

This article is from  
issue Number 3, 2020, of

# Technical Quarterly

a journal dedicated to the applied and practical  
science of the brewing industry published by the  
**Master Brewers Association of the Americas,**  
a non-profit professional scientific organization  
dedicated to advancing, supporting, and encouraging advances  
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# The Red Lion: My Introduction to Craft Beer and Fuller’s ESB

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## ABSTRACT

This article is part of a series on favorite recipes of the Master Brewers. Fuller’s Extra Special Bitter is deep amber, slightly sweet, and rich. It has a tight head that clings nicely to the glass. The first aromatic

notes are fruity, leaning toward citrus and orange, and marry well with the toffee-like sweetness from the malt. With this recipe, you can brew a Fuller’s-inspired ESB.

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In the fall of 1991, I had recently joined the Matt Brewing Co. in Utica, New York, as associate brewmaster after 6 years at the G. Heileman Brewing Company’s Frankenmuth, Michigan, brewery. Keep in mind that we brewed Blatz, Blatz Light, and Colt 45 at Heileman, and I still have a soft spot in my heart for a well-brewed American lager, but that will be another story.

My new boss invited my wife and me to dinner at his favorite local restaurant, the Red Lion. The Red Lion was a quaint place themed around a traditional English pub serving English fare and ale. At that time, craft beer was in its infancy and even buying “local” wasn’t a thing, so finding your brewery’s beer could be a treasure hunt at times. I ordered something called Fuller’s Extra Special Bitter. Having never had an English ale, let alone been to England, the experience was memorable, to say the least. The comfortable, welcoming environment, the genuine English menu—and most importantly, the company—all went into making this pint stick with me through nearly 30 years.

Deep amber, slightly sweet, and rich, the pint was like nothing I had drunk before and was a perfect match for the food that evening. Whether the beer was that remarkable or, as so often is the case, the whole package of the atmosphere, the food, and the company went into making it memorable doesn’t really matter, the point is it stuck with me and influenced my career in many ways over the ensuing years.

I want to give a shout out to two groups of people who helped bring this article to life. First are my friends at Briggs of Burton, who, having heard this story, first introduced me to the Fuller’s team, whose help with this article’s detail was critical. Both groups’ assistance just reinforces how great this industry is: friendly, willing to help, and basically just full of people you would love to have a beer with. Thanks, everyone! Now on to the details.

Craft beer’s roots are grounded in the desire to bring flavor back to beer in the United States by recreating traditional beer

styles. According to the website, Fuller’s roots go back to the 1600s, but specifically to 1845 as Fuller, Smith and Turner. By those standards, their ESB, introduced in 1971, is pretty new, but it has become the quintessential example of the style. ESBs are amber to copper-colored, medium to full-bodied ales with yeast- and hop-derived fruitiness and crystal malt sweetness balanced by a stiff bitterness derived from traditional U.K. varieties. Keep in mind that these descriptors are based on traditional expectations, not those of today’s more extreme craft beer expectations.

Fuller’s ESB pours with a beautiful aged-copper hue and tight head that clings nicely to the pint glass. The first aromatic notes are fruity, leaning toward citrus and orange, and marry well with the toffee-like sweetness from the malt. To my U.S. Craft acclimated hop perceptions, the hops are subtle and lean earthy and spicy for added complexity. The mouth feel is full, sweet, and rich with toasty/toffee characters leading the way. The reasona-



Photo courtesy of Asahi UK Ltd.

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<https://doi.org/10.1094/TQ-57-3-0826-01>  
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bly strong bitterness from the traditional and subtle English varieties leaves your palate clean and ready for another sip. This is a reasonably big beer that drinks easily due to the all-around balance.

If you want to brew your own Fuller's-inspired ESB, below is an outline taken from information found in Fuller's public record as well as some interpretations I made. Sources of the information are noted. I would recommend holding your mash

conversion time to the minimum needed to achieve a negative starch reaction—too long and you risk overconversion, resulting in a thinner mouth feel and overattenuation. With sufficient oxygenation, fermentation at 70°F (21°C) should be vigorous but controlled and take about 5 days to achieve final gravity. I recommend a brief diacetyl rest before chilling. As any good brewer would do, I would expect you will make your own adjustments. Enjoy!

#### Fuller's ESB-style ale

Malt		
Pale Ale Malt <sup>a</sup>	94%	
Light Crystal Malt <sup>a</sup>	6%	150 EBC (~65 °Lovibond)
Chocolate Malt <sup>a</sup>	<1%	As needed for color adjustment
Hops		
Target <sup>a</sup>	24%	Percent of kettle hops at start of boil
Challenger <sup>a</sup>	32%	Percent of kettle hops at end of boil
Northdown <sup>a</sup>	34%	Percent of kettle hops at end of boil
Golding <sup>a</sup>	10%	Percent of kettle hops at end of boil
Target <sup>a</sup>	7.7	kg/hL (20 lb/100 bbl) at start of fermentation
Water-to-grist ratio <sup>b</sup>	3:1	L/kg (1.16 bbl/100 lb)
Water <sup>c</sup>	Aim for a sulfate-to-chloride ratio of 1.5, and err on the high side of total mineral use, leaving a small amount of positive residual alkalinity	
Mash pH <sup>b</sup>	5.5	
Mash temperature <sup>b</sup>	152°F	(66–67°C)
Yeast <sup>b</sup>	Wyeast 1968 or your choice of ale yeast that drives fruity characters	
Fermentation temperature <sup>b</sup>	70°F (21°C)	
Specifications		
Original gravity <sup>a</sup>	14.5°P (1.059)	
Apparent extract <sup>c</sup>	3.6°P (1.014)	
Real extract <sup>c</sup>	5.7°P (1.023)	
Real degree of fermentation <sup>c</sup>	62.3%	
Alcohol by volume <sup>a</sup>	5.9%	
IBU <sup>a</sup>	35	
Color <sup>a</sup>	17–19 ASBC (32–36 EBC)	

<sup>a</sup> Source of information is Fuller's.

<sup>b</sup> Estimate.

<sup>c</sup> Calculation.