

The following is the "Father of the Bride" speech given by John White, of White Beer Travels, www.whitebeertravels.com, on the occasion of the wedding of his daughter, Julia White, to Paul Skinner, on the 18th of September, 1999, in Grimsby, in England.

Joyce and I are very pleased to welcome so many family and friends to this happy occasion today, the wedding of our daughter Julia to Bill and Chris's son Paul.

As many of you will know, I am not a man of many words. Therefore, to make the speech flow a little better for me, I have flavoured it with a subject of which I have some familiarity: beer! For the wedding I have commissioned a special beer, which is called Wedding Ale. As a memento of this occasion, there is a bottle for each of you to take away. Sarah and Jack will, I am sure be able to trade theirs in for something with their parents.

Julia has inherited one or two of my likes, such as Real Ale and, as you will have noted during the ceremony, Bob Dylan. The song played was one of his more obscure numbers that he has never performed in public, appropriately called Wedding Song. Quite coincidentally, this solo performance with guitar and metal jacket button accompaniment was recorded on Julia's second birthday, on the 9th of November, 1973.

Returning now to the beer. It was brewed by two brewers who live in the Dutch town of Bergen op Zoom. Being a fan of their excellent speciality beers, I hit on the idea of them brewing a one-off beer for the wedding. Naturally, it needed an appropriate label, so I asked an artist who produces the best labels for their brewery if he could do one for me. On Bergen op Zoom's coat of arms there are two savages from the Belgæe tribe, Knots and Knuppel. These half-naked, bearded characters feature on most of this artist's labels. Despite the unorthodox nature of my wedding speech, being a traditionalist, I was initially hoping to include Knots and Knuppel on the Wedding Ale label, but in the end, I substituted them for Julia and Paul!

Many of you who are here today are not from Grimsby and may not be aware that its most famous landmark is its dock tower. This was formerly part of a hydraulic system to open and shut the lock gates. It has recently been elevated to Group I listed building status.

I was keen to feature the dock tower and a Grimsby trawler on the Wedding Ale label. For the trawler, the artist copied from a painting of the famous trawler, the Black Watch. This was numbered GY 23, GY being the trawler designation for Grimsby. As you will see, I have changed the trawler's number to GY 18-9-99, which is the date of this year's Bergen op Zoom beer festival and also this Wedding, in GY!

I did not have a picture of the dock tower to give the artist, but this was not a problem, as Grimsby's 19th Century tower is modelled on a 14th Century bell tower, in Siena, in Tuscany, the Torre del Mangia. So the artist used a photograph of this from a guide book.

Incidentally, if there are any labologists amongst you, the labels readily come off the bottles, if soaked in hot water, but should you want a unused one, I have plenty of spares.

What about the beer itself. I was looking for a beer which would appeal to all drinkers, not just beer drinkers. It was brewed in February of this year, and bottled in March, and, as I can vouch, from the quality controls that I have been forced to carry out on it, as a wine buff would say, the beer is drinking very well at the moment. Therefore, I recommend that you partake of it in the next few weeks. Naturally being a fan of Real Ale, it is Real Ale in a bottle and as such it has a yeast sediment. The bottles thus need to be allowed to settle for a couple of days after getting them home and then poured in one go. At 9% alcohol by volume, the beer is quite strong, a strength hidden by its lovely soft taste and superb mouth feel.

As it states on the label, Wedding Ale is a marriage of English Hops, Continental Malts and Oriental Spices, only the best of these being used: excellent ingredients to produce an excellent beer. **By analogy, I am confident that Julia and Paul are excellent ingredients for an excellent marriage.**

This is a good opportunity to mention their son Jack who has made me and Joyce and Bill and Chris very proud and happy grandparents.

Of course, marriage can have its downs as well as its ups and so can the production of a special beer. Almost immediately after ordering the picture to be used on the labels, the artist, Jos Thommassen, got a commission to produce regular half page cartoons in a Dutch national newspaper, making him famous overnight, and leaving him less time to produce my label. This resulted in me having to bring the 204 bottles back to England unlabelled, and leaving me to hope that the labels would be posted to me on time. Then, after finally receiving them, I discovered that it is not easy to stick labels on by hand, horizontally, and without wrinkles. Therefore, please forgive the odd askew label and the wrinkle or two. The last bottle was labelled only a week ago.

As an extra little present to Julia and Paul, this is the original signed drawing for the label in a frame with one of the labels. There is also a framed copy for Paul's parents, Bill and Chris.

Having talked almost solely about beer, this is an appropriate time to transfer to another of life's great drinks, Champagne, when I end my speech and bring it into line with the strict rules of wedding etiquette by asking you to propose a toast to the Bride and Groom:

To Julia and Paul.