

## **Make mine a Large One**

IT was while driving through the Fonthill Estate archway that Alasdair Large found the name for his new brewery. "I noticed that it had the most remarkable keystone and took a picture of it," he recalls. A keystone is the wedge-shaped stone at the top of an arch, holding it together. It is also the small round bung on the front of a cask where the tap is driven in. "The stone is also in the shape of a pint glass," Alasdair adds. Alasdair has learnt a whole new language, the talk of brewers, since he left the army after 20 years to fulfil his dream of making and selling his own beer. He studied the art of brewing at Sunderland University and in a year has gone from crewing tanks to handling a grist case and mash tun. Last week 40-year-old Alasdair and his wife Charlotte, 35, officially opened Keystone Brewery in an old carpenter's workshop on the Fonthill Estate at Berwick St Leonard.. It has been full steam ahead for the whole family since they took over the premises two months ago. Charlotte's builder brother Nick Browne, formerly landlord of a Campaign for Real Ale award-winning pub, has been helping set up the brewery and offering advice on what makes a good pint. And Alasdair's and Charlotte's mothers have become guinea pigs, testing the brews as keen real ale drinkers. Charlotte, who is balancing being an upholsterer, helping at the brewery and caring for their two-year-old son Bertie, says the venture has been like having another child. The couple celebrated their anniversary last month watching the first pint pulled from a tap at the Royal Oak in Swallowcliffe. "The beer is fantastic," says Alasdair proudly. "It has been phenomenal. We sold the first two or three batches before they were ready to go. Publicans and local farmers have been really supportive." His aim is to produce traditional ales and beers with local character. This shouldn't be too much trouble with the first basic ingredient fresh spring water from Fonthill's own borehole. He is also using barley from the estate and getting it malted at Warminster. "We will make it locally, process it locally and sell it locally, keeping the money in the local economy," he says. "We are lucky to live in this area where there is some of the best barley growing in the country. We also try to buy hops from English merchants to support hop growers in this country." Alasdair and Charlotte feel strongly about supporting British farmers. Charlotte worked for the National Farmers Union during the BSE and foot and mouth crises and saw at first hand the damage done to the industry. "Our farmers need supporting in every way," she said. "I am one of those people who will shout out in a supermarket if there is no British butter. "In this part of the country we have farmers and producers that can supply lots of the food we need." Alasdair adds: "There should be no reason to import beers from overseas. There's no reason why we should drink beer that's brewed in Amsterdam." Alasdair and Charlotte started home-brewing when they lived in Edinburgh because they thought the beer there was "ghastly". Now, they are putting much thought into their brews to do away with the image of ale as a strong and heavy man's drink. They are concentrating on making it lighter, cooler and more refreshing. "It is not unusual for a woman to ask for half a bitter nowadays," says Charlotte. Not surprisingly, Alasdair just had to call his first brew, a best bitter, Large One. Other creations will fall under the masonry terminology, so the light and fresh summer beer is Bedrock, and a darker beer with plenty of hops is Cornerstone. "I have thought hard about how flavours are created and taken inspiration from beers we like," says Alasdair.

"We have produced four very different beers. "We are brewing for country pubs that people have to drive to so we are trying to keep the alcohol low. We have started with the four and will eventually start producing occasional and seasonal beers, introducing bottling in the New Year. "We want to be part of the community and will be arranging tours soon."

Rosanna Holmes