

Education Director's Report

What is a Firkin?



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A Firkin...

- A vessel historically used by British brewers for delivery of cask-conditioned beer to the pub.
- Holds a quarter of a barrel of beer (Imperial units).
 - 9 Imperial gallons.
 - 10.8 US gallons.
 - 41 liters.

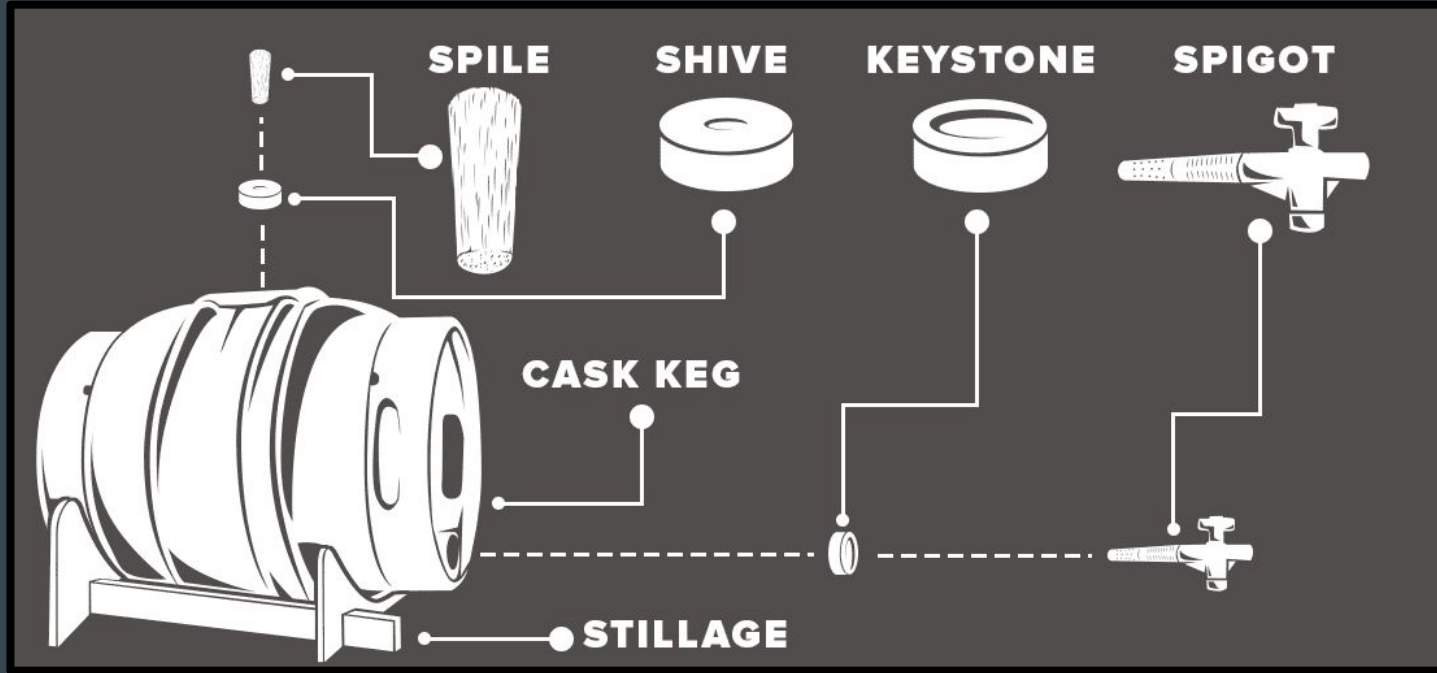


According to the Oxford Companion to Beer:

“A firkin was originally coopered from wooden staves bound with iron hoops, but is now more commonly made of stainless steel or aluminum. Like all proper casks, it has a hole in one of the curved sides, to which a wooden or plastic bung (“shive”) is fitted when the cask is filled. There is a smaller hole in one of the flat ends, or “heads,” of the cask, which is also bunged. The bung is knocked out by the tap when the cask is broached. Although other sizes of cask are also used, the firkin is by far the most common.”



Anatomy of a Firkin or Cask



Traditional Cask Sizes

- Tun = 216 Imperial Gallons
- Butt = 108 gal ($\frac{1}{2}$ Tun)
- Hogshead = 54 gal ($\frac{1}{2}$ Butt or $\frac{1}{4}$ Tun)
- Barrel = 36 gal
- Kilderkin = 18 gal ($\frac{1}{2}$ Barrel) *
- Firkin = 9 gal ($\frac{1}{2}$ Kilderkin) *
- Pin = 4.5 gal ($\frac{1}{2}$ Firkin)

* Kilderkin and Firkin casks are traditionally used for serving Real Ale in British pubs



Cask Conditioned Beer

- Cask conditioned beer is not filtered or have CO2 added to the cask.
- Beer is transferred to the cask with yeast in suspension so beer is able to continue fermentation.
- Fermentation produces CO2 which provides some level of carbonation.
- A cask conditioned beer is generally served in a pub or brewery using a beer engine that pulls the beer out of the cask.
 - Otherwise, a cask tap is driven into the side of the firkin.
- Depending on the pressure inside of the Firkin and how accurate the cask tap is struck, it can create quite a mess (see hole in ceiling at Dax's house)
- Once tapped, gravity allows the beer to flow through the faucet and out of the firkin.
- Beer is usually served around 55 degrees, but varies based on room temperature
 - Casks are often stored in the basement for a cooler cellar temperature.



Why Are Firkins Used Today?

- Real Ale is still served from cask conditioned vessels in the UK and can also be found locally at Hogshead Brewery (located in the Highlands west of downtown Denver).
 - Cask Conditioned ale provides a unique drinking experience.
 - The lack of filtration and lower carbonation have a significant impact on the drinking experience with a softer mouthfeel and gentle carbonation from a Cask Conditioned beer.
 - Higher serving temperature can aid in providing more aroma and flavor as well.
- Another reason is to give the brewery opportunities to experiment with new flavors.
 - Unique ingredients can be added to the beer in the firkin.
 - This method usually results in the brewery using finished beer.

