local’ recipes out of the window”.

Ironically, the hop varieties that look like putting so many English farmers out of business were bred at Wye College in a programme sponsored by the Thatcher Government, the farmers, and the British brewers. Farmers all over the world

tioned beer, which means beer kept in barrels and using good English hops. “There is a real demand,” says Clarke. “In the last few years we’ve doubled the distribution.”

But what hop growers here really need is for British bitter to conquer the Continent in the way its lager has conquered us. While the jolly band of British hop growers, 250 in all, are determined that the English hop will never die, what they would really like is to have the brewers over a barrel.

Until prices paid for hops keep pace with inflation — currently growers get 1984 rates — hop fields will continue to be grubbed up. Or, as Amanda Ash, the daughter of a grower who has dropped from 17 acres to one, suggests, hops will be dried for decoration round the home; a sad relic of a once-great industry.

BIRTHS

AZIS—On Aug. 3, 1990, to Fiona and ROBIN, a son (Alexander James David), a brother for Oliver.

BAILEY—On July 31, in New York, to RUTH (née Leask) and JEREMY, a son (Charles William Crampton), a brother for Jennifer.

BARSTOW—On Aug. 4, to RACHEL (née Drew) and DAVID, a son (Marcus Thomas James).

BEATTIE—On Aug. 5, at the Portland Hospital, to CAROL (née Neve) and MARK, a son (Max Henry Forbes).

BERTIE—On Aug. 2, in Gloucester, to BELINDA (née Adkin) and JOHN, a daughter (Georgina Anne).

BRIGGLAND—On Aug. 3, at St Mary's Hospital, Paddington, to JULIA (née Whesler) and DONATHAN, a son (Benjamin Jonathan Samuel), a brother for Abigail.

BROWN—On Aug. 4, 1990, at Heatherwood Hospital, Ascot, to BERNADETTE (née Cartland) and PETER, a daughter (Joanna Elizabeth).

CALDERBANK—On July 28, to SANBRA (née Head) and RICHARD, a son (Robert Allan).

CLEMORE—On Aug. 4, in Princeton, New Jersey, to LYNN (née Pendarvis) and ALASTAIR, a son (John William Guy), a brother for Sarah.

CLUTTON—On Aug. 5, 1990, to ROSEMARY (née Skeet) and OWEN, a daughter (Alice Elizabeth Katherine) a sister to William.

COWEN—On July 15, to ELIZABETH (née Hindmarsh) and JOHN, a daughter (Rosaleen Anna), a sister for Olivia and Juliet.

DA COSTA—On Sunday, Aug. 5, at Trellick Hospital, Truro, to JUNE and DAVID, a daughter (Sophie), a sister to Sarah.

ENGLISH—On Aug. 4, to STEPHANIE (née Thompson) and HOWARD, a daughter (Sabina Jacqueline), a sister for Sebastian.

FURNESS—On Aug. 4, to ANN and JONNY, a son (Robert Huw), a brother for Sam and Jack.

HARVEY—On Aug. 6, to CAROLINE (née Fawcett) and ANTHONY GUY, a son.

HOW—On Aug. 6, 1990, at the Simpson Memorial Maternity Pavilion, Edinburgh, to PAULA and ROBIN, a son (Paul David Samuel).

MONTGOMERY—On Aug. 5, to LUCY (née Slay) and DOUGLAS, a daughter (Sophie Clare).

OLIVER—On Aug. 5, to ANN and DAVID, a daughter (Kate Emma), a sister for Simon.

RICHARDS—On Aug. 5, 1990, to JUDITH (née Wickings) and DAVID, a son.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

BOND—On Aug. 1, suddenly at home, PETER ADRIAN in his 70th year. Much donations to Friends of the Earth in Cambridge. No flowers. If desired, funeral service at 11.30 a.m. at St Andrew's Church, Market Place, Epsom, Surrey. Burial at home, c/o E.A. Read Funeral Directors, Market Place, Epsom, Surrey. Only donations if desired to Hospice at home, c/o E.A. Read Funeral Directors, Market Place, Epsom, Surrey. Burial at home, c/o E.A. Read Funeral Directors, Market Place, Epsom, Surrey. Only donations if desired to Hospice at home, c/o E.A. Read Funeral Directors, Market Place, Epsom, Surrey. Burial at home, c/o E.A. Read Funeral Directors, Market Place, Epsom, Surrey. Only donations if desired to Hospice at home, c/o E.A. Read Funeral Directors, Market Place, Epsom, Surrey.

BRIGGS—On Aug. 3, suddenly at home, beloved husband of Alice and Nigel, loved father of Danny, Ian and much loved father of Danny, Ian and Nigel and four grandchildren. Funeral service, St Paul's, Merton, Guildford, 11.30 a.m., Thursday, Aug. 9.

BRIMCOMBE—On Aug. 3, peacefully after a courageous battle against cancer, JACK, much loved husband of Joan, father of John and Richard and grandfather of Claire and Laura. Funeral service at St Luke's, Stanmore, Winchester, on Thursday, Aug. 9 at 2 p.m. Donations, if desired, to Cancer Research, c/o Mrs Steel & Son, Chessell House, Winchester, (tel. 0932 844044).

BRISTOL—On Aug. 4, 1990, LILLIAS, most adored mother of Fiona and darling Gran to Augustus and Julius Gray. Most loving mother to Nicholas, Paul and Timothy. Funeral service on Thursday, Aug. 9 at St Mark's Church, Peaslake at 3 p.m. Flowers please, to Sherlock & Sons, Trellis House, Dorking.

BROADHURST—On Saturday, Aug. 4, 1990, after a long illness, courageously borne, JOAN ELIZABETH. Funeral service at Basbourne, 11.30 a.m. Family flowers only, but donations if desired to the charity to Broadhurst Memorial Fund (charity to be nominated). Inquiries and donations c/o Bedford Funeral Service, tel. 0923 893899.

BUCKLEY—On Aug. 3, suddenly but peacefully at Sea, ANN, beloved wife of Christopher. Funeral at Mortlake Crematorium, Townsmead Road, SW14, at 12 noon, Wednesday Aug. 15. Family flowers only, but donations, to the Pool Life Boat, R.N.L.I., West Quay Road, Poole, Dorset BH15 1HZ. Very welcome.

BURBURY—On Sunday, Aug. 5, peacefully in his sleep, Dr JOHN MARK, beloved husband of Carol and loving father of Judith and Frances, loved by sons-in-law Leonard and Alan and granddaughters Gemma, Katherine and Carolyn. Will be sadly missed by all.

BURRESS—On Aug. 3, passed away peacefully in his 87th year, devoted wife to