

Press release to the Mercury, 20 September 2016

Around four hundred people came to the first St Andrew's Church Beer Festival, and over £1,000 was raised for WaterAid. Rev Alan Stewart commented: "It was such an incredibly welcoming and positive day, with a real spirit of teamwork, hospitality and festival."

On offer were sixteen beers from breweries around the country, selected by Alex Wilsdon, a member of St Andrews and an experienced cask and keg cellar manager. There were also four Welsh ciders on offer from Gwynt Y Ddraig, and seven English wines from a range of vineyards from Cornwall, Gloucestershire, Sussex and Kent.

All the Cornish pasties from the Chough Bakery in Padstow were sold, and the church teenagers did a roaring trade in non-alcoholic cocktails, including a specially devised 'Hertford Sunrise'. Every half hour they also did a puppet show for children, who had a range of activities while their parents sampled the beers on offer.

The St Andrews Bell Ringers contributed a Quarter Peal to open the festival, and inside the church were displays on the themes of Artists, Activists and Pilgrims. An audio-visual presentation on Anthony Gormley's Angel of the North was a reflection on what the artist was trying to say to motorists on the A1, and there was plenty of material on offer about environmental concerns and the journey of life.

The Beer from the Emmanuales Brewery in Sheffield (featured recently on BBC *Songs of Praise*) was found to be a lot better than expected from the quality of the puns they use in naming and promoting their beer. The Brewery strapline is "What would Jesus brew?" and manager Nick Law says: "*Our aim is to spread the good news one beer at a time; but we're not out to force religion down people's throats – just beer! Quite simply, like Christian artists, poets, songwriters, authors, and craftsmen throughout history whose works adorn chapels and cathedrals, music halls and record collections, libraries and book shelves, and buildings or landscapes across this earth, we want to make the best beer around to the glory of God.*" At the festival four examples of their beers were on offer: By the Waters of Rhubarbabylon, Four Horsemen of the Hopocalypse, Jonah and the Pale, and Oh Hoppy Day.

When asked why a church would want to run a Beer Festival, St Andrew's Reader Jim Thornton said: "Far from being a decline in spirituality in the country, there is evidence of a growth of interest. The problem is that people no longer think the church has much to say, so they look in all sorts of other directions. Like the early followers of Jesus who changed the world, we have to find new ways to start conversations about God, and perhaps providing a good quality festival with excellent beers is one possibility."

More information and photos from Jim Thornton