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Plague and beer

The English have a long standing interest in beer and, as Niall has pointed out (1), a man could be clapped in the stocks in England in the 18th century for turning out a bad batch. The same author set out one day to make some beer by a recipe of the 1730's, but for some reason ended up doing a literature search on plague water. The search unearthed several recipes for plague water, one of which follows.

"Take rue, rosemary, balm, cardums scordium, marigold flowers, dragons, goat's rue, mint (each three handfuls), roots of master-wort, angelica, butterbur, piony (each 6 oz.), scorzonera (3 oz.), proof spirits (3 gall.). Macerate, distil and make it up high proof."

Preliminary cost estimates show that this forerunner of Kickapoo Joy Juice could be produced for around $45 per gallon. If you had the plague, it would be worth it. The product evidently need not be aged, which would reduce the amount of capital tied up in a full-scale plant.

Elsewhere in England, Biles and Emerson (2) have developed a means of detecting chrysotile asbestos fibers in beer. Pads that contain asbestos, they say, are often used for filtration in the drinks industry, but detecting the small amount that gets into beer is not easy.

The new method is complicated, but basically it involves centrifugation, filtration, ashing, ultrasonic dispersion, electron microscopy and electron diffraction. In the samples examined some of the fibers found were definitely chrysotile asbestos. The total number of fibers of all kinds came to an estimated 5000 per pint, but this could vary widely with the variation in practice in filtration. The authors offer no clinical assessment of their findings.

(1) Niall, I. "A Countryman's Notes," *Country Life*, [illegible] 1968, page 511.

(2) Biles, B., Emerson, T. R. "Examination of fibres in beer," *Nature*, 219, [illegible] 1968.