

# Welsh couple restore old brewery to former glory

By Valerie Hill

RECORD CORRESPONDENT

**NEUSTADT** — There are no ghosts haunting the stone encrusted bowels of historic Neustadt Brewery, but Val Stimpson wonders if the original owner doesn't stop by now and then to lend a helping hand.

"Whenever we need to put a hole for a new pipe in, it appears overnight," she says. "It's as if he's trying to help us."

The "he" in question is Henry Heuther, who founded the hotel and brewery in 1859 and imported 40 stonemasons from Germany to erect the 22,000-square-foot building.

Prohibition killed the business in 1916 and since then, the building has served as everything from a village dance hall to a creamery — until Val and her husband Andrew happened along about two years ago.

The North Wales couple were in Canada on an entrepreneurial pass, travelling the country looking for an ideal location to set up a microbrewery for traditional Scottish heavy ale.

By chance, they stopped at a Walkerton company to enquire about brewing equipment. A salesman asked if they'd visited the abandoned building in Neustadt, south of Hanover.

Val admits it was love at first sight.

"It had been up for sale for 25 years," she said. "In Europe, you can't buy a building like this. . . . When we saw this building we couldn't believe it, here in the middle of nowhere."

The Stimpsons were entranced by the caverns carved from layers of stone beneath the basement.

Like the dungeon of a medieval castle, each room has rounded ceilings, walls fortified with massive stones and the barely visible remnants of what were once tunnels connecting these storage areas to the inn and Heuther's home across the street.

The rooms are more than 13 metres below ground and maintain a constant

temperature of 11 C. Each is connected by an arched doorway.

In one room, the pure waters of Crystal Springs have bubbled up through the floor into a holding tank for more than 100 years, providing a prime ingredient in the brewing process. The superb water makes it possible to brew in accordance with the Bavarian Purity Laws of 1516, which strictly forbid additives.

"The water is tested every six weeks and it's absolutely pure," Val said. "It has the perfect pH for lager."

With remarkable ingenuity, one of the caverns also contains a large chute leading upstairs to what would have been the hotel.

"It was an early form of air-conditioning," she said.

For now, the Stimpsons are not using the caverns but someday hope to install storage containers for their brews.

After 20 years of running two historic pubs in Wales and brewing their own recipes, the Stimpsons were ready to bring this old building back to life, but without altering its unique heritage characteristics.

"We bought the building a year ago last March . . . we've come a long way," she said.

The couple's total investment exceeded \$1 million, including the building and brewing equipment purchase, renovations, fixing or replacing some of the 73 windows and 15 doorways and upgrading electrical wiring and sewage systems. They even converted the upstairs ballroom into living quarters.

After such a massive investment, the Stimpsons were still unsure how their ales would be accepted in a predominantly German and Dutch area known for its love of lagers.

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**"Everybody wanted the first beer off the line, the first beer in 82 years. We had little old ladies fighting . . ."**

Val Stimpson,  
brewery owner



PETER LEE, RECORD STAFF

Val Stimpson stands by some old wooden barrels in a cavern below the Neustadt Springs Brewery. Bottles of the brewery's lager and heavy ale are in front of her.

*Our W.I. toured this in July 1999*

before Christmas last year. "We had little old ladies fighting as it came off the line.

"We were sold out in five hours."

Neustadt Brewery has also generated interest from the tourist trade. Val estimated 55,000 visitors stopped by throughout the summer.

"There's a lot of history, so many people are interested in it," she said. "People think that what we're doing

here is absolutely fantastic."

One elderly gentleman recounted how his father had been paid by Heuther to get rid of rats scurrying across the top of vats.

Today, the beer is sold through the Stimpsons' retail outlet and in pubs from Tobermory to Toronto. Recently, a Belgian lager was added to the line and Andrew is working on recipes for other new beers.

Though it's running at about one-third capacity, the brewery produces 17,000 bottles annually using Canadian malt and hops imported from New Zealand and England.

The couple, citing their British "reserve," have been cautious about expanding too quickly, despite the demand.

"Then you're not here and gone tomorrow," Val said.