

CHARLIE WATTS' ESB

Faithfully Poured. Properly Bitter.

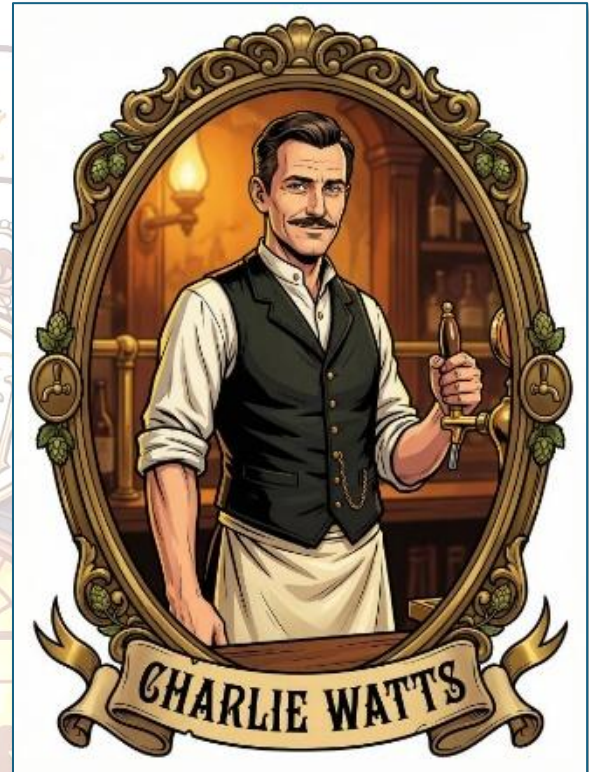
5-Gallon All-Grain Homebrew Recipe

THE CHARACTER

Charlie Watts — the unflappable man behind the bar. Cool, steady, never rushes, never rattles. Charlie has heard every story, poured every pint, and kept the pub running through it all. His ESB is the house beer — the one regulars order without even saying the name. Faithfully poured. Properly bitter. Every. Single. Time.

THE STYLE

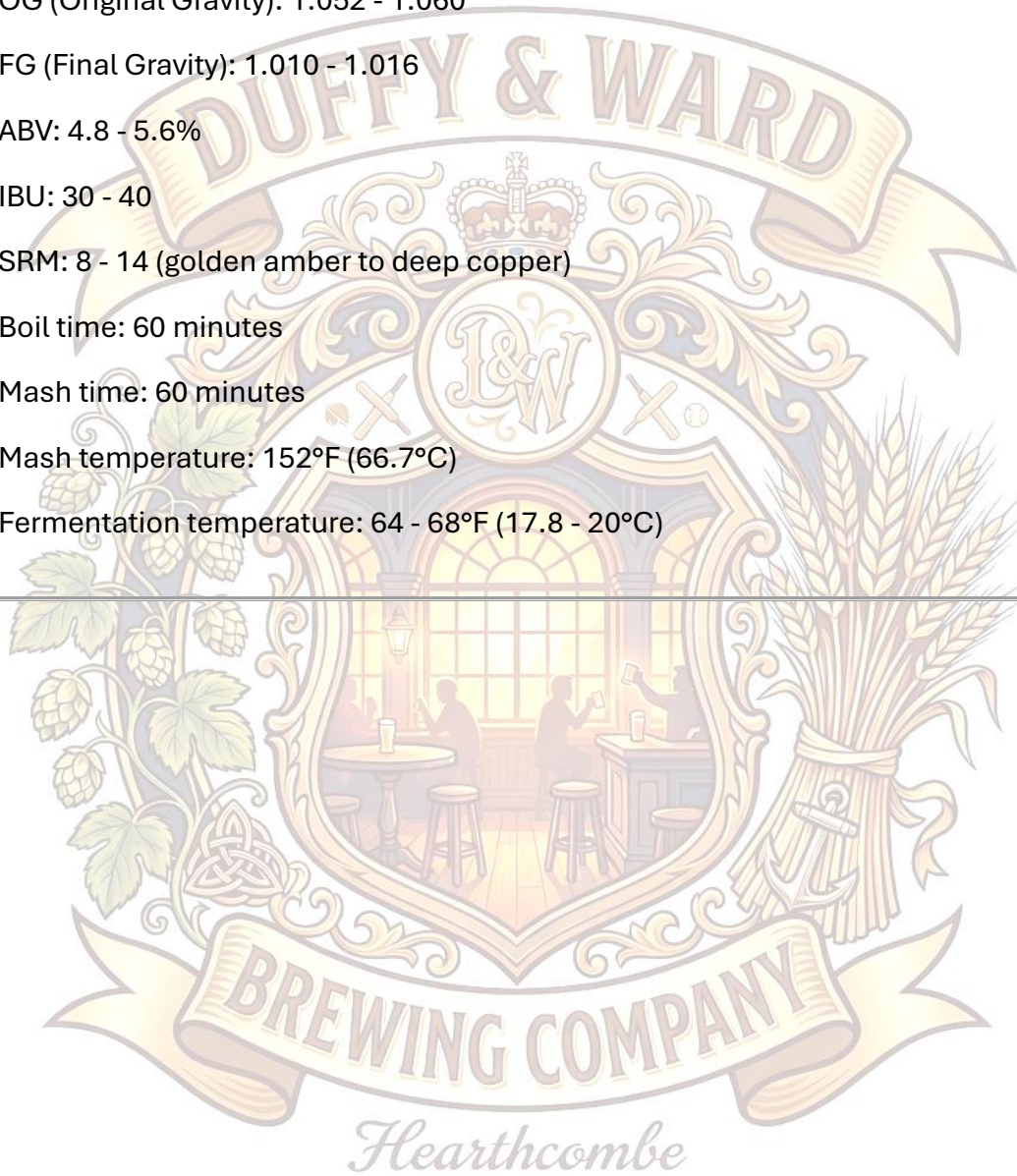
Extra Special Bitter is the pinnacle of the English bitter family — a style that has been the backbone of British pub culture for over a century. Fuller's ESB, first brewed in 1969 at the Griffin Brewery in Chiswick, London, essentially created the ESB category and remains the definitive example. The style is characterized by a beautiful balance between biscuity English malt and earthy, floral English hops — neither dominates. The result is a supremely drinkable beer with enough character to reward attention but enough restraint to invite another pint. If the ESB is good, the pub is good.



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THE SPECS

- Batch size: 5 gallons (into fermenter)
- Pre-boil volume: 6.5 gallons
- OG (Original Gravity): 1.052 - 1.060
- FG (Final Gravity): 1.010 - 1.016
- ABV: 4.8 - 5.6%
- IBU: 30 - 40
- SRM: 8 - 14 (golden amber to deep copper)
- Boil time: 60 minutes
- Mash time: 60 minutes
- Mash temperature: 152°F (66.7°C)
- Fermentation temperature: 64 - 68°F (17.8 - 20°C)



THE WATER

- Start with RO or distilled water — build from scratch
- Treat ALL water with one Campden tablet per 20 gallons to remove chlorine and chloramine
- Target a Burton-on-Trent inspired water profile — high sulfate, moderate calcium, emphasizes hop bitterness and creates a dry, crisp finish

Mineral Additions (for 8 gallons total water — mash plus sparge):

- Gypsum (calcium sulfate): 8 grams
- Calcium chloride: 2 grams
- Epsom salt (magnesium sulfate): 2 grams
- Lactic acid (88%): as needed to achieve mash pH of 5.2 - 5.4
 - Start with 1-2 ml and measure
 - Add in small increments

Target Water Profile (approximate ppm):

- Calcium: 100-150
- Magnesium: 10-20
- Sodium: 10-20
- Sulfate: 200-300
- Chloride: 40-60
- Bicarbonate: 30-50

Note: The high sulfate-to-chloride ratio is CRITICAL for this style. This is what gives English bitters their dry, crisp, hop-accented finish. Burton-on-Trent's mineral-rich water made it the historic home of English pale ales and bitters for exactly this reason. You're building Burton water in your kitchen.

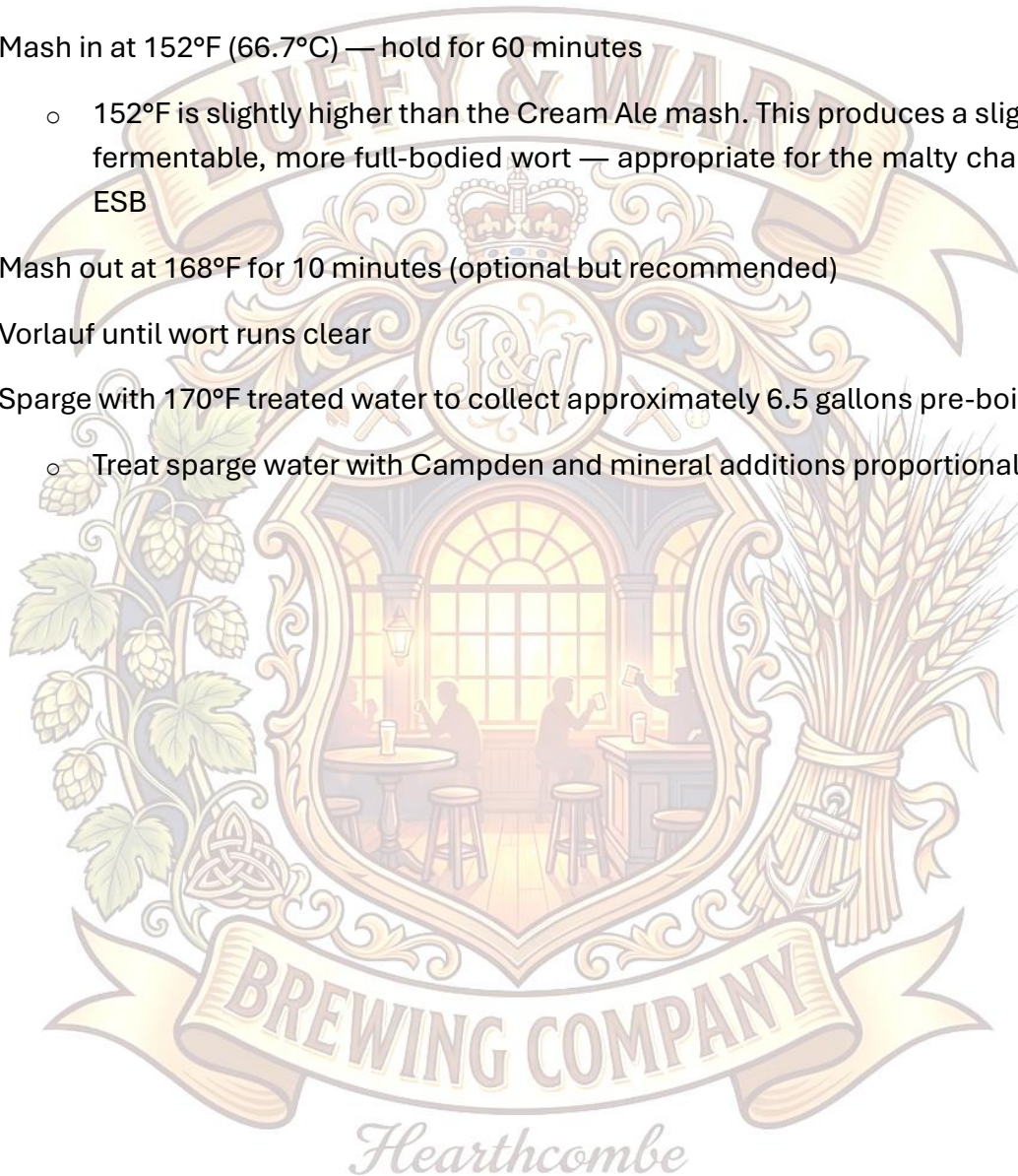
THE GRAIN BILL

- Maris Otter pale malt: 9.0 lbs (78%)
 - THE English base malt. Rich, biscuity, bread-crust character that defines English ales. Accept no substitutes. Do not use American two-row — it won't taste right
- Crystal 60L: 1.0 lb (8.5%)
 - Adds caramel, toffee sweetness, and the distinctive amber color. Provides body, head retention, and malt complexity
- Victory or Biscuit malt: 0.5 lb (4.5%)
 - Adds toasty, biscuity, bread-crust flavor that amplifies the Maris Otter character
- Munich malt: 0.5 lb (4.5%)
 - Adds depth, richness, and a slightly bready complexity
- Crystal 120L: 0.25 lb (2%)
 - Adds a touch of dark caramel, dried fruit, and color depth
- Flaked oats: 0.25 lb (2.5%)
 - Optional — adds a slight silkiness to the mouthfeel

Total grain bill: 11.5 lbs

Mash Instructions:

- Strike water volume: approximately 4.3 gallons (1.5 quarts per pound)
- Strike water temperature: approximately 163°F (to achieve 152°F mash temp — adjust based on your system)
- Mash in at 152°F (66.7°C) — hold for 60 minutes
 - 152°F is slightly higher than the Cream Ale mash. This produces a slightly less fermentable, more full-bodied wort — appropriate for the malty character of ESB
- Mash out at 168°F for 10 minutes (optional but recommended)
- Vorlauf until wort runs clear
- Sparge with 170°F treated water to collect approximately 6.5 gallons pre-boil volume
 - Treat sparge water with Campden and mineral additions proportionally



THE HOPS

A traditional English hop bill. Earthy, floral, herbal — never citrusy or piney. This is English countryside, not American West Coast.

- East Kent Goldings: 1.5 oz at 60 minutes (bittering)
 - The classic English bittering hop. Provides smooth, refined, earthy bitterness
 - Approximately 25-30 IBU
- Fuggles: 1.0 oz at 15 minutes (flavor)
 - Earthy, woody, slightly floral. Quintessential English flavor hop
 - Approximately 5-7 additional IBU
- East Kent Goldings: 0.5 oz at 5 minutes (late aroma)
 - Delicate floral, slightly spicy, honeyed English hop aroma
- East Kent Goldings: 0.5 oz at flameout / 0 minutes (aroma)
 - Steep for 10-15 minutes during whirlpool or cooldown
 - Adds fresh hedgerow, floral English hop nose

Total hops: 3.5 oz

- East Kent Goldings: 2.5 oz total
- Fuggles: 1.0 oz total

Total IBU: approximately 32-38

Note: The hop bitterness should be assertive but NEVER aggressive. ESB is balanced — the bitterness is firm, structured, and dry, but the malt meets it halfway. If the bitterness dominates, it's not an ESB, it's an English IPA. Charlie Watts doesn't shout. Neither should his hops.

Alternative English Hops (if EKG or Fuggles unavailable):

- Challenger — slightly more assertive, still earthy
- Target — clean bittering, works well at 60 minutes
- First Gold — floral, slightly fruity, good for late additions

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- Bramling Cross — spicy, blackcurrant notes, interesting substitute

THE YEAST

- Primary recommendation: White Labs WLP002 (English Ale) or Wyeast 1968 (London ESB)
 - Low attenuation — finishes with residual sweetness and body
 - Moderate fruity esters — subtle apple, pear, light stone fruit
 - Flocculant — drops clear quickly
 - This yeast is CRITICAL to the style. It is what makes an ESB taste like an ESB. Do not use American ale yeast — it will produce a cleaner beer that lacks the English character
- Alternative: Safale S-04 (dry)
 - English ale dry yeast
 - Not as characterful as the liquid options but produces a solid English ale profile
 - Convenient and reliable

Yeast Preparation:

- If using liquid yeast (WLP002 or Wyeast 1968): make a 1.5 liter starter 24-48 hours before brew day
 - These strains are highly flocculant — they will drop out of suspension aggressively
 - A healthy starter ensures complete fermentation despite the high flocculation
 - Stir plate recommended
- If using dry yeast (S-04): rehydrate in 4 oz of sterile water at 77°F for 15 minutes before pitching
 - Or pitch directly — S-04 is forgiving

Important Note On WLP002 / Wyeast 1968:

These yeasts are notorious for stalling. They flocculate so aggressively that they can drop out of suspension before fermentation is complete.

- Monitor gravity carefully
- If gravity stalls high (above 1.018), gently rouse the yeast by swirling the fermenter
- Raising temperature to 70°F for the last 2-3 days can help the yeast finish



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THE PROCESS — Brew Day

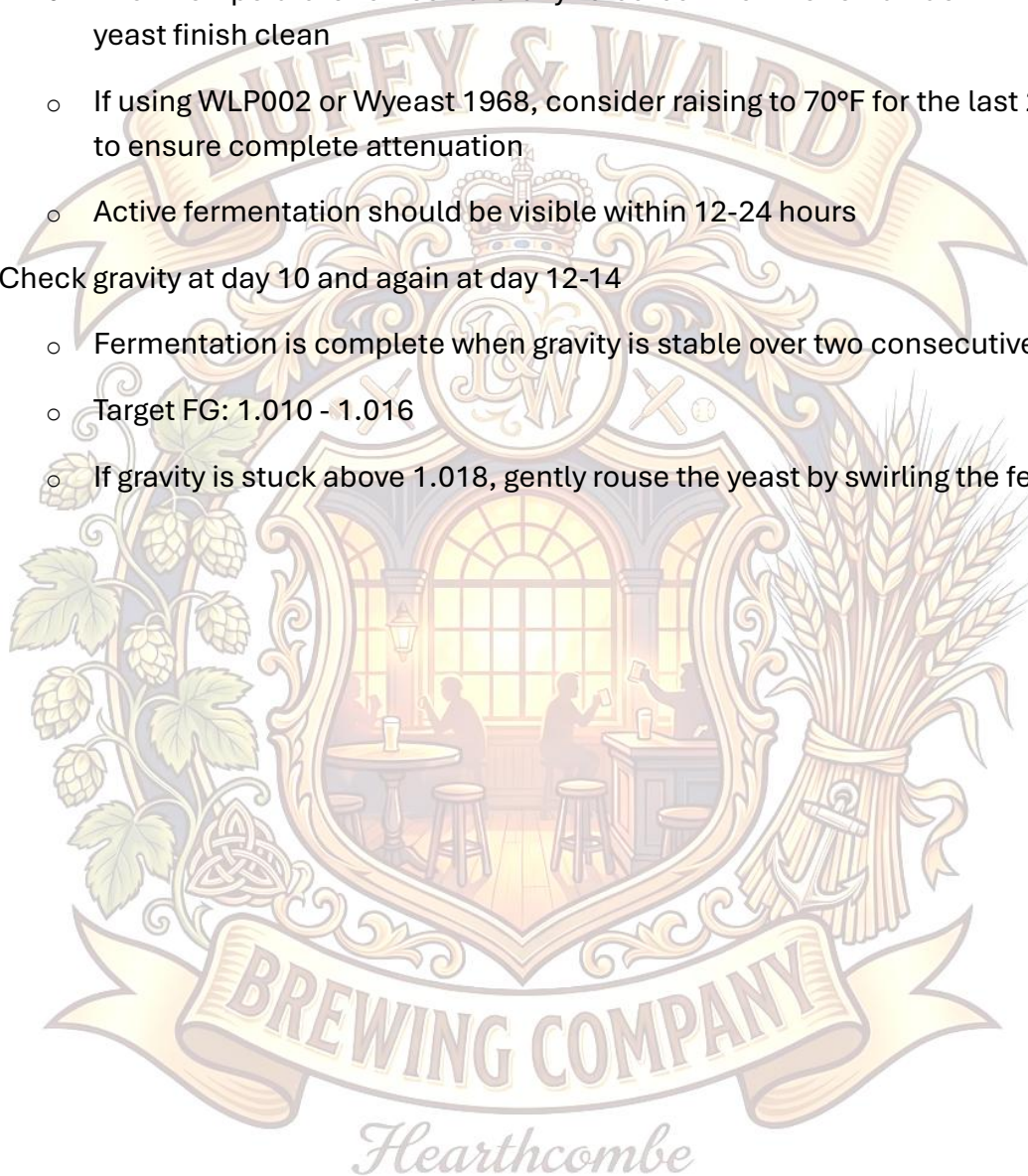
- Step 1: Collect and treat water — RO or distilled, add minerals, add Campden tablet
- Step 2: Heat strike water to approximately 163°F
- Step 3: Mash in — add grain slowly, stir thoroughly, target 152°F
 - Check temperature at 15 and 30 minutes — adjust if necessary
 - Check mash pH — target 5.2 to 5.4 — adjust with lactic acid if needed
- Step 4: Hold mash at 152°F for 60 minutes
- Step 5: Mash out at 168°F for 10 minutes (optional)
- Step 6: Vorlauf — recirculate until wort runs clear
- Step 7: Sparge with 170°F treated water — collect approximately 6.5 gallons
- Step 8: Bring to a rolling boil
 - Watch for hot break — skim if desired
- Step 9: Add bittering hops — 1.5 oz East Kent Goldings at 60 minutes
- Step 10: Add flavor hops — 1.0 oz Fuggles at 15 minutes
- Step 11: Add late aroma hops — 0.5 oz East Kent Goldings at 5 minutes
- Step 12: At flameout — add aroma hops — 0.5 oz East Kent Goldings, steep 10-15 minutes
- Step 13: Chill wort as quickly as possible to 64°F
 - Plate chiller, immersion chiller, or ice bath
 - Fast chilling promotes clarity and reduces DMS risk
- Step 14: Transfer to sanitized fermenter
 - Aerate the wort — shake vigorously for 2-3 minutes or use an oxygenation stone
- Step 15: Pitch yeast

- Step 16: Seal fermenter, attach airlock, place in temperature-controlled environment at 64-68°F



FERMENTATION

- Primary fermentation: 64-68°F for 10-14 days
 - Start at 64°F for the first 3-4 days — controls ester production
 - Allow temperature to rise naturally to 66-68°F for the remainder — helps the yeast finish clean
 - If using WLP002 or Wyeast 1968, consider raising to 70°F for the last 2-3 days to ensure complete attenuation
 - Active fermentation should be visible within 12-24 hours
- Check gravity at day 10 and again at day 12-14
 - Fermentation is complete when gravity is stable over two consecutive days
 - Target FG: 1.010 - 1.016
 - If gravity is stuck above 1.018, gently rouse the yeast by swirling the fermenter



CONDITIONING

- Option A: Cold crash at 34-38°F for 3-5 days
 - WLP002 and Wyeast 1968 flocculate beautifully — cold crashing produces excellent clarity
 - This may be all you need — these yeasts clear themselves aggressively
- Option B: Add gelatin finings
 - Dissolve 1 teaspoon of unflavored gelatin in 1 cup of 150°F water
 - Add to fermenter after cold crash begins
 - Wait 48 hours for brilliant clarity



PACKAGING

Kegging (Preferred):

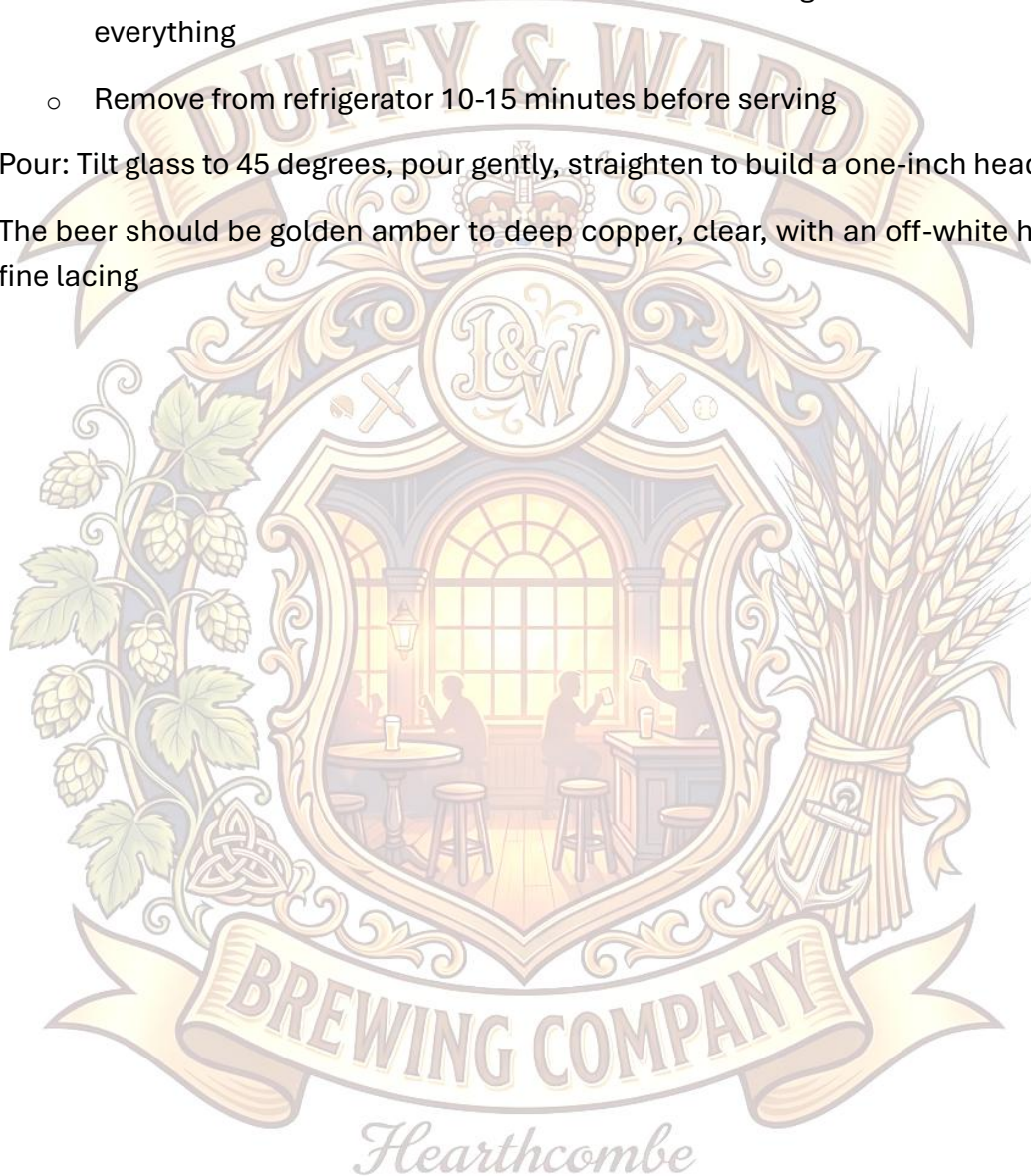
- Transfer to sanitized keg
- Purge headspace with CO₂
- Carbonate at 8-10 PSI at 38°F for 5-7 days
 - English ales are traditionally served at LOWER carbonation than American beers
 - Target carbonation: 1.5 - 2.0 volumes CO₂ (low to moderate)
 - This is intentionally lower than the Cream Ale — English bitters should feel smooth and soft, not fizzy
 - If it tastes "sparkling" it's over-carbonated for the style

Bottling:

- Prepare priming solution: 2.5 - 3.0 oz corn sugar dissolved in 2 cups boiling water, cooled
 - LESS sugar than the Cream Ale — we want lower carbonation
- Add priming solution to bottling bucket
- Transfer beer onto priming solution gently — avoid splashing and oxygen exposure
- Fill bottles, cap
- Condition at room temperature (68-72°F) for 2-3 weeks
- Refrigerate before serving

SERVING

- Glass: English nonic pint glass — the classic pint with the bulge near the rim
- Serving temperature: 50-55°F (10-13°C) — cellar temperature
 - NEVER serve ice cold. ESB at 38°F tastes like nothing. At 50-55°F it tastes like everything
 - Remove from refrigerator 10-15 minutes before serving
- Pour: Tilt glass to 45 degrees, pour gently, straighten to build a one-inch head
- The beer should be golden amber to deep copper, clear, with an off-white head and fine lacing

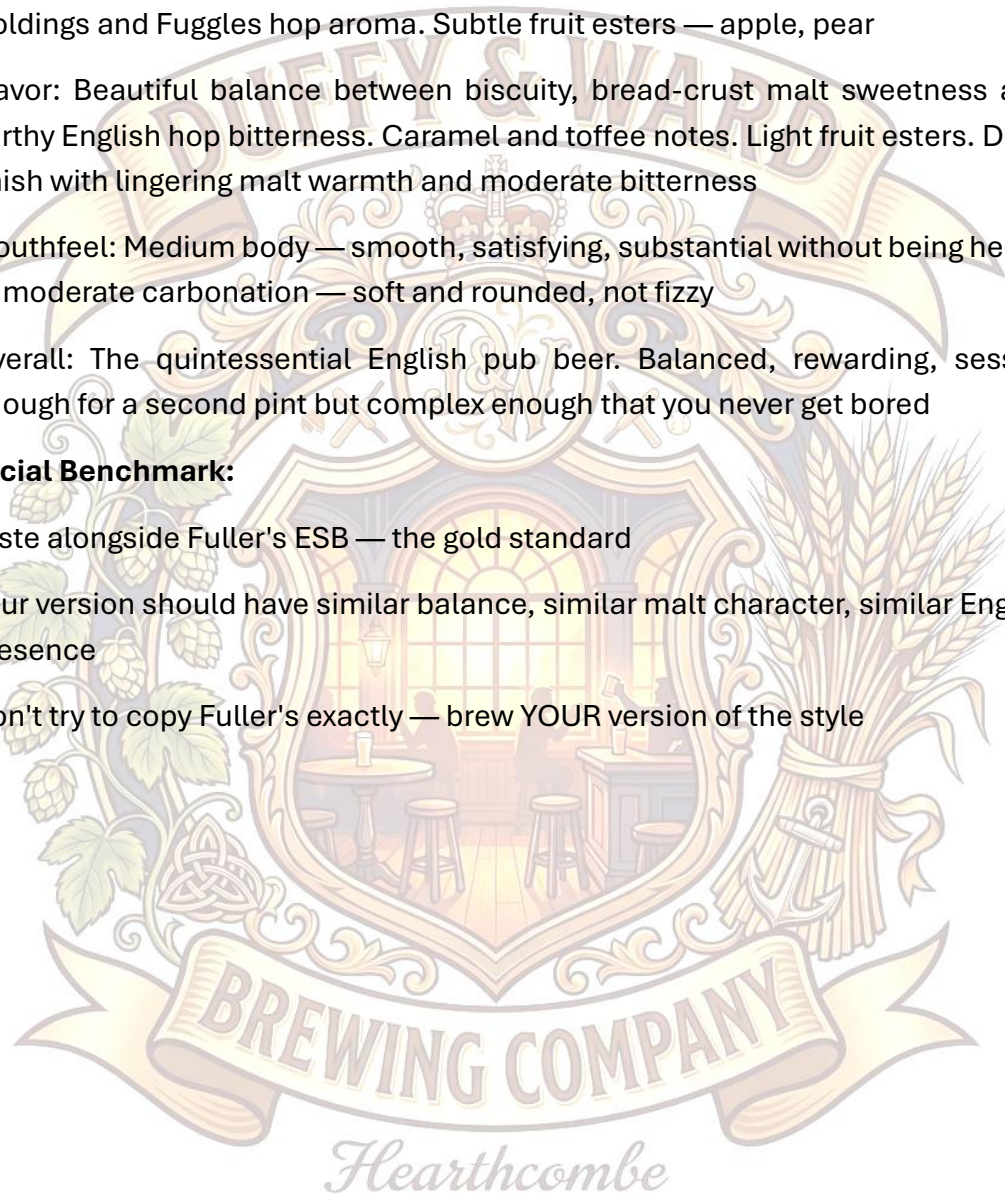


TASTING NOTES — What To Expect

- Appearance: Golden amber to deep copper. Clear to brilliant. Off-white head with fine lacing
- Aroma: Rich biscuity Maris Otter malt, caramel, toffee. Earthy, floral East Kent Goldings and Fuggles hop aroma. Subtle fruit esters — apple, pear
- Flavor: Beautiful balance between biscuity, bread-crust malt sweetness and firm earthy English hop bitterness. Caramel and toffee notes. Light fruit esters. Dry, clean finish with lingering malt warmth and moderate bitterness
- Mouthfeel: Medium body — smooth, satisfying, substantial without being heavy. Low to moderate carbonation — soft and rounded, not fizzy
- Overall: The quintessential English pub beer. Balanced, rewarding, sessionable enough for a second pint but complex enough that you never get bored

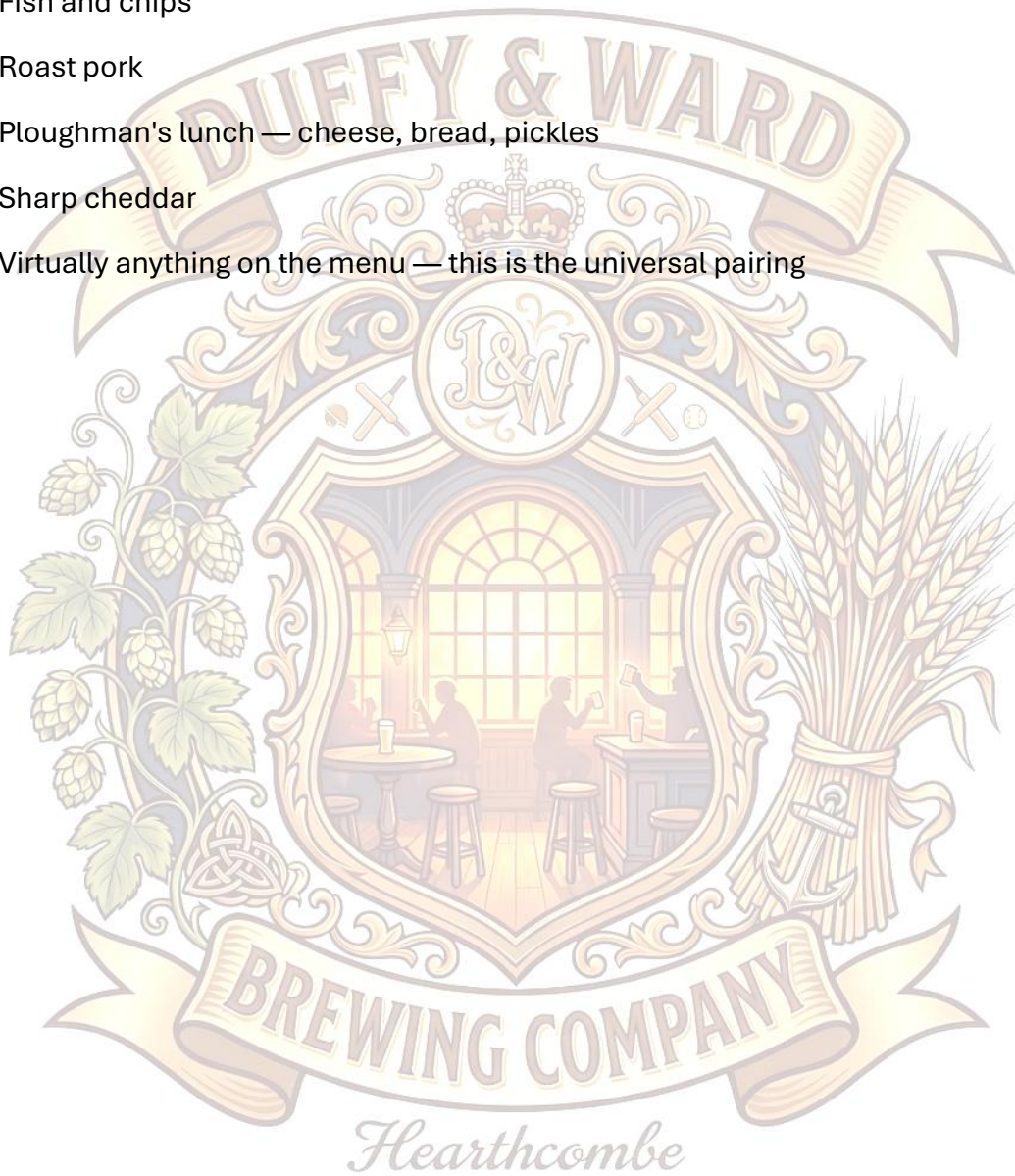
Commercial Benchmark:

- Taste alongside Fuller's ESB — the gold standard
- Your version should have similar balance, similar malt character, similar English hop presence
- Don't try to copy Fuller's exactly — brew YOUR version of the style



FOOD PAIRINGS

- Chicken pot pie
- Beer battered onion rings
- Fish and chips
- Roast pork
- Ploughman's lunch — cheese, bread, pickles
- Sharp cheddar
- Virtually anything on the menu — this is the universal pairing



TROUBLESHOOTING

- **Too sweet / not dry enough:** WLP002 or 1968 may have stalled. Rouse the yeast, raise temperature to 70°F, give it 3-4 more days
- **Too bitter:** Reduce 60-minute EKG addition to 1.25 oz next time. Or check your water — too much sulfate amplifies perceived bitterness
- **No malt character:** Mash temperature was too low. Next time mash at 153-154°F. Also confirm you used Maris Otter — American two-row will not produce the same biscuity character
- **Too thin / watery:** Mash higher at 154°F. Or increase Crystal 60L to 1.25 lb
- **Fruity esters too strong:** Fermentation temperature was too warm. Next time hold 64°F firmly for the first 3-4 days
- **Not enough hop aroma:** Increase the flameout addition to 1.0 oz EKG and steep longer
- **Hazy:** Cold crash longer — WLP002 should clear well on its own. Add gelatin if needed
- **Tastes like an American pale ale:** Wrong yeast. WLP002 or Wyeast 1968 is essential. S-04 as backup. Never use US-05 for this style — it's too clean
- **Over-carbonated / fizzy:** Reduce carbonation. English ales should be soft and smooth, not sparkling. If kegging, drop to 8 PSI. If bottling, reduce priming sugar to 2.5 oz

NOTES

The ESB is the house beer. The beer everyone orders. The one Charlie Watts pours a hundred times a night without thinking. It has to be perfect in its simplicity.

The test is not whether it's exciting. The test is whether you want another one. And then another. And then you realize you've been sitting in the same chair for two hours and you don't want to leave.

That's an ESB. That's Charlie Watts.

Ask yourself: would Charlie pour this? Is it steady? Is it reliable? Is it the beer you trust?

If yes — you've brewed an ESB.

Faithfully Poured. Properly Bitter.



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