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Introduction

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The Changing Nature of the Irish Beverage Story

Introduction

This “Beverage edition” of *JOFIS* is a collection of four articles presented at the Beverage Research Network Day that was held on 8th November 2017. The event, which took place at the Institute of Technology Tallaght (now part of TU Dublin), was co-organized by three post-graduate researchers, Susan Boyle, Aoife Carrigy, and Sylvain Tondeur. All three organisers belong to the National Centre for Franco-Irish Studies and are undertaking research into different areas of Irish beverage culture.

The members of the organising committee, which were supervised by Dr Brian Murphy and Dr Eamon Maher, were trusted with the organisation the event as part of their training and were thankful for the rich experience it provided them. Not only were they given the opportunity to experience the full organisation of an academic event, but they were also given the task to follow up the research day with the edition of the present special issue of *JOFIS*, adding peer-review editing to their academic skills.

The Beverage Research Network Day in Tallaght brought together a wide array of people interested in the evolution of the drinks industry in Ireland, from postgraduate students, to industry professionals, to lecturers and historians. All of them have been members of the Beverage Research Network, a research group that was founded by Dr Brian Murphy. As an interdisciplinary network, it encourages academics and industry professionals from different countries to engage with each other around the area of beverages in order to promote the field of beverage studies within food studies. The research day in Tallaght in November 2017 constituted the second official event of the Beverage Research Network.

The theme of the research day, that inspired the following articles, was “the changing nature of the Irish beverage story”. The focus was put on the renewal that has been experienced in many sectors of the beverage industry in Ireland, from the rise of microbreweries, to the “legalisation” of Irish *poitín*, to the renaissance of the Irish whiskey industry, and the resulting growing demand for Irish beverages on the world stage. However, some interesting perspectives also shed new light on older institutions of the Irish drinks industry, such as the Irish pub and Guinness.

Documenting and analysing that rapidly transforming cultural environment represents a challenge for researchers, but the emerging area of Irish beverage research offers plenty of opportunities to inform and feed into a global understanding of beverage studies.

This edition opens with Susan Boyle's insightful comparative analysis of the Guinness Storehouse in Dublin, Ireland, and La Cité Du Vin in Bordeaux, France. In her article, she shows how two iconic beverages from Ireland and France, namely Guinness stout and Bordeaux wine have managed to turn their respective iconic images into successful tourist attractions. While being perfectly in line with the research spirit of the National Centre for Franco-Irish Studies, Susan Boyle offers two case studies of beverage tourism, a developing sector within the food tourism trend.

In her article, explicitly entitled "Let's talk about Guinness.....and sex", Patrica Medcalf analyses two concomitant phenomena of the 1990s, namely the declining influence of the Catholic Church in Ireland and the increasingly suggestive nature of Guinness's TV ad content during that decade. She offers an analysis of two of Guinness's TV ads in the context of the social change that occurred at that time, and included the legalisation of divorce and contraception, and the decriminalisation of homosexuality. The author points out that Guinness adapted its marketing strategy as social mores evolved. She uses the twist made by the brand on their historical pairing with oysters to exemplify how the brand has cleverly moved with the times and adapted to new social norms.

Sylvain Tondeur's article deals with the evolution and adaptation of another Irish drink: Irish *poitín*. He argues that the lack of a proper definition for the "traditional" fiery Irish spirit made legal in 1997 resides in the complexity of *poitín*'s history. The author shows that, if the aura of *poitín* can be traced back to the heyday of illicit distillation, in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, the nature of the drink itself has always been evolving as it has adapted to the social customs and economic constraints of the times. By highlighting the link between the expansion of *poitín*-making and the industrialisation of the whiskey sector in Ireland, Sylvain Tondeur makes a case for what is now referred to as "authentic" *poitín* should actually be.

This link between past and present is also at the core of the last article of this edition. Indeed, it is the intention of Christina Wade's research to use the past as an avenue to investigate the disempowerment of women in the beer world and their re-emergence as cultural powerhouses in modern brewing. In her article, she analyses female brewers and consumers in modern Ireland by closely considering their position in our contemporary culture, while simultaneously examining their role in medieval and early modern Ireland. Christina uses examples from medieval Ireland to bring an innovating perspective on the major shift that the world of beer and brewing has undergone over the course of the last several decades, with a considerable influx of both female consumers and brewers.

