

# w·i·z·a·r·d·s

*Worcester Incorporated Zymurgists Advancing Real Draughts*



**Homebrew Club  
Worcester, MA**

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## Highlights from the year that was 2023

It's been another good year for the Wizards and our first year since the pandemic where every meeting was in person. The club kept busy this year with quarterly mini-comps, the barrel project, a third bulk grain buy, the NE Home Brew Jamboree and another Advent calendar beer swap. All this on top of our weekly Thursday night social call where we're now up to 195 in a row with only a few holiday breaks.

One highlight of the year was hosting the inaugural Central Mass Home Brew Challenge, a club only competition for the Wizards, M4, FOAM and Strange Brewers. Our goal in starting the competition was to bring the local clubs together, teach our members about competitions and judging, improve everyone's brewing and maybe even establish some bragging rights. Everyone was encouraged to enter and participate in the judging regardless of experience. Congrats to Eric from the Strange Brewers for wining Best of Show.

The only downside this year was the closing of Deja Brew. We had a good run with Deja Brew. They opened in the spring of 1996 and we started meeting there in December of 2000. Thanks to Ray and Carl for taking care of us for close to 23 years.

## January Club Meeting

The year started strong, meeting in person at Deja Brew, just like we're supposed to do. Brendan presented his NEIPA using thiloized yeast and cascade hops for the opening toast. After that we moved to the question of the day, how do you chill? It was quite a lively discussion for such a routine topic with all the obvious, and a few not so obvious, answers.

## WIZARDs 2023 Year in Review

Next, we had a quick Bitter tasting in preparation for the quarterly mini-comp next month. We had five different bitters to try so everyone should be well prepared when the time comes.



This month's featured event was the second half of the Barth Haas aroma panel sensory kit (we did the first half last year). The kit consists of 12 vials containing 12 common aromas naturally found in hops. They are for smelling only, not tasting. After opening and smelling each aroma, we tried to identify the various aromas we learned about in the kit by picking them out in several different hops. This time we learned about spicy (pepper), herbal (Italian seasoning), grassy (grassy), vegetal (diaper, cooked cabbage), floral (perfume), citrus (lemon pledge).

### [Annual Holiday Party](#)

Bill hosted the club's annual holiday party at his house in Hudson. In keeping with our new goal of bringing the local clubs together we invited M4, FOAM and the Strange Brewers to join us. Let's just say, those Strange Brewers know how to keep a party going.



## WIZARDs 2023 Year in Review

### [February Club Meeting](#)

This month's highlight was the Best Bitter mini-comp, won by President Eli. Per the winner himself "the contest went greatish and the scoring was quite amusing" although he never really elaborated on what that meant. We had a total of eight entries, most of which were similar, especially the top five. Bill N and Brendan filled out the top three.



### [March Club Meeting](#)

In preparation for the inaugural Central Mass Home Brew Challenge, we held an Intro to Judging Seminar. All the participating clubs were invited and we had guests from the Strange Brewers and M4. Given one of our goals was to get everyone involved, we wanted to make sure we trained them first. We walked through the judging process, the evaluation scoresheet and did a practice judging on an American Pale Ale disguised as an India Pale Ale that Bill brought to try and trip us up.

### [April – Central Mass Home Brew Challenge](#)

We met on a Saturday afternoon at Bill's house for judging of the inaugural Central Mass Challenge Competition. There were thirty entries collapsed into six flights: Dark European Lagers, Mostly American Ales, Light European Ales, Bitters & Pale Ales, Porters & Stouts and Belgian Ales. Judging was done in two rounds with three teams, with each team having at least one experienced judge, followed by a best of show. Congrats to Strange Brewer Eric for winning Best of Show with his Grodziskie. Complete results can be found on the website at <http://www.wizardshbc.com/central-mass-home-brew-challenge/>.



The winners and the rest of us



Best of Show Panel



## WIZARDS 2023 Year in Review



Judging in the basement



Judging in the kitchen

Thanks to Bill for hosting, Levi for being the steward, Megan for bringing us some after judging snacks and all the entrants and judges that made this event a success. Not only did we have a fun and educational experience, the net proceeds from the entry fees were donated to the Sweats for Vets charity in Marlborough.

### [April Club Meeting](#)

Marathon Bill M (he recently completed this year's Boston marathon) provided the opening toast with his Saison which was very well received. The opening question - do you use a secondary fermenter? - produced some lively discussion with the consensus being only when dry hopping, lagering or for very big beers, if at all.

To learn a little more about the Helles style for next month's mini-comp, we tried five different Helles's (Spaten Premium Lager, Paulaner Munich Lager, Weihenstephaner Helles, Augustiner Edelstoff, Hill Farmstead Marie).



### [May Club Meeting](#)

The main event for this month's meeting was the Helles Mini-comp. Brian W beat out the competition to take the top honors. We had seven judged entries and an eighth late but praiseworthy entry from Walter. 2<sup>nd</sup> through 4<sup>th</sup> place were Duane, Bill N and Rob. Brian quickly declared his choice for the next mini-comp as Weissbier/Hefeweizen (10A).

## WIZARDS 2023 Year in Review

### [June Club Meeting](#)

The meeting started with our annual officer elections. Eli and Bill will continue as president and treasurer and Brian W is our new vice president. All three claimed unanimous victories (and all three ran unopposed).

Perhaps the biggest discussion of the night centered around what we should do for this year's summer swill-off. After some debate we agreed on "cheap beer/anything under \$6/six-pack."

It's time for the club's sour barrel project to take another step forward with our annual doling out of shares and refilling the barrel. Last year we did a group brew at Duane's house for topping up the barrel. This year we decided that brewing the top-up beer would be done by club members at their own home at that their convenience. To get ready the club bought the ingredients and Duane whipped up an incredibly large batch of yeast which we assembled into ingredient kits and distributed at this month's meeting.

### [July Club Meeting – It's the Swill-Off Again](#)



Its July and that can only mean one thing. It's swill off time again! The swill-off is an annual club event where we pick a beer category, buy some commercial examples and then taste and pick the best in the lot. In the past we done things like American

macro beer, lite beer, Asian beer, Eurotrash, Mexican beer and 40-ounce bottled beer. This year's theme was cheap beer, ideally under \$6 a six pack. Sadly, Pat was not available to provide his usual eloquent, entertaining and informative summary so Bill filled in the best he could. Coming out on top this year was, drum roll please, Miller High Life, beating out Pabst Blue Ribbon in a hotly contested fight. You can read more about the swill-off on the website at <http://www.wizardshbc.com/2023/07/22/2023-swill-off/>.

If that wasn't enough swill, we finally had a Lion Tropical Stout, almost seven years after the tropical stout mini-comp! Overall ratings weren't that favorable. Maybe there's a reason it took us seven years to find a bottle.

### [Bulk Grain Buy – August 2023](#)

Dwanye organized this year's bulk grain buy (our third in three years) at Stone Path Malting in Wareham. Regrettably he was on his own for the pick-up but his efforts were appreciated by all who participated.

## WIZARDS 2023 Year in Review

One of the nice things about Stone Path is there is no minimum order, so you can buy as many or as few bags you like at a very reasonable price. Malts and prices are on their website – just call them if you're interested.

### [August Club Meeting](#)

This month we heard sad news from Rob that Deja Brew is closing so we must find a new place to meet. On the bright side we had 13 people show up for an August meeting, which is normally our most poorly attended meeting.

We decided the barrel project had run its course and it's time to start wrapping it up. Plans were set for the final pull off the barrel later in the month. The barrel top-up kits we distributed last month became a do what you want with them. Most of the participants made the base beer as planned and are enjoying it as we speak. We served the batch made by Jeremiah at the NE Home Brew Jamboree where we called it a Belgian Table Beer, whatever that is.

Then it was time for the Hefeweizen mini-comp. We had entries from Brian W, Bill N., Duane, Jon, Justin, and Walter. We scored them all together as a group using new custom scoresheets created by Brian (which Pat said was the only thing that redeemed him after the disaster of bad news we were having up to that point). Justin came in 3rd place with an average of 34.1, followed by Duane in 2nd with a 36 and in first place with a whopping 38 average was crowd favorite Bill N. The November style is Altbier and Bill gets to choose the February style.

We ended the evening of chaos with a final group photo in Deja Brew and a toast to the good times we've had there. As Pat so wisely said, the Wizards are a state of mind, a group of friends, not a location, and this is only a bump in the road. And then Rob kicked us out and locked the door for the very last time.



### [August – The barrel runs its course](#)

All good things must come to an end sometime and that time has come for the barrel project. The club met at Bill M's house for the final pull off the barrel and to drain it for good. We filled kegs for everyone who wanted one, filled another for the club and gave the final runnings to Rob so he could make some vinegar. After that, all we had to do was get the barrel out of Bill's basement. We're not



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sure what everyone is doing with their share but we do know Bill M is planning to make the barrel into a table for his backyard patio.



To learn more about the day and for the complete barrel project story, see the website at <http://www.wizardshbc.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/The-Sour-Barrel-Project.pdf>

### [New England Homebrew Jamboree, Tamworth Camping Area, Tamworth, NH](#)



The Wizards made another strong showing at the New England Homebrew Jamboree in Tamworth, NH. Brian W and Justin joined us for the first time this year. We made some changes to the booth this year for a nice clean and (almost) professional look, complete with multi-colored lighting courtesy of Walter. If only our recently rebuilt cauldron was ready for the task. We had a few line blow outs, a frantic searching for some new hose and a bit of rebuilding before we were finally ready for business. We had twelve beers on tap with two of them rotating during the day. The Sour Barrel Beer was served through the Randall first with Joey's home-grown rhubarb, followed by peach, mango and then rhubarb again. The second rotating beer was a pale ale served through the hop rocket with a variety of Eli's home-grown hops.

## WIZARDs 2023 Year in Review

Here's the tally of what you missed, taken at 3:30 PM Saturday, starting at our tent:

- Wizards 12
- Northshore 41
- Seacoast 28
- BFD 17
- Arcane the Brewcast 50
- RIBS 10
- Concord 8
- Southern Maine 3
- Blue Line Truck – 6
- Mash Holes 9
- Southshore 51
- WORTS 13
- MVHBC 18
- Knights of the Mashing Fork 18
- CBS 18

That's 14 clubs and the Blue Line Truck for a total of 302 beers, wines, ciders, meads and who knows what else to choose from! Compared to last year, we had 2 fewer clubs but 42 more choices. We didn't break any records since I've been counting (19 clubs in 2018 and 2019 and 339 beverage choices in 2017) but still a solid showing and nobody left thirsty.





## WIZARDS 2023 Year in Review



1. BOURBON STOUT	9%
2. HEFENEIZEN	4.8%
3. RYE ALE	4.7%
4. TRIGLIZED RHUBARB ALE	6.2%
5. BELGIAN TABLE BEER	4.4%
6. DARK MILD ALE	3.2%
7. BARREL AGED CIDER	9.5%
8. A.P.A.	6.1%
9. BRITISH GOLDEN ALE	4.4%
10. see below	4.6%
11. see below	6.5%
12. PALE LAGER	4.3%

Plans are already being made for next year's jamboree; we have a few more improvements for the booth in mind...

### September Club Meeting – Oktoberfest!

It's Oktoberfest again and time for the first club meeting since the closing of Deja Brew. Thanks to Jeremiah for hosting us at his house.



Once we got settled into our new temporary home, it was time for the next mini-comp style presentation. Bill talked about the Altbier style and gave us brewing tips while we sampled some Long Trail Ale (an Altbier style beer brewed by Long Trail Brewing Company and their flagship beer).

We also made a small change for the mini-comp that will give brewers time to brew after the presentation instead of having the presentation right before judging when everyone has already brewed. Starting with the next mini-comp, the style presentation will now be held four months before the mini-comp. Now people can listen to the talk, learn about the style, formulate their recipe and have plenty of time to brew it.

Then it was time for our annual Oktoberfest tasting. This year we had a very reasonable ten beers to try (remember the twenty last year?), evenly split between Oktoberfests and Festbiers. Was there a clear favorite? To find out, you'll have to read Pat's customary witty write-up with all the gory details that can be found at the end of this newsletter.



*1 Pat Announces the Winners as only Pat can*

## WIZARDS 2023 Year in Review

Our last act of the night was to set plans for our third annual Advent calendar beer swap. It was pointed out that Walter has clearly thrown down the gauntlet by providing the top scoring beer for the first two calendars – will it be a hat trick?

### October Club Meeting

Thanks to Rob for hosting us in Uxbridge. Rob gets bonus points as he was the first person to offer us snacks for a meeting. For the opening toast, Brian W shared his Vienna Lager to rave reviews. We also had a surprise visit from ex-President Craig. He's busy with family life but still brewing.

Bill announced the next mini-style as West Coast Pilsner. He talked about the style including a short history on how it came to be and gave some brewing tips while we sampled Aeronaut's Robocrusher. Although not labeled a West Coast Pilsner, it was dang close to what we will be brewing for the first mini-comp in 2024.



Rob shared several beers from his recent trip to Japan. There were two craft beers and the rest were nationals. My personal favorite was the 7/11 (yes, the 7/11 convenience store) house beer aptly titled “The Brew.”

### November Club Meeting

Our opening toast was dedicated to wishing president Eli a get well soon as he is home with covid (after spending 2 weeks in Munich, so no one was feeling that sorry for him) while Dwayne shared altbiers he brought back from his recent trip to Germany. During our business discussion, Bill shared beers he brought back from Portugal.

Then it was time for the Altbier mini-comp. For calibration beers we had the Long Trail Ale again and Olde Mecklenburg's Copper Altbier (which Levi brought back from a recent trip). Following that it was on to judging the seven entries. Once again, we used Brian's new abbreviated judging form. Bill N took first place followed by Dwayne in second, Jeremiah in third and Brian W with an honorable mention. With some urging from the club, Bill quickly picked English Mild as the



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May mini-comp style. We last did mild in 2017 so it should be interesting to see if and how times have changed.

We also had a hop giveaway thanks to Carl at Deja Brew!

Our final official act of the night was singing Happy Birthday to Rob as he walked out the door.

Special thanks to Jeremiah for hosting us again this month.



*Getting Ready for the Advent Calendar Swap*



*Hop Giveaway thanks to Deja Brew*

### [WIZARDS Advent Calendar 2023](#)

For once, we didn't have to go to the old Bed, Bath & Beyond parking lot for the Advent Calendar beer swap and instead just did it at the November meeting. This was the third year in a row in what is now becoming an annual tradition. Kudos to both Duane and Greg who had the designated beer on every day of the month. Double kudos to Greg who did the same for a Scotch Advent Calendar!

December 1st



December 25th





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### [December Club Meeting – Wormtown Brewery](#)

For the second year in a row, we kept with tradition and took our December meeting on the road. Everyone liked last year's Wormtown/Pint combo so much we decided to repeat it again this year. We started the night with a beer in Wormtown's taproom and a brewery tour. The tour, led by one of the owners, was fairly in-depth covering more than the usual "tourist" brewery tour. An especially interesting part was learning about the evolution of the brewery over time and the building renovations required along the way. The tour went long and



the taproom was closing so we headed over to the Pint for some shuffleboard and a late take-out dinner from the Mediterranean restaurant down the road. Another good time was had by all and it was nice have a few of the members of M4 and the Strange Brewers join us for a night out.

### [WIZARDS Tasting Glasses](#)



Good news – even though we sold some at the jamboree, we still have plenty of them.

Any member in good standing (ie, dues paying) gets two for free and additional glasses can be bought at the bargain rate of 2 for \$5.

***Till next year, see you at the monthly club meeting, always held on the third Tuesday of the month.***

[Oktoberfest 2023, courtesy of Pat](#)

Seid gegrüßt, meine Zaubererkollegen!

It's autumn, the days are growing shorter, the leaves are changing colors and so are the beer styles. It's a time when the beer shelves themselves start to turn orange with the offerings of fall signaling an end to summer. It's a time when we Wizards hold to our traditions. It's a time when we put away our shorts and put on our lederhosen! It's when we go out and collect the bounty of fall. It's a time for Oktoberfest!

I will admit this year felt a little bittersweet to me. Bitter due to the fact that our long-time meeting place, Deja Brew is no more and us Wizards are now looking for a new permanent home. It was sweet that we are still going to make the efforts to keep meeting. In September Jeramiah was gracious enough to open his doors and let us use his house to meet. With efforts like this I know we'll be ok. Keep your heads up my fellow Wizards in time we'll find a new place to call our home!

Now for some ground rules. As usual the scoring was done by the Wizard's time-honored tradition of finger rating (1 being awful, 5 being sublime). All scores will be rounded to the nearest hundredth (.00). We'll just go right down the list in the order we had them. And remember I only write what I hear. So if you don't see any comments of your own written down it means you need to speak up! That's enough talk from me. Let's get into it. Let's taste some German-style beer, or what others think German-style beer is. My fellow Wizards, I give you the 2023 Oktoberfest!

1. Tucher Festbier- Que the band! As soon as festivities started polka music seemed to come out of the basement walls. Almost as quickly as the music started many people started questioning the name of the beer. "Tucher not F\*cker". After we got past the listing the things that rhyme with Tucher most people found this beer to be enjoyable. "Good amount of bitterness." "Nice Polka this year!" "Decent little beer. Nice bitterness." Good Starter beer. Can wear on your pallet." This beer also pulled off a feat I don't think I've ever seen. When it came time to vote Tucher Festbier received straight 3's from those in attendance. Giving Tucher a score of 30 pts for a 3 average.
2. Sierra Nevada Oktoberfest- Now in cans! This caused some of us to long for the days of this beer coming in bottles. The quality did seem to be less than in years past. "Did someone have to buy a 12 pack?" "Yes. I hate they aren't doing bottles." This beer also gave us the most obvious comment of the night "We can go up or down from here!" For some reason we started looking down the road to future holidays "What is Santa bringing me this year?" One good thing did come from this talk of

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Christmas in that we confirmed the Wizards will be doing the holiday beer Advent again this year. The beer swap is back on baby! However, no Alt biers will be allowed. 27pts 2.7 average.

3. Jacks Abbey- Fest of both worlds- We had our first medical scare of the evening when Joey almost died. Alarms sounded from his pocket, and it looked like he was about to keel over. Turns out it was a false alarm. His phone was going off and his balance isn't what it once was. After we confirmed he would survive we moved on. Not much was said about this beer. It tasted fine but didn't wow anyone too much. People were lamenting the beer they don't have tonight. Like I tell my children be thankful for what you have! 34 pts 3.4 average.
4. Festbier Mighty Squirrel- There wasn't much about this beer that we enjoyed. "What a terrible brewery name." "A lot of melanoidin malt. Almost like straight Vienna. Craker, pretzel flower dry." "I want to die in my mouth." "Tripper is eating sticks!" (Tripper is Jeramiah's dog who joined us in the festivities.) After being entertained b by Tripper for a few minutes we got back to deciding where this beer should be properly placed. "Better than then first one." "WRONG!" 22pts 2.2 average.
5. Paulaner Oktoberfest Marzen- Right off the bat we were enjoying this beer more than the previous one. "They have the best labels." Brian now shared how impressed he is with the grip strength of beer maidens- "It's good." "Groggy taste." We then lamented how Duane couldn't be with us this year as he was actually in Germany. "Is Duane at Oktoberfest? I think so." Fun fact: you can sit at the tables, but don't ever stand on the tables at Oktoberfest. 33 pts 3.3 average
6. Mighty Squirrel Marzen- After Mighty Squirrel's festbier we had low expectations for this offering. "Ass free! You don't know that yet." "Very orange." "Better than the festbier". "What the hell almost sickening sweet." "This beer reminds me of dirt, not good." "Not bad like the other one." "Very dessert-ish" "Maple pecan heavy flavors" "I wish more breweries gave us their recipes." I don't know why this beer prompted that response, but it did. 26 pts 2.6 average.
7. Neshaminy Creek Festbier- This beer gave us some good conversation even though the beer was not well received. "The Germans are known for their laid-back style." "I taste nuts, not very good." It was then decided that this beer would greatly improve if we had pizza. "My thought was pizza. Good to eat with beer." "Pungent, I don't like it." "Up the creek." "F\*cking Philly." Damn right! (Never miss an opportunity to crap on Philadelphia!) "I'm sure it's fine if you're eating a pizza." We had no pizza, so this beer did not do well. 16 pts 1.6 average.



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8. Aeronaut Oktoberfest- This beer may have been better chilled. Unfortunately, we had to make do with room temp. Also, we started wanting to put onions in beer. "I like Caramelized onion". I want to make a stout I want to throw them in a whirlpool." "Nice art on the can." "Very warm." "A lot lighter than the last two." "I like the carb." "It's warm." "I don't get pilsner malt." "Not unpleasant." "Best beer from Aeronaut in a minute." According to Brian W if you like bad dancing in large groups this is the bar for you. "They have shitty dancing at their bar." Brian W then gave us the quote of the night: "I support the community. Just not when I'm drinking." Despite the bad drinking it's supposedly a great place to forget your bachelor party. Just ask Riley! 25pts 2.5 average.
9. Zero Gravity Oktoberfest- This was a very nice example of the style which we all mostly enjoyed. "A little pale for a Munich, cold helps a lot." I don't remember much else about the commentary about this beer other than Bill's story about how once when he was young a 90-year-old German man showed him how to warm his beer in a bath. It was a touching story about the curiosity of a young man yearning to experience life in new ways he once thought impossible. 35pts 3.5 average.
10. Treehouse Whisper- This beer was a late entry that I debated putting in here, but seeing how Jeremiah was kind enough to have us over I decided to let it stay. This beer was an excellent offering from Treehouse which we all enjoyed. "This was bought one year ago to the day! "I'm sad. Sierra Nevada made a bad beer." "Soft take on the style." "This should be named Carless Whisper." 36pts 3.6 average.

Well look at that. The last beer of the night took home the gold! After all was said and done, we had some good, some bad and some warm beer. The most surprising part of the evening was no Left Hand Oktoberfest! I'll have to go back and check, but I think this may be a first! I hope you all enjoyed your vacation from Left Hand; I'm sure it will be back soon!

We also decided on a theme for next year's swill off- Oktoberfest beers, from the year before! That should be interesting. Be sure to save any unopened beers from tonight.

That's about all I got for this year. It was good seeing all of you that made it out. Thank you again to Jeremiah for having us over.

-Pat