

# PINTS WEST

Newsletter of the Bristol & District Branch of CAMRA, the Campaign for Real Ale

## ASK IF IT'S CASK

**CAMRA, the Campaign for Real Ale, has launched the biggest generic promotion of beer for fifty years in its battle to save the British pint.**

Following two years of fund-raising, the consumer group has joined forces with dozens of real ale brewers and thousands of pubs to buck the trend and put real ale back on top.

Hundreds of advertising billboards were launched throughout the country, including Bristol, supported by leaflets and posters.

In its £100,000 campaign CAMRA is urging people to **Ask if it's Cask** when they visit the pub in an attempt to get lager lovers, smoothflow drinkers and even wine connoisseurs to discover the taste of real ale.

Overall sales of real ales have been falling since 1994 when they peaked at 17.5% of the total beer market. They are now less than 10% as consumers are being bombarded with global lager brands and smoothflow processed ales. The **Ask if it's Cask** campaign hopes to reverse the decline by encouraging people to try real ale and brewers to start marketing it.

The campaign is also a consumer fight back against the disease in the British brewing and pub retailing industry caused by consolidation, closures, mergers and sell-offs. We want to convince beer drinkers that nothing beats a pint of real cask ale in a local pub. If people start drinking for the taste and



**ACCEPT NO SUBSTITUTES.**

Discover real flavour – choose the cool, natural freshness of cask conditioned real ale.  
 TO FIND OUT MORE CHECK US OUT AT [www.askifitscask.com](http://www.askifitscask.com)

**GENUINE REAL ALE HAS REAL TASTE.**



shun big-brand marketing, the British beer market will be safe for future generations to enjoy.

The campaign aims to get across the message that real cask ales meet the needs of modern cultured beer drinkers.

The current explosion in organic beers is helping to create a more modern and sophisticated image for real ale and attracting a connoisseur market. Thoughtful marketing of distinctive, tasty beers should help the smaller brewers fight off the challenge of nationally-promoted megabrands.

The city's obsession with quick, high growth technology industries has eroded our brewing and pubs industry and led to the loss of thousands of pubs, hundreds of beer brands and dozens of long-standing breweries.

The **Ask if it's Cask** launch marks a momentous occasion when consumers, independent brewers and publicans across the land

unite to fight back against city short-termism and megabrand marketing. Before it's too late!

**Cask:** The general name for the containers used for traditional draught beer – real ale.

**Keg:** The name for the containers used for pressurised, processed beer – lagers and so-called smoothflow or nitrokeg beers.

# 30 years of CAMRA - cheers to that!



**CAMRA, the Campaign for Real Ale, has just celebrated 30 years since its formation. Beer lovers throughout the UK and beyond may like to raise a glass to toast three decades of successful campaigning for the rights of beer drinkers and pub goers.**

Since its beginnings in 1971 CAMRA has gone from strength to strength and has now just passed 60,000 members (see article on page 5).

When CAMRA was formed, real ale had disappeared from the vast majority of pubs in the UK. The four founding members could not have believed what has been achieved since then. Originally formed as The Campaign for the Revitalisation of Ale, it was soon decided that this was a bit of a mouthful so the name was changed to The Campaign for Real Ale – or CAMRA. It was CAMRA in fact that coined the phrase “Real Ale” – it did not exist before.

Undoubtedly, the biggest success CAMRA has had has been the continued existence of great British beers – despite the continued onslaught of big-brand lagers and keg (non-real) beers. CAMRA has campaigned hard for consumer choice and real ale is now featured in most pubs across the UK. CAMRA created the environment for many small breweries to set up business and thrive. There are now over 400 independent breweries producing over 2,000 real ales.

CAMRA has campaigned and continues to campaign on many issues. This is done via the Campaigns team at CAMRA Head Office as well as through the membership throughout the UK. A recent example is the successful campaign for mandatory rate relief for rural pubs. The Head Office campaigns team put together a detailed submission to Government to justify why rural pubs should be entitled to this relief, which is already enjoyed by many rural Post Offices and shops. This submission was supported by members writing to MPs and Ministers in support of the proposal and following a period of consultation, The Commons has passed the order. This will be a lifeline for many struggling rural pubs.

CAMRA campaigns in many other ways. It has around 190 branches throughout the UK. Using our own branch (Bristol & District) as an example, the branch runs a hugely successful beer festival at the Council House, it puts together this newsletter that gets distributed to pubs throughout the area, it has a very high press profile, produces local beer guides, assists in national campaigns such as surveys on prices, short measures, pub closures, etc. The branch campaigns on a variety of other issues and we have a lot of fun as well.

CAMRA has achieved so much in recent years including:

- After lots of lobbying, the Government issued a White Paper on licensing reform and has pledged its commitment to introducing more flexible opening hours for pubs.
  - After a long running campaign, the Government has announced its plans to consider a fairer system of excise duty for Britain’s small brewers, which will benefit consumers through choice and access to beers as smaller brewers will be better placed to compete with bigger producers.
  - Helping to save dozens of threatened pubs from closure.
  - Promoting real ale through promotional material in pubs and through many publications including local newsletters, local guides and the CAMRA Good Beer Guide.
  - Ensuring the consumers voice is heard on all issues related to beer and pubs including licensing law, full measures, competition enquiries and beer tax.
  - The Guest Beer legislation. CAMRA pushed for this and ensured that the guest beer was not any old beer – but real ale.
  - CAMRA runs around 140 beer festivals at branch level and two national festivals – the Great British Beer Festival at Kensington Olympia, London and the Festival of Winter Ales in Manchester.
  - The recent successful launch of the “Ask if it’s Cask” campaign as a generic promotion for real ale. The campaign to urge lager and smoothflow drinkers to discover the taste of real ale has seen CAMRA have hundreds of billboards across the UK with posters, leaflets and beer mats in thousands of pubs.
- The above are just some of the achievements and activities of CAMRA. Yes, this is a bit of a “blowing our own trumpet” article but as many breweries have said to CAMRA members recently – if it wasn’t for CAMRA there wouldn’t be any real ale any more. This from the industry – who do not always see things eye-to-eye with CAMRA!

Looking to the future, Mike Benner, Head of Campaigns, said “We are very proud of what we have achieved for Britain’s 15 million beer drinkers but there is still much to be done to make sure we can all continue to enjoy a choice of good quality, fairly priced beers in decent pubs long into the future.”

So CAMRA, the consumer’s champion, here’s to the next 30 years. Cheers!  
Pete Bridle

Wadworth JCB advert

# Lifeline for rural pubs

## Victory in campaign for rate relief for village pubs

THE Government has recognised the importance of pubs as essential community amenities. CAMRA, the Campaign for Real Ale, is celebrating success in its campaign for mandatory rate relief to be extended to village pubs. Following a lengthy consultation, the Commons passed the order.

Sole pubs in settlements with fewer than 3,000 inhabitants and with a rateable value below £9,000 will be able to claim a 50% reduction in business rates in line with village shops and post offices.

CAMRA research in 2000 showed that around twenty pubs are closing each month – many of them in rural areas. Many rural pubs are struggling to compete due to lack of investment from pub companies.

The Government's original proposals suggested that rate relief should only apply to singly-owned village pubs. But following CAMRA's recommendations, the initiative will apply to all sole village pubs as the majority of these are tenanted or leased.

The Government estimates that over 8,000 pubs will benefit from mandatory rate relief.

CAMRA believes this represents an important landmark for the pub industry in

England. We have campaigned for several years for rural pubs to be regarded as essential community amenities in the same way as post offices and shops and the Government has finally listened. Pubs are often at the heart of small communities and are every bit as important as other amenities.

It comes at a crucial time when many country pubs are suffering lost trade due to the foot and mouth disease outbreak. Rate relief will help, but we now need to see pub operators and brewers follow the Government's example and build long-term investment plans for marginal rural pubs.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

**Rural pubs are not 'closed for business' because of foot-and-mouth. They need your business, as do the small breweries that supply them with beer. Do not abandon them now or, when you do return, you may just find they really have closed for good!**

Photo

The launch of the Ask If It's Cask campaign at the Bristol Beer Festival in March, outside the Council House on College Green, with (from left to right) CAMRA regional director Pete Bridle, local branch chairman Richard Brooks, Kev Meredith and Pete Tanner.

# Pub News

As mentioned in the last issue the **Bristol Flyer** on Gloucester Road has undergone a major refurbishment and has now reopened under the name of the **Goose at the Flyer**. As originally thought, the upstairs Comedy Box is no more. In the first week or so the beers available included Highgate Bitter, Fuller's London Pride, Adnam's Best and Black Sheep Bitter.

**BJ's Liquor Emporium**, near Bristol Bridge seems to be closed every time I go past there, despite having some three barrels with cooling jackets on (for Bass?) behind the bar. (Let me in!)

The **Three Sugar Loaves** at the bottom of Christmas Steps, one of the oldest and most historic pubs in Bristol (dating back to the 17th century) has changed hands, having recently been purchased by Havana Leisure Ltd. Smiles Best, Wadworth 6X, Courage Best and Directors is the current range of ales.

**Aunties Bar** on the Triangle is changing hands due to the retirement of current licensee. The new owners plan to give it a five-week overhaul and change its name to the **Park** to reflect its previous life as the Park Hotel. Let's hope that the new management keep up the choice of real ales available on tap.

The **Eagle**, in Old Market is closed at the time of writing, whilst the **White Hart** in Brislington and the **Happy Landings** on the Wells Road are both undergoing refurbishment. Also, still derelict, is the **Rummer** and associated bars. When it was closed over a year ago it was going to undergo a major revamp but no obvious sign of building work has ever been apparent. If anyone knows any more, please let us know.

Good news for real ale fans in and around the Shirehampton area – the **Lamplighters** in Station Road is to host its own beer and music festival in September. Keep an eye on their web page [www.the-lamplighters.co.uk](http://www.the-lamplighters.co.uk) for developments.

The **Hobgoblin** on Gloucester Road, Bristol is offering 20% off its Wychwood ales to card-carrying CAMRA members. (Suggest you join up now if you haven't already.)

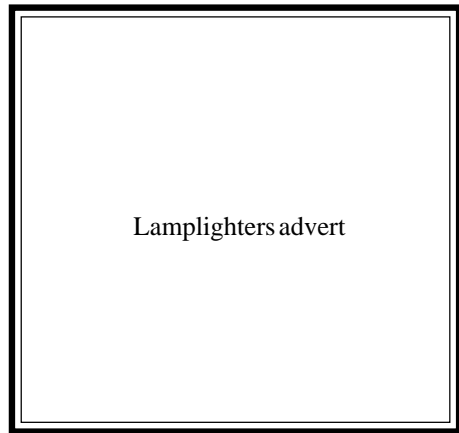
The **Lion** in Church Lane in Clifton Wood is once again a cracking pub after re-opening under new management following a tasteful and sympathetic refurbishment. Check out the real ales (and the "proper landlord") in this great community pub.

Pete Tanner

# On tour – Towers are best!

WHEN it comes to brewing beer, there's no doubt, those Victorians knew what they were doing! To see proof of this, try taking a trip around **Archers Brewery** in Swindon. The brewery was relocated to its present location several years ago, and it is now housed in one of the old GWR workshops.

The set up of the brewery is the "tower" system which any Victorian brewer would have immediately recognised – the beer in its various stages of brewing is moved up and down the various floors of the building, utilizing where possible the force of gravity and



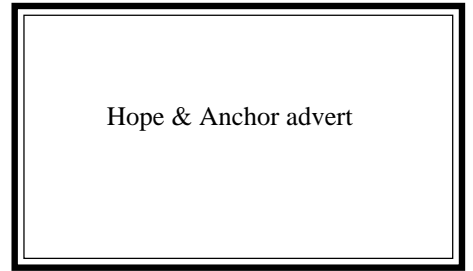
Lamplighters advert

ensuring the beer is treated as gently as possible.

These are interesting times for Archers, who have recently taken over the Leicester-based brewery, Tom Hoskins, and had just completed their first brew of Hoskins Churchills Pride. We were fortunate to sample some of this beer, which is unusually sweet and very different from the usual Archers stable of Best, Village and Golden. Our thanks go to Tony Kemp and all the staff at Archers for a very enjoyable evening, which concluded in the Gluepot pub in Swindon, one of the primary outlets for Archers.

### Travels

It has been interesting on our travels to note the change in many of the pubs which form the ex-Smiles pub estate, now owned by Young's of Wandsworth. In the splendid **White Hart** at Littleton-on-Severn for example, there used to be a full range of Smiles beers, complemented, ironically enough, by Young's Special. The situation is now reversed, with a full range of Young's beers and one from Smiles. We can certainly be thankful that the new owners are one of Britain's premier real ale breweries and pub

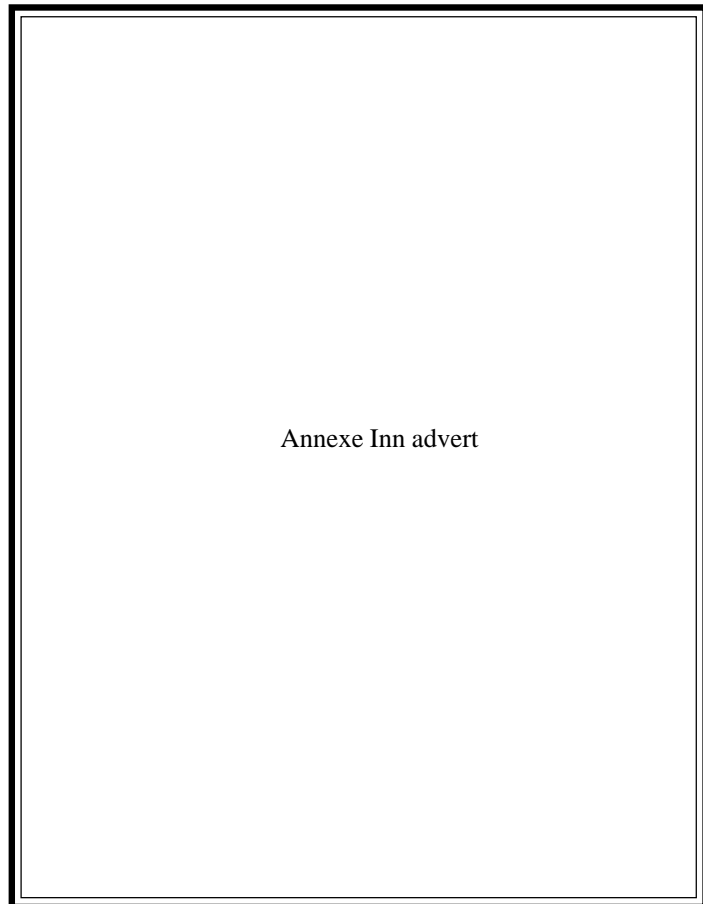


Hope & Anchor advert

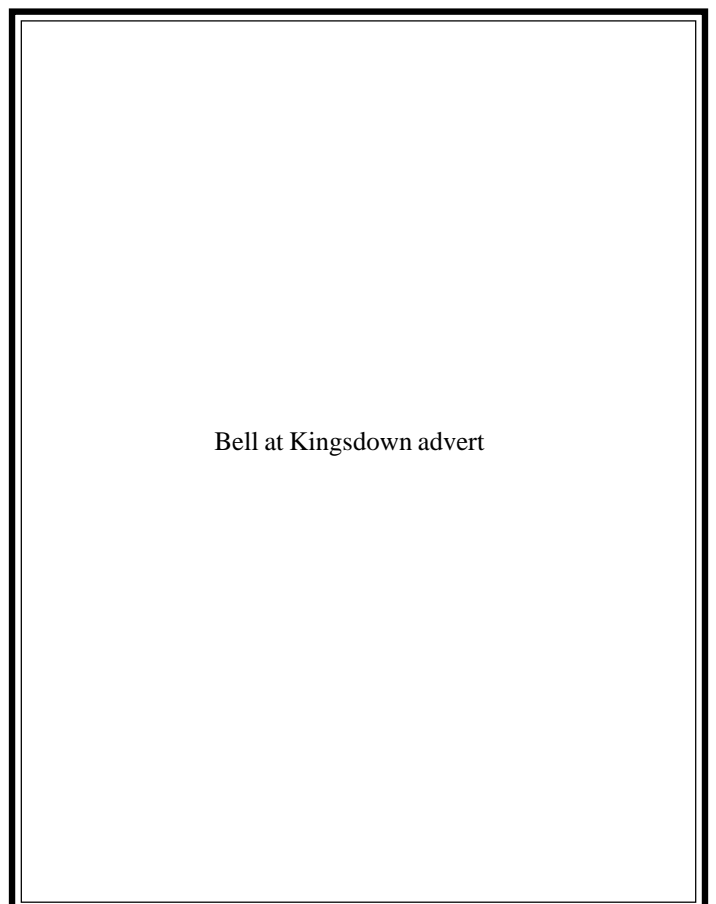
owners, and let's hope Smiles beers still flourish in the free trade.

Our pub surveying trips have taken us wide and far over the Bristol district, and pubs which have been visited by us for the first time as a group include the **Red Lion** at Mangotsfield, where interesting guest beers can often be found, and the **Langley Arms** at Emersons Green, and I would have to confess my amazement at finding such a fine pub in such a newly developed and seemingly barren area. And I couldn't finish without mentioning a couple of my particular favourites, the **Bird In Hand** at Saltford, now serving the excellent Archers Village instead of the demised Courage Georges, and the splendid **Plough** at Congresbury, which when we visited we had the rare pleasure of drinking Butts Blackguard, a marvellous dark porter-style beer.

Phil Cummings



Annexe Inn advert



Bell at Kingsdown advert

# Bristol Beer Festival review

THE fourth Bristol Beer Festival took place at what has become its familiar venue, the Council House on College Green, between March 1st and 3rd.

For the uninitiated, a CAMRA beer festival has something for everyone – there is the always popular tombola, featuring all sorts of prizes ranging from beer mats to polypins of beer, merchandise from various sources including local breweries and CAMRA products, snacks are available, and you can either sit down and relax or stand and enjoy the friendly, relaxed atmosphere.

Of course, the star of the show is the wide range of real ales and real ciders and perries which are available. This year there were 80 real ales and over 20 ciders and perries. (For those who do not know, perry is a similar drink to cider only made from pears instead of apples, and generally a lot harder to find!) Of the beers, we had many from our fine local breweries, but also others from far and wide across the UK, and even from beyond our shores – beers from France and the Republic of Ireland were also featured and proved highly popular!

The full range of beers was represented, giving the drinker an amazing array of different tastes and styles, ranging from lagers (the real thing of course, far superior to the fizzy product encountered in your average pub), to wheat beers, to milds, to fruit beers, and to porters and stouts!

With the festival taking place at the tail end of winter (and did we have the weather to remind us!), there was an emphasis this year on dark winter beers, and many of these proved extremely popular. It's a matter of regret that so many of these are seen really only at beer festivals, although happily a few of our more enterprising landlords are trying to break this trend.

Once again the public voted with their feet, and the festival proved to be even more popular than its predecessors, with many sessions sold out. Despite this, we were still



able to open for the last session on Saturday evening with most of real ales available.

It would be impossible to mention all the highlights of the three days, but there are a few which stand out. The first beer to sell out was Worthington E, made by the Bass Museum Brewery at Burton-on-Trent – this was far removed from the keg “Worthy E” more experienced drinkers may recall, and gave a reminder of what the famous Burton beers really used to taste like.

In the festival programme there was a voting slip for beer and cider of the festival, and many votes were cast. The clear winner was Old Tom, brewed by Robinson's of Stockport, a fabulous strong dark beer, whilst the second place went to Roosters Yankee, a more traditional British bitter, and third place was taken by Orkney Skull-splitter, which is also the current CAMRA champion winter beer. Winner in the cider category was the moreish Janet's Jungle Juice from Westcroft.

The generosity of the public was again noticeable, and £477 was raised for our chosen charities.

Finally, it would be wrong to close this review without mentioning a few people who made contributions above and beyond the call of duty. Thanks go to our major sponsors, Bath Ales, to Simon Whitmore of Butcombe Brewery for help with the stillage, and Malcolm Shipp of Shipping Beer for his indefatigable efforts in getting the beer.

Phil Cummings

## CAMRA membership tops 60,000!

CAMRA, the only consumer group fighting for the rights of beer drinkers, has recently welcomed the 60,000<sup>th</sup> member to its ranks at its City of York Beer Festival.

Peter Bridle, CAMRA's South West Regional Director said, “When I joined CAMRA in 1988, national membership was around 18,500 members. Since then, our membership numbers have more than trebled and it is a reflection of how much people care about Real Ale and support CAMRA's aims that we now have over 60,000 members”.

The 60,000<sup>th</sup> member was named as Laura Craft, a 20-year-old student teacher. Laura said, “I'm really happy to have become CAMRA's 60,000<sup>th</sup> member and feel as though I have become a small part of their history”.

Mike Benner, CAMRA's Head of Campaigns and Communications said, “Our membership has been growing since the

1980s and is now at its highest level ever. The more members we have the better we can represent the interests of all Britain's beer drinkers and pub goers. Our campaigns reach out to Government, the media, the industry and other decision makers on issues as diverse as fair licensing laws, full pints and protection of community pubs – not forgetting promoting good Real Ale and choice”.

On a local level, Bristol & District branch signed up 44 new members at the recent CAMRA Beer Festival at the Council House – taking branch membership to its highest level of over 940 members.

60,000 volunteer members – why not join CAMRA today and help push the local branch towards 1,000 members? We are all volunteers from a whole variety of backgrounds with one thing in common – a love of decent beer.

Horts advert

## Now we are four

**THE SALAMANDER in John Street, Bath has become the fourth pub in the Bath Ale's portfolio.**

It joins their existing estate – the Hare on the Hill in Kingsdown, the Merchants Arms in Hotwells and the Hop Pole in Bath – in supplying the full range of Bath Ales beers plus guest ales. The Brewery is aiming to open the Salamander before the end of April 2001.



Summer must be on the way as brewer Craig has been busy producing the first batch of the excellent Bath SPA extra, a golden hoppy 5% beer designed to quench your thirst on hot sunny days.



The web site at [www.bathales.co.uk](http://www.bathales.co.uk) has been redesigned and now contains details of the pubs and beers and a regularly updated News letter. It's well worth visiting if only to play "put the belly" on the Hare on the Hill's beer-meister, John Lansdall. Steve O'Shea

## Old George's site - a plea

AS we all know, brewing in the West Country has been decimated: the national brewers have gobbled up and spat out all of the regionals here, leaving us with just a few modern micros.

The region has had major enterprises in just about every corner: Bristol; Bath; Gloucester; Cheltenham; Wickwar; Stroud; Rode; Oakhill; Shepton Mallet; Burnham-on-Sea – the list goes on. What though is left of a once great tradition? Snazzy names on yet another housing or office redevelopment.

In Bristol there is a golden opportunity to keep the memory fresh – the old George's brewery cellars. These could be utilised to exhibit brewing artefacts from all over the region: locally made ones from manufacturers like Price, Powell or Pourtney; or even Parnalls, the Gaskell and Chambers of the West. Some of the great Scottish & Newcastle archive collection could also be shown off (if allowed) on a rotating basis.

To spice up the collection, permanent exhibits from Bristol's colourful, ale-related past should also be incorporated. These displays could depict the following:

- The Knights Templar having a final drink together before their departure for the next crusade.
- The witches of Bristol making another ale-based potion to help ward off the plague.

○ Daniel Defoe meeting Alexander Selkirk in the Star (Castle Green), gathering information for his classic book "Robinson Crusoe".

○ Thomas Clarkson hearing about the horrors of the slave trade from a helpful landlord in the Seven Stars, unbelievably still standing in Thomas Street.

All of these events actually occurred within 500 yards of the old George's Brewery. It would be of great interest not only locally but also nationally.

The City Council were quoted in Christmas 1999's Pints West as saying that "future developments (of the Courage site) should recognise, interpret and possibly continue the tradition of brewing within an appropriate part of the site."

With the old brewhouse adjacent to Hawkins Lane possibly earmarked for use by a modern micro-brewer, the possibility of reinstating the historic ferry landing at the end of the lane; and by using the old Head Brewers office (the building with the lovely oriel window overlooking the river) you'd have a superb entrance for an integrated visitor attraction.

With the brave decision to go for "European City of Culture 2008", Bristol needs to make more of its own, and the region's, contributions to the world.

Mark Steeds

Bath Ales Brewery and pubs advert

Cornubia advert

# Become a beer explorer!

In previous editions of Pints West we have often featured many of the excellent pubs that lie outside of the “Greater Bristol” area, but within striking distance.

You may have been keen to visit them, but were put off by the thought of someone having to drive or incurring a large taxi fare. You are probably unaware that there is an affordable and practical way – the “Day Explorer” bus ticket, which must be one of Bristol’s best kept secrets. This ticket allows unlimited travel on City Line and Badger Line services for the bargain price of £5.70. It can be purchased on board the bus or from the bus station.

In the first of a series of articles, I outline a route which takes in a number of excellent Good Beer Guide listed pubs.

We set off on a Saturday morning from Kingswood, which is normally £2.40 return to the centre, so we were only spending an extra £3.40 anyway. We then took the 10:00 number 376 bus from the bus station to Wells, arriving at 10:56 (the service runs virtually hourly all day every day). A very short walk took us to the City Arms in the High Street.

This is an absolutely excellent old pub set around a courtyard, and part of which was once a jail. There were about six real ales on offer, most of them very unusual for the area, such as Cains Dr Duncans IPA and Shepherd Neame Bishops Finger. The range changes frequently and all were in excellent condition. We had some time to spare so decided to eat from the very tempting and imaginative menu. The food was very good and fairly priced too. The pub is open all day every day.

Our next port of call was to be Wookey Hole, about one and a half miles away. The somewhat pitiful bus service (number 172) consists of four buses to Wookey Hole at 10:11, 11:11, 13:11 and 14:11, and four back at 23 minutes past the same hours, and none at all on Sundays! We were told that even these buses were under threat of withdrawal.

We caught the 13:11 to the Wookey Hole Inn opposite the famous caves. This pub, which we had been to before, was the main inspiration for the whole trip. This pub was extensively refurbished in July 2000 by new owners and is now like no other pub that I know. It is furnished with an odd assortment of settees and bizarre stools, as well as more conventional tables and chairs. A wide variety of subdued lighting and much use of pastel shades gives it a very mellow atmosphere. Assorted trinkets complete the picture and somehow it all works together! A quiet side room and 100-seat sculptured garden also feature. The very inventive menu, changed daily, is very popular

with the more basic lunchtime food priced much lower than the evening offerings. All of this is wonderful but we were really here for the beer! There are four ever-changing real ales, sourced from genuinely independent small brewers from all over Britain. Timothy Taylor’s Landlord is usually, but not always, on. On top of that comes no less than eight draught Belgian beers and anyone who has read my previous rantings will know what I think of that! They include a wheat beer, a frambozen (raspberry) beer and the wonderful L’Achouffe at a mere 8.4% ABV! The pub is open from 12-3:00 and 6-11 Tuesday to Saturday (closed Mondays) and 12-4, 7-10:30 Sundays. They are likely to open longer in summer.

You won’t be surprised to hear that we missed the 14:23 bus back to Wells, but a taxi at £3.50 split three ways is a small price for such pleasure.

Our next bus was the 15:40 Wells to Weston -super-Mare (operates hourly until 20:40 then one more at 22:10, and two-hourly from 11:15 to 21:15 on Sundays). After about 30 minutes we got off at Axbridge in the main square and visited the Lamb, which is open all day. This is another excellent pub, which hasn’t really changed since I first visited it over twenty years ago, and is now owned by Butcombe brewery. The Butcombe bitter and Gold were excellent and the food menu looked very enticing too. This is a proper country inn of a type becoming all too rare.

After an hour we boarded the next bus and travelled on to Weston-super-Mare arriving at 17:50. We disembarked in the centre and,

deciding to forego the attractions of Wether-spoon’s Dragon Inn, took the short walk to the railway station. Here is an unusual experience – the station bar and buffet “Off The Rails” is somewhere you would actually choose to go!

The enterprising landlord introduced two real ales a few years ago, usually from local small brewers such as Oakhill or RCH, kept them very well and was rewarded with a place in the 2001 Good Beer Guide. The bar is quite basic but very friendly and features a free jukebox. How many ale drinkers have missed their trains after venturing in?

It was then back to town to pick up the next Bristol bound bus – I’ve mislaid the timetable but they are at least hourly. However, we hadn’t quite finished yet as the route passes through Congresbury and the excellent Plough Inn! This is open all day Saturdays but closes from 2:30-5 Monday to Friday and 4-7 Sundays. This is a pure drinking pub, which does no hot food. Four or five beers always feature at least one guest and often something unusual. A good atmosphere prevails and several beer festivals a year are staged.

For those with even more stamina, the bus goes directly past both the Merchants Arms (new Bath Ales pub) and the Bag O’Nails on its way back into Bristol. It was then back to Kingswood, all tired and emotional, but still wringing extra value out of our Day Explorer tickets at the end of a very enjoyable day out. I am far from being a fan of our local bus “service” but £5.70 must be an absolute bargain for so much.

Vince Murray

Wye Valley Brewery advert

# A world of choice

**THE 2001 Great British Beer Festival** will take place at Olympia, London once again, from Tuesday 31<sup>st</sup> July until Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> August. This is our tenth year at the same venue. There will be entertainment every session from Tuesday evening until Saturday lunchtime, with quieter or more traditional music earlier in the week and at lunchtimes, and the more boisterous acts on Thursday and Friday evenings.

The Festival offers the opportunity to sample beers ranging from the finest traditional brews to the newest micro-brewers' offerings. England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are all well represented, but so is the rest of the world. We have beers from the vast majority of beer producing nations and many from the famous brewers of the world like Belgium, Germany, Netherlands and USA. Ciders and perry are also available, as are some of the finest continental lagers including dark versions, and some excellent American examples.

## Champion Beer of Britain

The final tasting for the 2001 Champion Beer of Britain takes place on the morning of Tuesday 31st July. The Champion Beer of Britain Awards will once again be



announced in the National Hall during the trade session.

The trade session is again being sponsored by the Beer Seller, who will have a stand in the Grand Hall, featuring a range of beers from breweries that this wholesaler represents.

The trade session will start at 1:45pm and continue to 5pm when the Festival is open to the general public. Once again, as a special thank you to season ticket holders, their tickets will allow them to attend this unique session and to hear the announcements of the 2001 Champion Beer of Britain winners. Season tickets cost: £13.50 (plus 50p booking charge per order to cover p&p).

There is one way to guarantee that you will taste all of the winners, and that is by attending the Champion Beer of Britain tutored tastings. These are conducted by Roger Protz and take place on Wednesday lunchtime and evening.

Tickets are available from HQ and are priced at £8 plus entrance fee to the Festival. These tastings are open to non-CAMRA members as well so this could be good opportunity to bring along the uninitiated into the taste of good real ale.

## New Breweries Bar

2001 will see the return of the bar devoted to new breweries (i.e. under three years old). There should be plenty on display to attract even the most travelled "ticker"!

## Opening times

**Tue 31 Jul 5:00pm-10:30pm £5.00**  
**Wed 1 Aug 11:30am-3:00pm £1.50**  
**5:00pm-10:30pm £5.00**  
**Thu 2 Aug 12noon-10:30pm £6.00**  
**Fri 3 Aug 12noon-10:30pm £6.00**  
**Sat 4 Aug 11:00am-7:00pm £4.00**  
 (Live music every session)

For further information  
**0900 525 2525**

(All calls charged at 60p per minute; all money raised by CAMRA from this line will go towards the CAMRA Real Ale Fighting Fund)

[www.gbbf.org.uk](http://www.gbbf.org.uk)

Wickwar BOB advert

Moles Brewery advert



# Can we bank on some good beer ?

So, Whitbread, for years a name associated with brewing and pub ownership, having sold its breweries to Interbrew of Belgium, has now sold all its pubs to the German owned Morgan Grenfell Private Equity, the buy-out arm of Deutsche Bank. The 3,000 or so pubs and bars were sold for around £1.625 billion and include the Hogshead

chain, which put the emphasis on Real Ale. Morgan Grenfell beat off competition from several other bidders for the Whitbread outlets including Nomura the Japanese bank which is already the UK's biggest pub controller. Other bidders for the estate included Punch Taverns and Candover. Morgan Grenfell now becomes the UK's

third biggest pub controller and with Nomura in first place, two of the three biggest pub operators in Britain are run by overseas banks! In an industry that until relatively recently had the majority of its outlets controlled by big brewers there has certainly been a radical change in its structure. However, many of these pub operating companies still offer a limited choice of real ales and without any particular affinity to a brewer (apart from supply deals) what commitment will we see to choice and quality for the consumer?

## News from Smiles

**NEVER a dull moment at Bristol's remaining brewery.** Managing Director Mark Todd has moved sideways to take control of a new related venture, drinks company KC Brands. Quentin Williams has stepped forward as new Managing Director of Smiles with the intention that they will be able to support each other and sell more bottled Smiles through off trade outlets.

There has also been a review of the beer range, with **Heritage** now becoming a winter seasonal beer – expect to see it again in October. If that seems too long to wait, keen Heritage drinkers will still be able to find the bottled version in Sainsburys, Safeway and Tesco with Asda coming on quite soon.

**Mayfly** will reappear as the guest beer for May. There are already orders from Young's of London for this 4.5% ale so head for your nearest Young's pub to get a pint!

The frenzied pace of a different seasonal beer every month is going to be tamed a little with the 3.5% **Maiden Legover** available through both June and July.

Another development that is sure to be popular is **the reappearance of Smiles Golden**. Many drinkers were disappointed when **Smiles Blond** muscled Golden from the regular range, but the 3.8% Golden will appear again for the months of August and September for you to quaff on those last days of summer.

Richard Brooks

### The UK's top ten pub operators:

1. **Nomura:** 6,635 pubs
2. **Punch Group:** 6,053
3. **Fairbar Ltd.** (Morgan Grenfell Private Equity): 2,998
4. **Scottish & Newcastle:** 2,624
5. **Enterprise Inns:** 2,600
6. **Bass Leisure Retail:** 2,006
7. **Pubmaster:** 2,000
8. **Wolverhampton & Dudley:** 1,777
9. **Greene King:** 1,565
10. **InnSpired** (Alchemy Partners): 1,000

Source: M&C Report / Martin Information.  
Pete Bridle

Smiles Brewery advert

Bunch of Grapes advert

# The rise and fall of Bath's historic breweries

**FOR a town of its size and regional importance, Bath has been something of an oddity in that its last large brewery closed as early as 1923, well before those in Bristol and other large towns.**

The city's brewery history has, hitherto, received little attention but recent research has provided plenty of evidence of the changes in business organisation and beer production that have resulted in recent brewery closures and the introduction of new styles of beer.

Historically, Bath's beer was brewed in the home, institutions such as the Royal Mineral Water Hospital and pubs. The spectacular growth of eighteenth-century Bath gave rise to the building of the first of its large breweries near the present Claverton Street, in 1736. This brewery, of which some illustrations survive, had closed by 1750 but was succeeded by a number of larger concerns in the last twenty years of this century. Many of these were linked with porter, the dominant style beer of the day.

The brewery revolution of the time was obviously a popular topic as the local press included a league table showing the massive production of the London Porter

breweries that provided a model for those in Bath. Also, the construction of Meux's "great cask which could admit near 300 persons" – before, of course, the maturing porter was added! – was also noted by the Bath Journal of 1792.

The number of large breweries in Bath and its suburbs rose from a dozen in 1800 to 25 by 1850. These included a large concern on Broad Quay that had been opened by William Bros. of Bristol and, largest of all, the Northgate Brewery on the site of the present Podium centre. Both were to install steam engines from the celebrated firm of Boulton & Watt at the start of the nineteenth century. This firm supplied a third engine to William Clark's porter brewery in Walcot at this time.

An early railway guide of 1861 describes the Northgate as the largest brewery in the west of England when it was noted for its 'old' ales and sent its stout, porter, mild and pale ales to Wales, Cornwall, London and Liverpool.

The Northgate was to close in 1868 and the following years might be seen as a vain attempt by Bath's brewers to recapture such heights.

Early trade directories provide some idea of the number and size of breweries in the later nineteenth century – Kelly's national trade directory of 1877 showing 29 'large' or 'Common Brewers' and 102 'small' brewers, the latter brewing 'the beer they sell', according to this

publication.

Changes in company law and the spectacular success of the Guinness share flotation in 1886 marked a significant change in the financing of brewery companies and facilitated the process of takeovers and closures that has continued to this day.

Locally, Arnold, Perrett & Co of Wickwar had registered as a limited company in 1886 and it was no surprise that a prospectus for 'The Bath Brewery Ltd' was published three years later. This sought to amalgamate five smallish brewers in Bath and the Limpley Stoke Brewery with the hope of significant growth and profit.

Poor management and failures of financial strategy at the outset were to dog the company throughout its days but it did build a modern brewery in Lower Weston and acquired about half of Bath's pubs by 1914.

The second attempt to form a limited company was a much more ambitious affair. In 1890 the English Lager Beer Brewery Ltd was floated to convert an old ale brewery in Batheaston to meet the (supposed) growing demand for this foreign beer. A German brewer was hired and a lager plant and ice factory were built at great expense.

Surviving records are sparse but it is doubtful if much, or any, lager was sold. The company went into liquidation in 1893 with significant loss to the shareholders, tales of negligent management and suspected fraud.

The former lager beer brewery – variously called the Avondale or County Brewery – was, however, to host the last

Bath Star advert

Bag O'Nails advert

of Bath's limited brewery companies, Pearce Reynolds, Withers & Co Ltd, formed in 1905. Known locally as 'the Combine', this was an attempt by leading pub-brewers to combine, concentrate production and compete with The Bath Brewery Ltd and other local brewing centres. Again, financial strategy was at fault and the company soon passed into the hands of the debenture holders and, eventually, the receivers. The pubs were sold to the Bath Brewery Ltd in 1912.

The First World War brought many difficulties for brewers but also saw high profits. The Bath Brewery Ltd was able to use some of their war profits to pay overdue interest and dividends on its preference shares but the recession of the early 1920s was to see its purchase by The Bristol Brewery, Georges & Co Ltd in 1923. As is the way in such takeovers, the brewery in Weston was soon closed and the pubs supplied from Bristol.

Brewing in Bath was then carried on by a few small breweries, such as Biggs's Crown Brewery and Pointing's of Weston, but these were soon to close.

A few of the surviving pub breweries proved more resilient – the Long Acre Tavern was the last to brew in the city until acquisition by Wadworth in 1956. At Batheaston, the George & Dragon continued until 1962.

Many of these breweries operated their own maltings and these buildings, together with those of independent maltsters, outlived their former owners and customers, the last closing by 1980. One of these maltsters, H. Stanley Taylor, a senior partner in the family firm James D. Taylor & Sons, was also a director of The Bath Brewery Ltd and joined the Georges board in 1923. He was to chair the Bristol board in 1952 on the retirement of Christopher George. He was the first non-family member to do so.

In recent years, 'Abbey Ales' has restored commercial brewing to the city but it is extremely unlikely that current trends in the industry will permit a repeat of the cycle of the past 250 years.

Mike Bone

The above piece gives a taste of a much larger article (30 pages) entitled "The Rise and Fall of Bath's Breweries: 1736-1960", one of eight articles in **Bath History Volume VIII (2000)** covering a period of about 2,000 years! The book (200 pages) is published by Bath Archaeological Trust in collaboration with Millstream Books, price £8.99. It is available from certain local booksellers or may be obtained by writing to: Bath Archaeological Trust, 13 Brassmill Enterprise Centre, Brassmill Lane, Bath BA1 3JN – enclose a cheque for £10.19 (includes £1.20 p&p) made payable to "Bath Archaeological Trust".

## Progressive news from Abbey Ales

This last year has seen another annual increase in sales for Abbey Ales of Bath. The brewery that still believes small is beautiful, and only supplies within a 20-mile delivery radius, has announced an 18.4% rise in sales from February 2000 to February 2001.

Announcing an increase for the fourth year in succession, brewery boss Alan Morgan said, "We started in October 1997 at a time when the market place was shrinking due to pub group (pub company) acquisitions, landlords losing the choice of a guest beer, and the so called loss of demand for real ale. We decided therefore that quality and service on a very local small basis was the way for us to go."

One beer is produced on a regular basis, Bellringer, a golden hoppy 4.2% abv best bitter. There is a demand for seasonal beers from Abbey and occasionally they oblige. The latest is one called **Chorister**, which Alan describes as: "A single hop, reddish brown, malty 4.5% abv best bitter brewed using only the finest Maris Otter malt and finished with Northdown hops."

Welcome news for Alan recently was a budget announcement from Chancellor Gordon Brown stating that the Government was minded to introduce a reduced rate of duty on the beer produced by small breweries and will be considering the scope for doing so over the coming year, to provide support for the nation's small brewing industry.

Both CAMRA and the Society of Independent Brewers, of which Abbey Ales is a member, have lobbied extensively for a **Progressive Beer Duty**, duty paid which is proportional to production and would mean a lower tax rate for smaller brewers that could be passed on and used to expand. This system is used extensively in Europe and the Office of Fair Trading, Customs & Excise and the Department of Trade and Industry

already accept the principal. The European Commission permits progressive tax as it recognises the need for a healthy and competitive industry, a fact that British Governments previously chose to ignore, since we are the only major European brewing nation not to operate progressive duty.

Alan said of Abbey Ales: "I am very happy with what we have achieved and very proud of my small team but I still see many ways that we can go forward. Our internet site is attracting a lot of attention and shortly we will be able to sell on-line which should satisfy the requests from all over the world that we receive for merchandise.

"Bottled beer is another market we would like to move into. We continually get asked for it at the brewery from local restaurants and also on the internet mainly from American wholesalers who love the idea of anything from the World Heritage City of Bath.

"However with Progressive Beer Duty Abbey will be given the opportunity to move forward sooner than later," he added.

Abbey Ales Bellringer advert

# Butcombe Brewery celebrates 60 millionth pint

BARRIE WILTON had a surprise when he ordered his usual pint of Butcombe Bitter at the Hunters Lodge at Priddy, on the Mendip Hills in Somerset. For the ale he was served was a very special drink - the 60 millionth pint to be brewed by the local Butcombe Brewery.

Managing Director Simon Whitmore marked the milestone by presenting Mr. Wilton with a Dartington real ale pint tankard inscribed: "Barrie Wilton is Butcombe Man. Drinker of the 60 millionth pint of Butcombe."

Mr. Wilton, of Whitnell House, Haydon, near Wells, has been drinking Butcombe Bitter since the first day it was brewed more than 22 years ago.

"My first pint of Butcombe was one of the first brews that went out from the brewery to the Hunters Lodge and I have been drinking it ever since," he said.

"I don't go out for a drink every night but, if I do go out, it's usually to the Hunters Lodge and I always drink Butcombe. Nothing else. Butcombe is a nice bitter. In fact, it's the bitterness of the beer that I like. A bitter has to be bitter, you know."

Barrie Wilton played shove ha'penny for many years and drank Butcombe Bitter at various pubs in the Chew Valley.

How did he feel about being served the 60 millionth pint?

"Fantastic," he exclaimed. "It's a real privilege."

Photo

Butcombe Brewery has grown from producing just 10 barrels a brew to over 14,000 barrels a year since Simon Whitmore and his wife Maureen set up the brewery in converted farm buildings at their home at Butcombe, near Bristol International airport, in September 1978.

The Hunters Lodge was one of one of the 14 pubs which took a delivery in the first week of the brewery's life and it still has the same landlords, Roger and Jackie Dors.

"We never have to ask Barrie Wilton what he wants to drink because he wouldn't want anything but a pint of Butcombe Bitter," said Mr. Dors. "He's a Butcombe man through and through."

Butcombe advert

Weston-super-Mare Folk/Jazz/  
Real Ale Festival advert

# WATERING HOLES IN THE DESERT

## News from Weston-super-Mare

### Branch News

#### First the bad news ...

Vince Rutter and the **49 Club** have parted company. Vince was the Assistant Steward at the club and had been responsible for introducing guest ales at the club over a four-month period and raising the standards of the real ales on offer. The exact reasons for the parting of the ways are not clear, but it is definitely a sad turn of events for Weston real ale fans.

In his column – “49 Pints” – in the last Pints West, Vince promised that he would put on any type of beer, “porter, stout, mild or bitter.” Since then he has been as good as his word. We have seen two appearances for the 2000 Champion Beer of Britain – Moorhouses’ wonderful Black Cat Mild, Oakhill Black Magic Stout and RCH Old Slug Porter. No-one else in Weston is interested in offering these types of beers (Wetherspoon makes a token gesture when National Mild Week comes around, sells out quickly but doesn’t bother any other time of the year). Vince was also responsible for giving us

some RCH beers not seen anywhere else in Weston – Double Header, Sante Fé, 25A and the aforementioned Old Slug Porter.

I made an ashen-faced visit to the club as soon as I heard the news. Lo and behold, Vince’s “upcoming guests” board had disappeared. There was a guest beer – a very strange tasting and cloudy Butcombe Gold. I did not have the heart to bother asking whether they were still planning to hold the beer festival Vince had been trying to arrange for sometime in May.

#### But now the good news ...

Weston seems certain to have a proper real ale festival this summer! And not just for one day, but for three!! A Folk, Jazz & Real Ale festival is planned to take place from Friday 10th August until Sunday 12th August. Some of the details are still being clarified, but what we know so far is that, subject to formal council consent, the festival will take place in and around two large marquees on Beach Lawns, running from 11:00am until 9:00pm each day.

Fourteen folk and jazz acts will be appearing and there should be a wide range of beers available. At the time of writing eight breweries had committed to running their own “bars”. The early finish each evening is a licensing requirement. However, the organisers have had the foresight to get other pubs/music venues in town involved in the enterprise and it is expected that at least half a dozen will be having live music after 9:00 on the evenings of the festival. The Regency is promising to run its own beer festival that weekend.

This is all very exciting news for Weston real ale fans and, indeed, the town in general which is not exactly overflowing with crowd-pulling attractions.

So, if you have friends or relatives who are thinking of coming to Weston in the summer, tell them to make it this weekend! And if you are planning to go away in the summer but have not booked anything, keep this weekend free. It promises to be one of the most memorable events that Weston has seen for years.

Tim Nickolls

### 2nd Annual Seasonal Ales Crawl

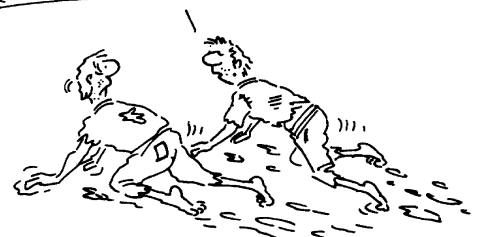
ON a wet and windy December’s evening we embarked on our second seasonal ales crawl. It felt good that this was the second event – reminding us that we had passed our first anniversary and were slowly, but consistently, adding to the numbers attending our events.

As with the previous year we began at the **Regency** – a good place to start any Weston town crawl due to its location at one end of the town centre (with little beyond it in the way of good beer) and the fact that you can be sure of something decent to drink. The selection was the best for a long while. In addition to the regulars – Gem, Bass, Boddingtons and 6X – were Hop Back Summer Lightning (very seasonal) and Tolly Cobbold Bob’s Sleigh. We all went for the latter, given its

seasonal nature. A very nice, typical winter beer, very warming and weighing in at a hefty 5%. This beer is not mentioned in the Good Beer Guide so is presumably a new brew by the Ipswich brewery. The following week the Regency had the more appropriate beer from Hop Back, Winter Lightning. It was probably just as well that this was not on at the time of our crawl as it would have made it very hard to leave. Those who managed to get some will know what I mean.

After a couple of Sleighs we headed off into the night. The next port of call was the **Dragon Inn**. Despite the huge amount of publicity by Wetherspoon to support their “Twelve Ales of Christmas,”

I sometimes think  
we take these  
crawls too literally



there was only one seasonal beer available (and about the same number of staff serving). Fortunately, the beer in question was the mighty and very wonderful Robinson's Old Tom. If Bob's Sleigh was hefty at 5%, I am not sure what term you would use to describe this 8.5% masterpiece. Wetherspoon took the decision to only serve it in half-pints. Accurately described in the Good Beer Guide as "a delightfully complex range of flavours including dark chocolate, full maltness, treacle toffee and fruits," Old Tom is the reigning Champion Winter Beer of Britain. It would certainly feature highly in my top

ten favourite beers and it was worth queuing for ten minutes for the rare opportunity to drink it in W-S-M.

A hard act to follow, but we forced ourselves onwards up Meadow Street to the **49 Club**. En route we were joined by Graham Dunbaven from RCH. It was fitting that we were heading for the 49 as we knew that their guest beer was Double Header from RCH. This is not a seasonal beer, but is so rarely seen in pubs that we could not resist the opportunity. It says a lot for the quality and flavour of this beer that it still registered as a very impressive pint following the Old Tom. In fact we

were unable to drag about half our number away as the rest of us headed to our final destination of the evening.

We feared that the evening had to take a downward turn following the quality of our previous beers, but **Off The Rails** did not disappoint. Branscombe Vale's winter brew Hells Belles was in very good form and almost took up permanent residency at OTR during the mid-winter months (landlord Colin Hicks bought five barrels to help see his regulars through January).

All in all an excellent night's drinking. Here's to the third seasonal ales crawl on December 19th 2001!

Tim Nickolls

## The Bell, Banwell

POUNDRING the streets on Pints West distribution duty is not exactly a glamorous task.

Apart from the fact that the weather in Weston always seems to be either wet or windy or both, when asking landlords to take some copies you feel obliged to have a drink. Most of the time this means forcing down a too cold/warm, grim half of the likes of Bass, Courage Best, Theakstons Best or Wadworth 6X.

However, every now and then you are rewarded with a nice surprise, either from a pub with a poor reputation that suddenly surprises you with an excellent pint or from a pub that you have not visited for years and never realised was serving good beer. The Bell in Banwell fits the latter category.

All we really knew about the Bell was that it used to be okay when owned by Gibbs Mew, but no one had ventured there for years. Steve Reed decided to pop

in on his Pints West rounds last autumn and was very pleasantly surprised. The range was not riveting – Butcombe Bitter, Flowers Original, Wadworth 6X and Greene King Old Speckled Hen – but the beers Steve tried were of very good quality and it was clear from chatting to some of the customers that the Bell is very much a real ale drinkers pub.

Steve returned with the winter Pints West and had more good quality beer. His only disappointment was that he had just missed Exmoor Hart and Young's Winter Warmer.

We decided to visit the pub as a group during our February social and we were all impressed. In addition to the aforementioned Butcombe and Old Speckled Hen (which are regulars), Shepherd Neame Spitfire and Everards Original were on offer. We went through the card and were impressed with the overall quality of the beers. In particular we were pleased with the Everards Original, which

is rarely seen in these parts. It weighs in at 5.2% and is accurately described in the Good Beer Guide as "beautifully full-bodied." The Bell certainly did it justice.

We had a chat with the landlord, Robert Doddington. Robert took over the pub last July, having previously been at the Jovial Forrester in Nailsworth. Robert explained that he is in the process of trying to buy the

pub from Enterprise Inns (who acquired Gibbs Mew) as his ambition is to run the place as a genuine free house. If successful, he says that he will be looking to stock more beers from micro-breweries, local if possible. He mentioned that when he gets some rare time off he likes nothing better than heading up to the nearby Crown at Churchill for some RCHPG Steam – this augurs well for the future.

It was clear from talking to Robert that he is keen on keeping and serving good beer – he says that when he took over it took a long while "ripping out all sorts of gas \*%&!" – I'm sure the locals are grateful.

As a pub, the Bell is a pleasant place to visit. It began life as a coaching house back in the 16th century and is now a very pleasant village local. At the time of our branch visit a table skittles league match was in progress. The pub also hosts a folk music club on the first Thursday of each month. I would recommend any real ale fan in Weston to take the short bus ride out to Banwell to try it for yourself.

Tim Nickolls

RCH Brewery advert

## Diary

**Friday 27 April:** Chippenham Beer Festival.

**Wednesday 16 May:** Congresbury two-pub social – 8:15 The Old Inn, 9:45 The Plough. Buses from WSM at 7:35 and 8:35. Buses back at 10:17 and 11:37.

**Wednesday 20 June:** 8:30 Off The Rails  
**Wednesday 18 July:** 8:00 WSM golf club, 9:00 The Ship Inn, Uphill, 9:30 The Dolphin, Uphill, 10:15 WSM cricket club, Devonshire Road.

**Wednesday 15 August:** Banwell two-pub social – 8:00 The Brewer's Arms, 9:00 The Bell. Bus from WSM 7:45, bus back at 10:52.

## Pub Profile : The Regency

A SHORT walk from the garish/tacky/decrepit bars that dominate the seaford and town centre of Weston lies the Regency. The Regency was opened in Lower Church Road about 30 years ago. It has only been called the Regency for about 15 years. Previously it was called the Top Hat and the Silver Jubilee.

Mark Short left Weston to get a degree in business studies at Plymouth University and then spent two years as a ski instructor. This background would not obviously lead to running pubs, but Mark acquired his first eight years ago – the Cellar Bar in Wellington. Shortly afterwards, his father alerted him to the fact that the Regency was on the market and Mark bought it in conjunction with his brother David.

The Regency comprises of one bar and a separate pool room. It doesn't have a TV, darts or loud music – Mark's aim has always been to have a pub which provides the right environment for having a chat or simply relaxing in peace. There is no doubt that Mark has been very successful in achieving this and the pub is popular with a strong and loyal customer base. It attracts a wide range of people from all age ranges. Its location opposite the college is useful for ensuring that a regular stream of new people get to try the pub – the younger crowd at lunchtimes and the more sociable elements from the adult education classes in the evenings.

Mark organises a wide range of social

events. These include an annual pub outing (last year Stratford, this year the Bridgnorth-Kidderminster railway, with Batham's beer on board), an annual "booze cruise" in Bristol, pool, crib and cricket teams and the occasional live music (usually accompanied by all real ales being reduced to £1.50). All of this is under-pinned by friendly and popular bar staff, led by the near-legendary Mark "Pullers" Pullen.

But what about the beer I hear you ask. Back when Mark took over, the pub did three real ales – Bass, Boddingtons and Flowers. Mark quickly built this up to six beers, comprising of five regulars and a guest. The range changes over time as Mark is always ready to drop a poor seller and add a different beer to the permanent range if it proves popular as a guest. This is exactly what happened with Bath Ales Gem and the Regency is the only pub in Weston to stock a beer from this excellent brewery on a permanent basis. Less happily, a similar occurrence happened last autumn with Webster's Yorkshire Bitter that, bizarrely, was so popular as a guest that Mark was compelled to add it to the permanent range. Mark feels that his current range is his strongest yet, in terms of sales. In addition to the afore-mentioned two beers, on offer are Bass, Boddingtons, Wadworth 6X and Charles Wells Bombardier. The latter is, technically, the guest but Mark reports that it is so popular that he is going to have a tough

decision to make about withdrawing it. All six of the current beers have their own strong followings and Mark said that he would be able to sustain a seventh beer if cellar space permitted. He would not be drawn on which ale is currently the most vulnerable but, happily, he reported that the Gem would be unlikely to go.

It is worth noting that at the Regency about 70% of the beer sold is real ale.

The afore-mentioned Webster's replaced Courage Best on the roster. Mark persevered with Courage after the closure of the Bristol Brewery, but he says that its regular following deserted it and moved on to other beers.

Some CAMRA purists may feel that the range is not exactly the most exciting in the world (and anyone would be hard-pressed to persuade me that Boddies and Webster's are tasty, flavoursome beers) but I feel it would be churlish to grumble about a fine pub that offers six ales in good condition and where the landlord is clearly committed to supporting real ale, despite not drinking it himself. Besides, in the past few months we have seen beers from Hop Back, Smiles, Young's and Moles, amongst others.

Mark also owns Cheers, on the High Street, and has just purchased the adjacent Shooters, with plans to knock through to create one venue, with three parts. This will comprise of the current "Cheers" bar, a sports bar and a late opening bar/club called Club Red. None of these are likely to stock real ale. The venue is aimed at a different market and Mark is basically a business man and understands that there is more than one type of pub that can make money and I am sure he would snort at anyone who suggested (as many big brewers and pub owners do) that there is not money to be made out of real ale. If you are committed, have a nose for a business opportunity and understand how to build customer loyalty, a healthy living can be made out of it, as Mark ably demonstrates at the Regency.

I mentioned to Mark that there was some irony in that you are far more likely to pop in and have a friendly chat and meet someone interesting in the Regency than Cheers, named, of course, after the TV Boston bar. He agreed with this and a passing customer interjected with "this is the only decent pub in Weston." A bit of an injustice to one or two I can think of, but the Regency is quite probably the most popular pub in town amongst CAMRA members.

Tim Nickolls

## A Response from Heaven (for discerning beer lovers only)

THERE I was, one evening a few weeks ago, working through my weekly chore down at the local fitness centre.

Now this, in many ways, is due penance for my beer 'sampling' hobby but nonetheless is a job that must be done ... 'or else'! It normally takes around an hour but this particular night it seemed like ten. The cycle machine was doing its best to squeeze the last ounce of energy out of me, the air conditioning seemed like it couldn't care less that the chap next-door was dripping buckets and smelt like his kit

hadn't been washed since the last Millennium! Oh, and the final straw came when Rick Astley started bouncing up and down on the facing video screen singing "Never Gonna Give You Up" on some 80's MTV revival programme; at that particular moment thoughts of a glass of cask conditioned were extremely high on my post-activity agenda.

Then all of a sudden I just could not believe what I was hearing over the tannoy. "Could SARAH HUGHES please come to reception?"

What, I thought ..... don't leave it there, bring it in here double quick!

Steve Reed

P.S. If you ever get the chance try their Xmas ale 'Snowflake' at 8.0%. It is *absolutely wonderful!*

## Contacts

Tim Nickolls - 01934 628996 (eves)

Rich Neale - 01934 429808 (eves)

## On The Real Ale Trail

AT the end of January Mike Coleman, Rich Neale and myself arranged to check out a couple of well established pubs in the Gordano Valley. The aim was to establish if these two Good Beer Guide entries from the 2000 edition were maintaining the standards expected by the discerning beer-drinking public and connoisseurs alike who are prepared to shell out £11.99 for the annual 'bible.'

Our first port of call took us to the **Black Horse** at Clapton-in-Gordano. This is a perennial GBG entry and is a pub of wonderful character and local charm. We had heard one or two rumours however that the choice of ales had diminished during the last year and mutterings from some customers that the beers on offer were not always up to standard. Regrettably, on this particular visit at least, our

fears had some foundation. Wickwar Olde Merryford Ale had long since departed leaving Draught Bass, Smiles Best and Courage Best to hold the fort. Nothing wrong with these at all (although some might disagree with the latter) but perhaps an uninspired choice to whet the appetite for an 'away trip.' More disappointingly, in our opinion, was the condition of the beers served: often too cold which can lead to bland tasting beer.

Come on 'Black Horse' we know you can do better than this.

## Weston Whispers (pub/beer news)

**Jack Stamps Beer House**, hitherto famous in local CAMRA circles for being the only pub to refuse to take Pints West, has had a change of ownership and changes have included the introduction of Brakspear Bitter and Brakspear Special. Availability is variable, as are quality reports, but a reasonable pint is usually served, which only costs £1.30 between 11:00 and 3:00 (presumably an attempt to compete with the nearby Wetherspoon).

There have been reports of RCH East Street Cream being available at the **Chalice Bar** but we haven't managed to spot it yet.

Tim "Missed Train" Nickolls proved again that timing is not one of his strong points. He told people to turn up for the **49 Club's** January quiz an hour late! Fortunately, the excellent guest ale offering – Harviestoun's Jack The Lad – ensured that everyone was kept happy.

We reported in the last Pints West that there had been a change of landlord at The **Borough Arms**. This appears to have been beneficial in terms of real ale. The new incumbents have added a guest ale to the Bass and Courage Best. During a recent visit the Bass tasted fine. The guest was the uninspiring Webster's Green Label Best, but a Young's beer had previously been spotted. The ex-landlord has now taken over the **Imperial** and introduced a real ale – the ever-popular Bass.

Bass's heavy promotion of Charles Wells Bombardier has seen it become a regular fixture at the **Nut Tree**, Worle and it has also appeared at the **Windsor**.

We have previously highlighted the **Winscombe Club** as a venue worth seeking out. We are pleased to report that the club has agreed to grant admission to

all CAMRA members. On a recent group visit, the regular beers (Courage Directors and Wickwar BOB) were augmented by the rarely seen Beckett's Original. The beer was felt to be on the cold side on this particular visit, but on a return trip, Millennium Mash from Berrow Brewery was on and was excellent in all respects. This venue is definitely worth visiting.

A couple of people on the aforementioned trip to Winscombe got their clubs mixed up and went to **Winscombe Cricket Club**. This proved to be a beneficial diversion as, in addition to the regular Greene King IPA, there was an excellent offering from Ringwood – Swing Low.

In December we spent an evening on a crawl in Congresbury, visiting the **Bell**, the **Ship & Castle**, the **Old Inn** and the **Plough**. The latter two pubs were the clear standouts. The **Old Inn** has long been well regarded under Smiles ownership and the recent takeover by Young's has, if anything, increased the pub's attraction. Beers on offer were Smiles Original Dry and Best (direct from the cask or, if preferred, via swan-neck and sparkler!), Young's Triple A and Special. They also do Bass but this was not on. Cider fans can get real cider from Thatchers. The landlord is enthusiastic about his beer and likes a natter about ale.

The **Plough** is, quite simply, one of the best pubs in the county. The beers are straight from the cask and always in excellent condition. On the night of our visit the regulars (Bass, Worthington Bitter and Butcombe) were augmented by Greene King Old Speckled Hen and, best of the lot, Oakhill Yeoman. Landlord Steve Armstrong often has his own, home-brewed cider available (be very careful with this) and, if you ask nicely, he may have a Belgian beer or two tucked away under the counter. The only disappointment with this evening was the

After a very brief unplanned visit just around the corner to the **Priory** at Portbury village (a pub with a reputation for good food) where we had a swift and chilly swig or two of Fullers London Pride, we made our way to the **Little Harp** at Clevedon. This pub with a sea faring theme is currently owned by Greene King and had the usual range of GK beers available including the flagship Abbot Ale and Old Speckled Hen. The various beers here were all served icy cold knocking back much of the flavour although, left for around 20 minutes to 'warm up', they were generally fine (not much use if you are in a hurry though).

Feeling quite disappointed after what was turning out to be a 'Labour of Love' Mike suggested a visit to one final hostelry for the evening. He had tried this place some time back and felt it deserved another look. The pub was **Campbell's Landing** (still in Clevedon, immediately opposite the Pier). This turned out to be the highlight of the night and well worth the 'inspection'. Fullers ESB and Bath Ales Barnstormer were on offer here and well received they were too. Looking at some of the old pump clips fastened to the rear of the bar gave us the impression that this pub has been taking its beer seriously for some time. The guest beers apparently change on a regular basis, there is live music (I think on Thursdays) and customers should get a decent sea view near the front window. It may not suit non-smokers though as, during a follow up visit the next week with my family, we all remarked on the very heavy smog within. Go on give it a try.

Steve Reed

limited time we were able to spend at the Old Inn and Plough and have booked a return visit on **16th May**, just visiting these two. Getting to and from Congresbury is very easy from Weston so put it in your diary.



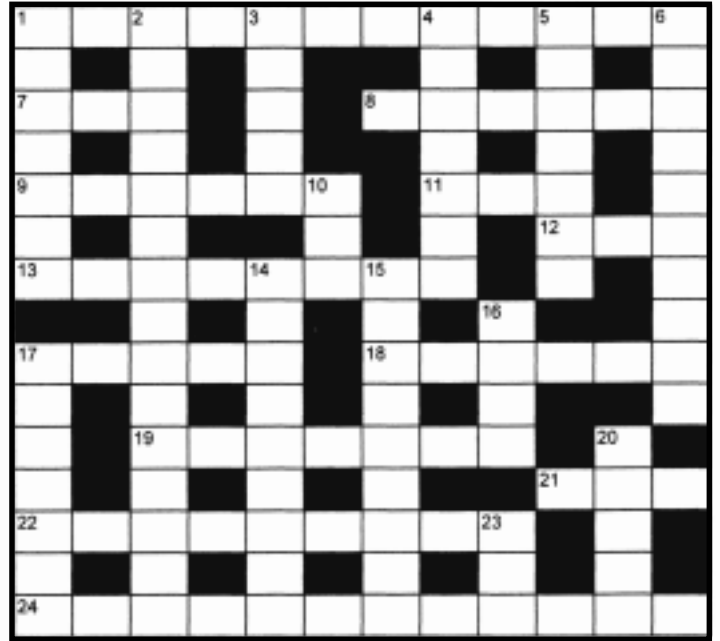
**Across**

1. Brewed by Bass's Museum Brewery this was the first beer to sell out at this year's Bristol Beer Festival (11,1)  
 7. What sort of Nut Brown is the 3.8% seasonal beer from Hop Back Brewery of Salisbury? (3)  
 8. What can be Fallen, White or Black from Goff's Brewery of Winchcombe, Gloucestershire? (6)  
 9. What is seasonally Lightning from Hop Back and Blotto from Franklin's? (6)  
 11. What is the seasonal King beer from the Brewery-on-Sea or is Rising in Ashton or Frampton Cotterell? (3)  
 12. Pub in Alpha Rd, Southville (3)  
 13. Harrogate brewery that brews the award winning Yankee at 4.3% ABV (8)  
 17. Real ale has lots of this and nitro-keg does not! (5)  
 18. Founded in 1994 this Wadebridge brewery brews Cornish Coaster at 3.6% abv and Doom Bar Bitter at 4% abv (6)  
 19. The 4.7% abv beer from Inveralmond Brewery of Perth, it's also the Gaelic title of the Stone of Destiny (3,4)  
 21. Dark beer brewed to 4% abv by Tigertops Brewery of Wakefield (3)  
 22. Belgian brewer that recently failed in its attempt to acquire Bass when the deal was blocked by Trade Secretary Stephen Byers (9)  
 24. Pub in Station Rd, Shirehampton (12)  
**Down**  
 1. South Gloucestershire brewery that brews the golden coloured Coopers WPA at 3.5% abv and the

- amber coloured BOB at 4% abv (7)  
 2. Beer of the Festival at this year's Bristol Beer Festival (9,3,3)  
 3. See 17  
 4. The 3.8% abv beer from Bigfoot Brewery of Gainsborough or the 4% abv beer from North Cotswold Brewery of Moreton-in-Marsh (7)  
 5. This aptly named tower brewery from Helston, Cornwall, has its own source of natural mineral water and brews Lizard Point at 4% abv (7)  
 6. Pub in Parson St, Bedminster (10)  
 10. At 4.3% abv this beer is a seasonal from O'Hanlons Brewery of Clyst St Lawrence, Devon (3)  
 14. Pub in St Mary's Way, Thornbury (3,6)  
 15. Edinburgh brewery that brews Otter of Leith at 4.2% abv and 80/- at 4.4% abv (9)  
 16. Clifton pub that was previously called the Footbridge and Firkin (4)  
 17,3. Pub in Shirehampton Rd, Stoke Bishop (3,4,5)  
 20. See 23  
 23,20. Brewed at 5.5% abv by Itchen Valley Brewery of Alresford, Hampshire this beer shares its name with a Tolpuddle Martyr (3,5)

Phil Brooks

**Send your solution to the editor (address under 'Contacts' on the back page) by 1st July 2001. The first correct entry selected at random after that date wins a £10 Oddbins voucher and a festival t-shirt (state size).**

**Last edition's crossword solution**

**Across:** 1 Man in the Moon. 7 Rare. 8 Border. 10 Durham Light Ale. 12 War. 13 Red. 14 Uley. 16 Crop Circle. 17 Super. 19 Kiwi. 20 SAS. 21 Steeplechase. 25 Conkeror. 28 Merchants Arms. **Down:** 1 Mordue Workie Ticket. 2 Northern Pride. 3 Tye. 4 Moorhouses Black Cat. 5 Old Gavel. 6 Green. 9 Mild. 11 Merlins Ale. 15 Hare. 18 Pale. 22 Crofty. 23 Dark. 24 Duck. 26 Rams. 27 Bat.  
*The winner was **Hugh Betteridge** of Park Row, Bristol who won a case of beer and four pints of real ale from the Cornubia.*

**Michael Blake of the Cornubia in Bristol would like it be known . . . .**

"To clear up any confusion and misinformed rumours, Tisbury Brewery has been sold separately to Tisbury Taverns (who employ me) and both businesses are now run independently of each other. This is excellent news as far as the Cornubia is concerned as we are now free of any tie whatsoever. And I'll drink to that."

Dorothy Inn, Weymouth advert

Batemans  
 Organic Yella Belly  
 @ Horts  
 advert

# Bass Shape and Bristol Fashion



In the second of two articles, Tim Mars offers a personal account of the ups and downs of Bass after the closure of the union room and explores the 'special relationship' Bristol enjoys with Draught Bass

## “Oh to bask unasked in a cask of Bass!”

That was Dylan Thomas's considered view of the matter from his seat in the bar of Brown's Hotel at Laugharne. The poet was imbibing in the early 1950s. In those halcyon days Bass was still fermented in oak barrels in the union room at Burton-on-Trent, swan necks and sparklers were, like the Mekon, the stuff of science fiction, and Bass was the undisputed Rolls-Royce of cask beer.

In 1982 Bass closed their Number 2 brewery at Burton-on-Trent together with its famous union room. Overnight, Bass, the most celebrated child of the union, found itself on the wrong side of the blanket. As brew followed brew that subtle elusive Bass character slowly disappeared leaving behind a bastard brew.

I didn't bother much with Bass after that – it became a beer to avoid rather than to seek out. With typical brewer's irony, once it became scarcely worth drinking, it became even easier to find – a fate which was subsequently to befall (to name just three) Boddingtons, Brains and Wadworth 6X.

Moving to London I consoled myself with the many fine brews pouring out of the dozens of new breweries which had sprung up since CAMRA's foundation, together with the products of long standing family brewers like Fuller's of Chiswick. And there was always that other child of the Burton union, Marston's Pedigree, in those days brewed to perfection and hard to find – but available in Marston's one London tied house, Ye Olde Cheshire Cheese, in an alley off Fleet Street. A unique beer to savour in a unique pub – Dr Johnson's former local, in my time thronged with journalists and printers. More widely available was Ind Coope's Burton Ale – the young pretender, first brewed in 1976 but to an old recipe for Samuel Allsopp's IPA: a powerful, fruity, hoppy, richly-flavoured brew, very palatable if lacking the subtlety of the Bass of old, the now seemingly dead and buried Bass.

Occasionally, revisiting old Bass haunts – the Express Tavern at Brentford, the White Star in Liverpool, the Island Queen in Islington, the Liverpool Arms at Conwy, the Magazine at Wallasey, Ye Old Watling in the shadow of St Paul's – I would still drink a pint of Bass for old time's sake. Then, some years later, to my intense surprise I began to find myself enjoying the actual Bass and not just the memory. It happened often enough for me to conclude that it wasn't just a fluke.

It seemed some semblance of the old union-room character was being reverse-

engineered into the beer. Bass was at least becoming drinkable, perhaps even slowly returning to something approaching form. By 1992 even the Good Beer Guide was able to declare 'when it's good, it's still a classic pint'.

About the same time swan necks and sparklers stormed bars all over the land and, adding insult to injury, even Bass was to be found served through them – foamed, oxygenated and agitated to within an inch of its life. Even venerable Bass houses like the Olde Bull's Head at Beaumaris succumbed to this worthless fad. Before ordering a pint you had to go through the humiliating process of leaning over the bar to determine if the sparkler was in place and ask for it to be removed.

Increasingly I gravitated towards pubs that served beer straight from the cask. I'd always preferred beer this way since being introduced, in the early 1970s, to the delights of Burtonwood Bitter poured directly from wooden casks in the Queen's Head at Ty Croes on Anglesey. I'm not sure Burtonwood was (or is) a particularly interesting beer, but somehow the combination of a wooden cask and gravity transformed it into a beer to savour. Years later in Cardiff I was lucky enough to live in Adamsdown near to the Royal Oak, the only Brains pub to serve SA straight from the cask. Once sampled this way, handpulled SA always seemed second best. In the case of Bass this was even more true. Two of my all-time favourite Bass shrines – the Star at Bath and the Dolphin on Plymouth Barbican – were noted for their commitment both to Bass and to gravity dispense. The old union-room Bass had always tasted that little bit better at these two pubs, but with the slowly-returning-to-form version of the post union-room Bass the improvement was so startling it was a revelation.

The proximity of Bath was not a consideration when I moved to Stroud in 1991, but the chance to re-acquaint myself with Bass at the Star was certainly a bonus. I thought the Star was a one-off, a unique institution – which indeed it is. It is also, however, a satellite shrine of the Bristol Bass cult of which I was then entirely ignorant. I've spent many pleasant hours over the last ten years exploring the mysteries of this cult, discovering its shrines, partaking of the sacrament and puzzling over the question – **why are Bristolians bonkers about Bass?**

**Firstly, why Bass?** Is it because the Bristol-brewed Georges beers never

commanded the sort of loyalty and enthusiasm that Cardiffians used to reserve for Brains and Liverpoolians once had for Higsons? Then why not (say) Wadworth 6X, a beer one might have thought more to local tastes than Bass? It's true that Bass was one of the first genuinely national beers, available throughout the country, and many towns used to have pubs famous as 'Bass houses' – sometimes tied to other brewers but with Bass as a permanent fixture – where people would go for that special session. Cardiff, Liverpool, Hull – all boast such houses but there's nowhere I know that bears comparison to the scale of the Bristol enthusiasm for Bass.

**Secondly, how far back does the Bristol love affair with Bass go?** And is there a historical explanation? Burton-on-Trent is famous for its pale ales and particularly Imperial or India Pale Ale – heavily hopped and alcoholically strong enough (perhaps as high as 10 per cent!) to survive the long sea voyage to India and still be drinkable at the end of it. Bass made its name with such ales – of which Draught Bass is the domesticated version.

Given the proximity of Liverpool to Burton, I had always assumed these ales were shipped out of Liverpool, but did some of this trade pass through Bristol Docks? From there it would be a short step to a dockside tavern's obtaining the odd bootleg barrel (it fell off the back of a dray, honest, guv) and the stevedores, sailors and bargees getting a taste for the stuff. From this a 'legitimate' trade might grow, and the taste spread to other hostelries.

*This is an ingenious and plausible explanation – but is it pure conjecture? Does anyone have a better explanation? Or better still the real one!*

**Thirdly, why 'flat' Bass when almost everywhere else Bass houses pull Bass with a head?** And why flat Bass in pubs that are happy to serve their other real ales with a head? "It just tastes better!" says John Baldwin, manager of the Commercial Rooms and responsible for the gas-powered pump system of dispense installed there and at the Robert Fitzharding. I agree – but might not all the beers offered at Wetherspoons taste better served this way?

Or poured straight from the cask? All over the country there are pubs that traditionally offer a strong winter ale from the cask – in Bristol the Phoenix used to serve Wadworth Old Timer this way – and there

are a few pubs that serve all their beers this way, either from choice or due to the lack of a cellar. What is unusual in Bristol and environs are the number of pubs which are happy to serve their other ales through handpump but take the trouble to serve Bass straight from the cask. Why is it that Bass gets singled out for this treatment? Yes, it does taste better, but there are very few beers, in my view, that don't taste better served as God intended – straight from the cask.

These are the perplexities I mull over as I sup Bass on my pilgrimages to Bass shrines in and around Bristol. And I also try to evaluate what I'm drinking today against the union-room Bass I used to so revere in the White Star in Liverpool twenty years ago.

Today's Bass certainly lacks some of the depth and complexity of old, together with its former enticing floral hoppy aroma, but at its best it is a satisfyingly fruity ale with a dry, bitter, spicy finish. It is assertively different from the national 'blands' of other brewers. It may not be a Rolls-Royce any more but it's certainly not, as the Good Beer Guide suggests, a Ford Fiesta. A Rover 75 perhaps?

And as I sup my Bristol Bass, I plot to restore Bass to its superlative, incomparable, lip-smacking former greatness. It only requires doing two things. The first is relatively easy: **go back to dry-hopping the beer in cask**. This would restore some of the mellowness and depth of the old Bass, and contribute hop aroma.

The second is much more difficult: **resume fermenting Bass in wooden unions**. "Impossible!" I hear you cry. Not impossible, just ... difficult. And in the weird, topsy-turvy world of the big brewers these days, almost *anything* could happen.

I have a cunning plan. For some time now I have been gazing wistfully at the union rooms of Marston's – the only brewer still to ferment beer this way. In the Autumn 2000 edition of Pints West, an article which mentioned a possible take-over of Wolverhampton & Dudley and the future of its breweries said: "Marston's is probably safe due to its unique 'union room' method of fermentation which would make transfer of its flagship brand, Marston's Pedigree, difficult but the brewery is brewing under capacity." (After what happened to Bass and the way brews are casually tossed from brewery to brewery these days, the premise that Marston's brewery is 'safe' because of its union room is itself unsafe.)

If indeed Marston's is brewing under capacity, it would be extremely interesting to trial the Bass yeast on the Marston's unions. It might even turn out (as with Marston's other ales) that you don't need to ferment *all* the Bass in the unions, as long as all the Bass is fermented with yeast propagated *in* the unions.

Either way, if the results were as

spectacular as I am hoping, a special **Connoisseur's Bass** could be produced and test marketed. If this Connoisseur's (or Codger's) Bass proved a success, then perhaps Bass might be persuaded to start building the necessary union room capacity to ferment all Bass this way. (As recently as 1992 Marston's spent a cool one million pounds adding a new union room. If Marston's can afford this sort of money, how much more so Bass.) And if Marston's brewery is put up for sale, then Bass is the obvious buyer.

At any rate, at least now you know how to recognise me. Yes, that's me in the corner, by the window, the bloke with the wild staring eyes, a pint of flat Bass in front of him, constantly turning round to scan the sky with a pair of high-powered binoculars, searching for pigs on the wing.

## THE BEST BASS IN AND AROUND BRISTOL

**This is inevitably a partial and personal list. If any readers have further suggestions, please write to Pints West with them.**

All these pubs serve Bass straight from the cask, but those towards the top of the list are what I would call 'Bass shrines'. To qualify as a shrine, the pub should be particularly renowned for its commitment to Bass. In some cases Bass may be the only ale on offer, in others there may be a number of beers on handpump but Bass is the only one on gravity. That doesn't mean that pubs further down the list necessarily serve an inferior pint, just that they are less obsessional about Bass.

**The Star, The Vineyards (London St), Bath**

Immaculate three-room and corridor town pub where Bass is served from glass jugs. Casks condition in the cellar and are then brought up to the bar by means of a hydraulic lift. (Bass is the only ale on gravity, but the pub is effectively Abbey Ales' brewery tap. A Bass shrine since at least 1975.)

**Phoenix, Wellington Rd, Bristol**

Plain, unpretentious and friendly. (Formerly offered several ales - and not always Bass - on gravity, but today Bass is the only ale on gravity. A Bass shrine since the late 1990s.)

**Myrtle Tree, St Georges Rd, Bristol**

Single carpeted room frequently 'decorated' with empty casks. (Bass is the only ale on gravity. A Bass shrine since at least 1975.)

**Swan Inn, Bath Rd (A431), Swineford**

Unpretentious roadside pub. (Bass is the only ale on gravity.)

**Post Office Tavern, Westbury Hill, Westbury-on-Trym**

Fascinating collection of postal artifacts and noted for its evening pizza menu.

**Blue Flame, West End, Nailsea**

Remote, unpretentious rural pub popular with farm workers. (All ales and cider on

gravity.)

**Tuckers Grave Inn, Faulkland, Somerset**

Three superb rooms and no bar counter. (Bass and Butcombe served from a stillage set in the bay window.)

**Crown Inn, Skinners Lane, Churchill**

I have yet to visit this pub so it is included here on the basis of report and recommendation – it was Bristol & District CAMRA pub of the year 1999. (Numerous ales on gravity. A gravity alehouse since 1975.)

**Old Barn, Bristol Rd, Wraxall**

Homely barn conversion with plenty of sofas and armchairs. (All ales on gravity.)

**Star Inn, Castle Rd, Pucklechurch**

Comfortable suburban pub with an emphasis on real cider. (Bass is the only ale on gravity and is brought from the cellar by jug.)

**Lock Keeper, Keynsham Rd, Keynsham**

Beautifully situated on the Avon just above Keynsham lock. A Smiles house and therefore now in the course of becoming a Young's pub so the future of the gravity Bass may be in doubt. (Bass is the only ale on gravity.)

## FURTHER AFIELD

**Dolphin, Barbican, Plymouth**

Plain dockside tavern, open early for trawlermen and late for Beryl Cook, in many of whose paintings the pub features. (Gravity Bass is the only ale.)

**Prince of Wales, Kenfig, near Porthcawl, Glamorgan**

Friendly, atmospheric pub in the former town hall of the 'lost city' of Kenfig. Bare stone walls, blazing log fire and stove.

## HONOURABLE MENTIONS

These pubs can't or won't go all the way with gravity dispense, but are sufficiently conscientious to avoid battering the Bass by handpump and, in order to achieve the requisite flatness, serve the Bass via gas-powered pump.

**Horts, Broad St, Bristol**

Perhaps better known for its imaginative and ever-changing range of small brewers' ales on handpump.

**Commercial Rooms, Corn St, Bristol**  
Spectacular Wetherspoons conversion of this formerly exclusive Bristol merchants' private club.

**Robert Fitzharding, Cannon St, Bedminster**

Wetherspoon's shop conversion. Pioneered the 99p Bass 'Monday club' promotion.

## MIRROR BOX BASS

Some pubs achieve the required 'flat' nature for their Bass by dispensing it through a "mirror box" rather than a handpump. These should not be mistaken for keg fonts, they dispense genuine real ale. If you don't know what I mean, check out for instance the **Shakespeare** in Prince St, Bristol.

# More beer than football — Further travels with my Guide

THE usual gang of ten, made up of a selection Gas Heads, shoppers and CAMRA members, got together for the now traditional long weekend away, this year using Rover's attractive fixture at romantic Rotherham as the excuse for visiting **CAMRA Good Beer Guide** pubs up t' North.

After studying the Guide we decided to base ourselves in Derby with its twelve GBG listed pubs and a few "try alsos". We set off on Thursday lunch time courtesy of Richard Branson's Virgin groupie deal which meant we only paid £9 each return.

The first item on the agenda was a visit to the **Bass Museum** in Burton on Trent. I would thoroughly recommend this to anyone even vaguely interested in brewing or beer history, especially as showing your CAMRA membership card waives the £4.50 entrance fee. The guided tour is fascinating and ends up in the museum bar where beers brewed at the Museum using traditional recipes from by-gone breweries are available. One of these is **Worthington E** which happened to be the first beer to sell out at this year's Bristol Beer Festival.

We followed this cultural experience with a brief tour of three of the four other GBG pubs in Burton. This brief excursion uncovered thirteen different beers.

On Friday morning we set off to start Andy's ale trail of the GBG Derby pubs; this odyssey was to carry on through Friday and Saturday evenings, and Sunday lunch time. Over this period we found no less than forty-nine different real ales at very competitive prices and in excellent condition.

Saturday meant another rail trip, this time to Rotherham via Sheffield. Lunch time was spent visiting two of Yorkshire's finest pubs including former national pub of the year **The Fat Cat** on Kelham island. In less than two hours Julian ticked another fifteen beers. (It must be said that he had less than a pint of some of them.) Four of the party then headed for the warmth of the shopper's heaven at Meadow Hall while the Gas Heads reluctantly stayed on the train to snowy Rotherham where the picturesque ground is situated in the centre of Europe's largest scrap yard. Unfortunately I can't remember the result but I'm sure Rovers did well enough.

Inclement weather delayed our return to Derby where we spent Saturday evening touring more of Derby's finest hosteries, a task made easier by the large number of cheap taxis (just like Bristol, not).

Overall the weekend was enjoyed by everyone (although Saturday afternoon remains a blank for six of us). A total of seventy-seven different beers were tried as we reaped the benefit of the work done nationally by CAMRA members in producing the annual Good Beer Guide.

Steve O'Shea



Bear Inn, Wiveliscombe  
advert

## Fox Tavern to reopen

THE Fox Tavern – on the corner of Victoria Road (just off the Feeder Road, Temple Meads end) in St Phillips Marsh – has been undergoing extended repairs whilst retaining the original three bars. Delay in reopening was due to structural problems and lack of reliable building labour.

The Fox is owned by Bath based Four County Inns Ltd which buys the freehold of pubs in distress, restores the historical features and replaces keg with cask. When the old chapel and former wartime mortuary are demolished on the other corner – to make room for the new car showrooms – the Fox will be the only original building remaining.

Company Director, Edward Toomer, says that the Fox will be open in May with a colour change! Real ales and cider will be a prominent feature. The Fox serves the industrial estate and it is worthwhile checking its opening hours.

The Fox is not the only project Four County Inns is involved in. Restoration of the **George** in Tewkesbury High Street is almost complete. The George is one of the six oldest licensed premises in Tewkesbury. On offer will be a selection of beers from Gloucestershire breweries and Hereford's Wye Valley.

Since November the company has reopened the **Wood Street Inn**, Taunton, offering ales from Exmoor, Otter and Juwards with Brakspear and Wye Valley lined up. The landlord of the pub is a noted musician. For Four County Inns the Wood Street Inn was rather modern, having been constructed during Taunton's late Victorian development.

Four County Inns also restored the **Griffin Inn** in Frome (built 1590), home of the Milk Street Brewery.

Adnams Brewery advert

# PINTS EAST

Focusing on three pubs on the eastern side of the city

## The Phoenix

SITUATED on Wellington Road, close to the car parks and very handy for Broadmead shops, the Phoenix is a gem of a pub serving excellent beer in the Old Market area which has lost many interesting pubs over the last ten years or so.

Built in 1793 along with the adjacent terrace of housing, it provides character and continuity with the past. However the future of the pub has been in the balance for a number of years. In 1984 the locals, CAMRA and the then licensee Geoff Fowler fought a mighty battle to save the pub from a massive and ill thought out office/shop development. Now of course we have another Broadmead development in the offing, which, according to all the "artist's impressions" show the Phoenix and the houses as an integral part of it, with the car park in front of the pub as a 'New City Park'. But what sort of pub will it be?

At the moment we have a pub serving the local community as well as the offices in the surrounding area such as Tollgate House, with good beer in a happy, lively atmosphere. The pub is open all day serving simple but pleasant snacks. The public bar area is a narrow open-plan layout, with a quieter lounge area down the step at the end of the bar. Taped music is played in the background but it is unobtrusive and conversations can be held without difficulty. The front patio forms a pleasant drinking area in the summer with a wall that shelters it from the winds.

The City Council actually own all the buildings and the lease was taken over by Moles Brewery a few years back. The landlord and landlady, Tim and Sharon Oxenham, serve up three different beers, two on handpump being Moles Molecatcher and Wickwar BOB (Brand Oak Bitter).

In the last issue of Pints West there was an article about Bristol Bass (part two is elsewhere in this issue) in which the author described the Phoenix as a Bass 'shrine'; the third beer the pub sells is indeed Bass, and you can obtain it in tip top condition straight from the barrel – Bristol Fashion.

So if you enjoy a variety of good value beers in a pleasant public bar atmosphere, the Phoenix is the place for you.

Mike Wilson

## The Old Fox

THE Old Fox in Eastville is a pub full of character, specialising in beer and conversation. WG Grace used to drink here. It has two separate drinking areas, both of which are very traditional in appearance. The wood panelled walls are adorned by a display of 40 old photos of the area and its mines.

The building dates back 300 years in parts. It was thoroughly restored in the 1970s, when it was the first pub in the country to be owned by CAMRA Investments, a company set up by CAMRA to promote real ale in "beer deserts" – areas where real ale was hard to find.

Six beers from independent breweries are usually available, including Timothy Taylor's Landlord and a house beer, plus two from RCH and two changing "guest beers" from micro breweries such as Daleside. There is a wide and changing range of independents' bottled beers, many of them available in pint bottles; and a couple of Belgian ones too. Around 20 quality single malt whiskies are also on sale.

The pub has no facilities for dogs or children, and no music; it does not especially set out to attract young people. Games available for customers to play include chess, backgammon, shut the box and Jenga; there is also a variety of magazines to read. Although there is no "no smoking" area, the extraction system is very efficient, and the air is usually pleasant for non-smokers to breathe.

The Old Fox closes for a week between Christmas and New Year, and in August for holidays. Located on what is now a back street overlooking the M32, it is easy to find from A432 Stapleton Road (close to Stapleton Road railway station) via Warwick Avenue.

Norman Spalding

## The Sugar Loaf

THE Sugar Loaf in St Mark's Road, Easton, with the beautifully renovated St. Mark's Church directly opposite, occupies a site with almost a rural village feel to it. Yet once you walk through its doors it is an unmistakably inner city pub full of good beer, food and company.

There are many stories surrounding the name of the pub but the McCracken family who have owned the Sugar Loaf for centuries (well a few years anyway) favour the tale of slaves hiding sugar under their hats for consumption later which then formed itself into a loaf shape.

The pub is split into three areas and features a lounge resplendent with two comfy armchairs, a larger bar area and a well equipped games room with three pool tables and two pinball machines that Duncan McCracken is justly proud of. Duncan and Sandy have recently introduced Marston's Pedigree (one of my very favourite tipples) and there is Abbott Ale, Tetley and Easton Ale, a special for the Sugar loaf brewed by Moles. The Sugar Loaf also caters for those whose preferred tipple is cider.

The food served at the pub is first rate fayre and is served from noon to 2:30pm, and 5pm to 7:30pm Monday to Saturday, and excellent value Sunday lunches from 12:30 to 2:30pm – in my humble opinion the best pub food in North East Bristol.

There is also plenty of music supplied by juke box to satisfy all tastes from new age to old age hippies and there is also live music on Thursday evenings.

The Sugar Loaf is an extremely popular and busy pub. It also has plenty of local characters (both sides of the bar!). So come on down (with or without hat) for a warm Easton welcome.

John Kiely

## Fast Music And Drinking

REAL ALE oriented rock band **Blackfire** have just released a new album with the slightly dubious title of "Fast Music And Drinking". The album contains thirteen original songs and there is a rumour that everyone's favourite campaigning song from yesteryear "**Save The Bristol Brewery**" lurks on the end as a hidden track. The album is available from most Bristol record shops, at Blackfire gigs and on-line from the web site [www.blackfire.demon.co.uk](http://www.blackfire.demon.co.uk).

Curiously, Blackfire's guitarist bears a striking resemblance to a certain local CAMRA branch chairman...

## READERS' LETTERS

## FROTH OFF!



Your chance to let off steam.

Readers are welcome to send letters to Pints West Editor, Steve Plumridge, Garden Flat, 6 Royal York Villas, Clifton, Bristol BS8 4JR ([steve.plumridge@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:steve.plumridge@bristol.ac.uk))

### Troublesome Pubcos

Dear Sir,

This letter is by way of expressing my thanks for the many calls of support I have received from tenants across the industry in response to my recent 'problems' with InnSpired. I realise that far from being a minority, we are the tip of a rather large iceberg. The whole of the 'tied' estate is suffering as a result of the senseless greed of the larger Pubco bosses across the country. For my own part, I fail to see the need for a telesales department within a pub company that has no brewery! Why can I not, at least, deal with my nominated supplier directly? After all, they have a national distribution organisation with a cheaper rate of telephone contact than I have with our own telesales department! As a basis for change I feel the burden of such a bureaucratic dinosaur is inexcusable, the shedding of which has to be a fundamental step in securing the survival of small, traditional local pubs such as mine.

Further on, the whole question of the 'tie' must be addressed. (By 'tie' I mean that between pubs and Pubcos - I have no problem with ties between pubs and micro-breweries.) Many Pubcos survive without it, acting as a property manager, leaving the actual running of the pub to the tenant. If I were allowed to 'shop around' for the best deal, I would save on average 30% from the price InnSpired currently charge me; a saving that I could pass on to my customers. Surely this approach would benefit both the company and myself. I would no longer struggle to meet rent deadlines. The increased revenue would allow improvements within

the pub and rent reviews based on 'A FAIR, MAINTAINABLE TRADE' would be far more palatable.

I now see the futility of fighting a Pubco, especially when the only answer you get from senior executives is that while the law says they can impose these feudal conditions, they feel not one twinge of conscience. If we, as landlords, are to change the system it must be done at Government level, via constant, mass lobbying of our individual Members of Parliament. Only then will we benefit from truly running our own businesses, free from the inherent greed of executives that are no longer in touch with the 'coal face' of running a traditional, local pub.

This type of action will of course require organisation and planning on a national scale. To that end my hat is still very much in the ring. If anyone reading this were in any way sympathetic to the cause, I would be happy to discuss a plan to co-ordinate our efforts. I learnt that we cannot stand alone. Pubcos are growing at an alarming rate and the tenant is becoming a pawn in the big game of profit at any cost. (Quite often the tenant's cost.) Senior executives are happy to pick us off one by one, but from my own experience they hate confrontation. 'Any publicity is good publicity' they say. Let us as licensed tenants change that smug statement. Let us as licensed tenants ensure they no longer hide behind agreements that are fundamentally feudal by nature. A local pub must serve the community, not some faceless, profit-watching suit in an office miles from reality.

If any of this strikes a chord with any of you, I can be contacted on (0117) 9264964.

Yours sincerely,  
Ray Barnes  
Eldon House  
6 Lower Clifton Hill  
Bristol BS8 1BT



### A new society for pub history enthusiasts

Dear Sir,

Over the last couple of months, myself and a fellow CAMRA member have been busy forming a new society for pub history enthusiasts. Called the Pub History Society, it will hopefully bring together like minded individuals who have an interest in the history of the pub.

As there are already societies to cater for those with an interest in brewery history, inn signs, bottles, labels and beer mats there appears to be no such body to bring together pub historians. We think that this should change.

At present we are seeking to spread

the word about ourselves and thought the most obvious avenues would be to contact the various CAMRA branches listed in What's Brewing. We have contacted CAMRA HQ with our details and I'm sure we will gain some publicity in the coming months, in the meantime I would like to ask if you might be able to include our particulars in your local branch newsletter. Please feel free to pass this email onto anyone you think might be interested - such as local history societies, museums, pub groups, breweries, etc.

We have published a webpage where you can read more about us:

[www.uk-history.co.uk/phs.htm](http://www.uk-history.co.uk/phs.htm)

Best wishes,  
Steve Williams  
Pub History Society  
13 Grovewood, Sandycombe Rd,  
Kew, Richmond, Surrey TW9 3NF.  
[steve@pubhistory.freeserve.co.uk](mailto:steve@pubhistory.freeserve.co.uk)

### Living Easton

Dear Sir,

I recently picked up a copy of the winter edition of your magazine at my local, the Ring O'Bells at Compton Martin, and was surprised to see the letter from Jim McNeill regarding the Old Fox, in which he, as chair of 'Living Easton', was appealing for information.

Maureen and Harry Campbell were my parents, my father died in February 1975, my mother is still alive and well.

As you look at the pub with your back to the M32 the left hand corner of the building is built in red brick, this part of the building is obviously an addition to the original, the first floor of this 'extension' was used as the family living room. When we removed the wallpaper from what would have been the outside of the wall of the original building it revealed an advertisement painted on the surface for the hire of rowing boats for use on the adjacent river Frome now covered by the motorway.

My father was always proud of the fact that the cellar always remained within the optimum temperature range for good beer keeping winter or summer. This was confirmed to me when I returned to the pub, for only the second time since leaving about three years ago and the existing landlord took me into the cellar after I introduced myself.

I remember the article in the Bristol Illustrated News, which I believe was accompanied by a photograph of customers in the lounge bar enjoying their meal. One of the customers was sporting a large handlebar moustache and is named Ralph Sidney. Ralph had a peculiar habit of calling every woman he met 'June' and

every man 'Louie' no matter how long he had known them and their correct names.

The original cellar delivery entrance was situated in the public bar which involved rolling the barrels into the bar before lowering them into the cellar, quite a task at Christmas when Courage Bitter was delivered in Hogsheads (54 gallons).

I have some photographs somewhere but these only show my parents, etc., and the interior of the pub. If these would be of any use to Mr. McNeill please get him to contact me or if I can be of help in any other way. Please forward this letter to the writer. (*Duly done - Ed.*)

Yours sincerely,  
Noel Campbell  
Ubley, Bristol.

### Smiles Beer Boxes

Dear Steve,

Though I live in Derbyshire, I have spent a lot of time in Bristol over the last few months through work commitments.

As a CAMRA member, I have done my turn at drinking about Bristol and in my travels I have enjoyed reading Pints West.

I was interested in the exchange of correspondence concerning the Smiles' Beer Boxes. Suffice it to say that both a friend of mine from our village and myself had 36-pint boxes and a friend from another village close at hand had an 18-pint box of Smiles Best for Christmas.

The 36-pint boxes lasted about three to four weeks and the 18-pint two. We agreed that the beer was very good until the last pint.

We shall be looking to have beer boxes again for next Christmas!

Cheers,  
Paul Hathaway  
Cowdale, Nr Buxton  
Derbyshire

### A Devil of a Pub

Dear Sir,

Old Market has always been a bastion for cider houses.

Parked conveniently on the outskirts of this colourful and infamous part of town is the 'Printers Devil'. The licensees of this pub have always had a problem in isolating and defining its character.

The current management have opted for a direction very 'close to our hearts', real ale.

A fine pint of Bass can be had, but in order to deliver guest ales that suit the tastes of Bristol's drinkers, a visit to the pub and a word in the right ear is recommended.

Yours,  
Richard Lobb.

### Great Bristol Beer Festival

Steve,

Another great occasion! We went to the Saturday lunchtime session which was most enjoyable. Superb beers, a wonderful location (although I did notice that the Council have hidden the picture of Brunel) and good company. What more could you ask? A big thank you for all the hard work and dedication that went into it. Roll on 2002.

Cheers, Neal Gordon (by email)

### The only swamp to be in!

My intake of alcohol back on New Year's eve began at about 6 o'clock when I started drinking a 3-litre bottle of Thatchers Millfield bought at my local off-licence, Humpers on Soundwell Road. (I had to give her a mention as she told me off for not doing so last time you published a letter of mine.)

At about 8:15 after drinking about half of my bottle, it wasn't hard for me to decide that I would start as I meant to go on. I braved the rather severe elements and walked from my house near Humpers in to Kingswood and, as I had on so many previous occasions, I took the plunge and went into the "Swamp" (the Kings Head cider house).

Now I know people for different reasons have praised it up before and I will again as quite simply I feel more credit is required where it is due.

After drinking the bottled variety for a fair portion of my evening it was refreshing to have what is always a limitless supply of the draught variety. Amusingly sometimes referred to as "pondwater" I assume because there is so much of it in the "Swamp", I can assure the people at Thatchers that Sarah at the Kings Head does you proud. The taste and temperature of your cider is constant. The array of comical characters that regularly drink there amuse me and I've become familiar with many of them in the few years I've used it.

My opinion of course may be biased somewhat as I am a self-confessed cider monster. Good old Sarah had an extension till 2 a.m. but I had had my fill by 1 a.m.

If you've already tried the draught Thatchers at the "Swamp" then I'm sure the chances are you still drink it. Needless to say, I had a great night on New Year's eve. If you haven't tried the "pondwater" yet, go on, take the plunge! You won't regret it!

(Dedicated and in remembrance of our friend Tyke, a Thatchers connoisseur who's sadly missed.)

Craig Weaden,  
Staple Hill.

### Where's my Pints West?

Dear Steve,

I wrote to you on 20th November last year asking to be put on the mailing list for *Pints West*, starting with issue 49, and enclosing a cheque for £3 to cover six consecutive issues. But, guess what? Yep, I'm still waiting...

Don't tell me you're waiting for the cheque to settle or there's an air bubble in the pipe or you're just putting on a new barrel or whatever - 'cos, as it happens, I picked up a copy of *PW*, in perfect condition, from the Queen's Arms at Bleadon last Monday.

However, in checking my recent bank statements, I've found that my £3 cheque does *not* appear among the entries - so one possible explanation just might be that it was lost in the post. If this is the case, perhaps you would let me know (and I promise to re-imburse you with a stamp!) so that I can send you a replacement cheque. Of course, an alternative explanation could be that you put my letter, with its accompanying cheque, aside to be dealt with at the appropriate time, then went out to sample a few pints and happily cast aside all thought of the reading requirements of decrepit old pensioners languishing in Weston-super-Mare.

You might well be thinking: "If he's capable of finding his way to the Queen's at Bleadon, why does the lazy old sod have to sit back and expect our newsletter to be delivered to his door anyway?" Well, yes, with all due modesty, I have to say that innate laziness is indeed one of my most easily identifiable virtues - but it is aided and abetted by a back/leg condition which can on occasion result in semi-immobility lasting for several weeks, or even months, at a time. And as for the *pain*.... (If you're not feeling really bad about yourself by now, I give up.)

One final request (in case I pop my clogs before you get round to finding my cheque under a stack of empties) - in view of the fact that I have shown commendable initiative in obtaining my own copy of *PW* number 49, would you please note that I would like my subscription to start with issue 50 to be published on 22 March 2001 (probably).

Yours respectfully - and cheers,

*hauze*

Maurice Tasnier

Weston-super-Mare.

P.S. sorry my signature went a bit awry - it's me back .....

★STAR LETTER

*You win a £3 subscription to Pints West! (Starting with PW number 50, published a month later than originally planned.)*

★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★

# Pints West hits half century

This issue of Pints West, the free newsletter of the Bristol and District branch of CAMRA, is numbered "50". Currently 6,000 copies of each of the four issues per year are circulated to pubs: each issue regularly has 16 to 20 pages (and sometimes more, as with this issue). But what did earlier editions look like?

**Lesly Huxley** takes a stroll down memory lane to issue 1 (a four-page publication from May/June 1989 then called Avon Drinker) and selects front page headlines and other news up to issue 49. How many of these stories do you remember? How much has the price of your pint changed over the years? How many of the pubs and breweries mentioned are still around? And how many issues of the newsletter have there really been?!

## Issues 1-4: May-December 1989

In its early days, Avon Drinker was issued every two months, and comprised just four pages. **Top stories** focused on legislation - later known as 'The Beer Orders' - that would allow a guest beer in pubs owned by brewers with more than 2,000 in their estate. The first Avon Drinker wondered whether this would lead to "**22,000 pubs for sale**" and quoted Mr Elliot of Elders IXL (then owners of Courage Brewery) who vowed to "dismantle the Bristol Brewery and take it to the Continent" if the proposed law went ahead. Sad that 11 years later Courage did the dismantling themselves. The first CAMRA prices survey to be reported by the Avon Drinker showed Courage Best on sale in Bristol at 92p per pint, but only 82p in Solihull. By issue 3, "**MMC - the Damp Squib?**" offered the gloomy prediction of a £1.20 premium bitter pint by Christmas. The fate of independent breweries was also a cause for concern. Issue 2 urged readers to "**Support your local independent brewery (if you can find one)**" and offered hints on finding beers by the two local independents Smiles and Butcombe, whilst issue 4 carolled "**Merry Firkin Xmas from Allied**", lamenting the closure of the Fleece & Firkin brewpub with the loss of four beers. In the same issue, a report of the takeover by "the piranha of the brewing industry" - Whitbread - of the independent Boddingtons and the more cheerful news that Ross Breweries were opening their first premises in Hartcliffe.

**Other news:** A profile of the completely refurbished Bridge Inn in Passage Street - still a real ale gem - run by Michael and Lyn Bullock, appeared in issue 1. Issue 2 saw the announcement of the opening of Wolverhampton & Dudley's Bailey's Court Inn, the first pub to serve the new Bradley Stoke estate. A "fine conversion" of a 19th century farmhouse, the pub was selling Banks Bitter at 91p in the lounge and 86p in the public! Autumn's issue 3 heralded the imminent opening of Smiles Brewery Tap in Colston Street and featured a profile of the Old Castle Green in Old Market, one of only two Bristol pubs listed in the 1989 Good Beer Guide. Issue 4 featured the Prince of Wales, Westbury-on-Trym, then serving Courage ales. In 1989 you could also join CAMRA for only £9 per annum. It's not even double that in 2001 (unlike the price of beer): what good value!

## Issues 5-10: January - December 1990

With issue 8, Avon Drinker expanded briefly to six pages, whilst circulation increased to 2,500 with issue 9. Psychedelic colours

crept in, with acid green, violent purple and a livid red-orange! An eclectic mix of **top stories**, ranging from "**Smiles Brewery Tap: March Opening**" in issue 5 (complete with artist's impression of the proposed new pub on Colston Street), to issue 6's concerns at a possible threat to Ushers, being sold off by owners Fosters in "**Grand Met Swap: Fosters abandon Ushers**" and issue 7's announcement of "**A New Brewery for Avon**" reporting the opening of Wickwar Brewery and its two beers, BOB and Olde Merryford Ale.

There is a return to the effects of the Beer Orders, effective from 1st May, in issue 8, with "**Guest Beers in Avon Pubs**", a list of locals stocking 'interesting' guest beers, and a summary of brewers' responses to the Guest Beer legislation in the local area were followed in issue 9 with reports of increased sales for local independents. The price of a pint is also still of concern: "**Price Rise Outrage**": Courage Best at £1.18 per pint in local pubs (but Banks Bitter still £1)! The last issue of 1990 ended on a low note with "**Miners Light Fades Out**". The Miners Arms Brewery (Westbury-sub-Mendip) ceased production, although pub business continued.

**Other news:** Campaigning issues featured inside as well as on the front pages: issue 5 reports brewers' deceit with 'fake hand-pumps', issue 6, an article on how the poll tax, business rates and the budget will affect beer prices: 2p for the poll tax, 4p for the brewery and 4p for the Government - 10p on your pint! Depressing reports of many more brewery closures, including Higson's, Greenall Whitley (Whitbread) and the Wilderspool Brewery (Greenalls) crept in during the later issues of 1990.

More local concerns were expressed over the Llandoger Trow, dating back to 1664, falling into disrepair under landlords Grand Met. Since refurbished, but now to be annexed as the dining room of a new hotel complex according to recent Bristol Evening Post reports (March 2001). Issue 6 noted Smiles Brewery Tap opening delayed until May by roof repairs and bad weather, whilst issue 8 carried a campaign to save the Nova Scotia on Cumberland Basin from a planned unsympathetic refurbishment.

There was plenty of good news too: 5-year celebrations at Uley Brewery in Gloucestershire and a new real cider being made at Long Ashton Research Station - 'Secret Orchard' comes from several 'exotic apples' from the University's orchard at Compton Greenfield. The local pub was also going strong, evidenced in an interesting tour of the 19 pubs in the Old Market area (together selling 20 different beers from 11 breweries), and pub profiles of the (still excellent) Anchor in Oldbury on Severn: "a beautiful pub in a lovely setting" and six real ales; the Colston Arms on St Michael's Hill (now Micawber's); the Phoenix in Broadweir (currently under threat from the proposed development of Broadmead). And Avon CAMRA announces its first pub of the year - the White Hart at Littleton on Severn.

## Issues 11-14: Feb-Winter 1991

Avon Drinker moves to a quarterly publication and more sober colours! **Top stories** had a local focus in 1991: "**Your Local under Threat!**" potential losses as Courage and Grant Met plan to reduce combined pub concentration in Bristol to below 25%, echoed in the final issue of 1991 which urged "**Save your Pub! Save your Pub!**" following the shocking news that major



brewers have given tenants notice to quit in July 1992, ostensibly to comply with new legislation. New tenancy agreements are unlikely to be too favourable to the tenants. Good news in issue 12: **“New Brewery for Bristol”** announced the opening of Hardington Brewery in Bedminster, brewing Hardington Best Bitter and Jubilee - the first Bedminster brewery for 60 years, and better news in issue 13 of a possible management buyout to save Ushers Brewery: sadly the brewery had less than 10 years to operate before closure in 2000. **“First the Bad News...”**: not Alan Morgan, but news in issue 13 that Devenish Brewery in Redruth is to close, ending nearly 250 years of brewing.

**Other news:** issue 11 sees Smiles Brewery Tap open at last “with a flavour of beautiful timber and tiles ... excellent ales and good value food” - a description which still stands today. Wickwar brews ‘Victory Ale’ to celebrate end of the Gulf War, and takes over tenancy of The Bell in Hillgrove Street. Issue 12 notes that Bath’s famous ‘Star’ pub in the Vineyards is threatened by office development, a refurbishment award goes to the White Hart at Littleton on Severn and last month’s budget raises the price of an average pint - by 2p in duty plus 2-3p in VAT - to £1.19. Issue 13 carries a pub profile of the Queen’s Head at Willsbridge with its “rare choice of three rooms ... delightfully original and unspoilt”, and an announcement that Stout is being brewed in Somerset after 200 years’ absence, with Oakhill’s Black Magic: “seek it out and see if it gets you under its spell” - mmmmmm!

There was also a special issue in July 1991, with a return to the six-page format and a brief flirtation with a new name, the **South-West Drinker**. “Support your Independent Breweries!” heralds a joint local branches’ five-day tour of 28 independent breweries in the South West (amazingly some people can still recall this trip in fine detail!) in support of CLIC.

## Issues 15-17: Spring-Winter 1992

There were four issues this year, but two of them were numbered 17! **Top stories** veered between news of breweries and the campaign for a full pint. **“Ushers In - Guests Out!”** in issue 15 brings news of improved flavour and quality control for Ushers beers, some new or resurrected brews and commitment to the traditional pub, but a policy of no guest beers in any Ushers houses. **“Does Your Pint Measure Up?”** in issue 16 points to resistant cries from brewers at possible new legislation. Drinkers nationally are being short served by 5%, but brewers claim that oversized glasses and new dispense methods will be needed to provide a full pint. The first issue 17 crows over **“Greene King Loses his Crown”** in failed Morland bid, as CAMRA supports the successful campaign to save the brewery from a hostile takeover. The second issue 17 returns to local issues with **“Hardington and Ross Breweries Open Their First Pubs”**. Hardington reopens The Swan With Two Necks in St Jude’s (sadly closed in 2000), and Ross opens the Bristol Brew House (formerly Mozarts) on Stokes Croft (now the site of the Bristol Comedy Pub).

**Other news:** CAMRA nationally celebrates 21 years of campaigning. An EC attempt to raise tax on cider and perry to the level of wine fails. In issue 17 (2) CAMRA launches a new manifesto for the preservation of pubs and traditional pub interiors. Smiles Brewery Tap wins best new pub award and shortly afterwards Smiles’ founder John Payne sells the brewery to Ian Williams, who immediately announces expansion plans. Avon Drinker takes a dip into the archives to investigate Ashton Gate Brewery. More up to date, there is a pub profile of The Lion at Cliftonwood (under new

management since the end of 2000, and apparently flourishing again) and reports of a victory in the campaign to preserve the Nova Scotia’s traditional interior.

## Issues 18-20: Spring-Winter 1993

Circulation increases to 3,000 and the final issue of 1993, in British Racing Green, goes to six pages. **Top stories** support campaigning issues with **“Freeze Beer Duty Now”** (issue 18) - calls to the Chancellor to cut duty: an average of 44p in tax is included in the price of a pint; **“CAMRA Welcomes Pub Reforms”** (issue 19) and **“Painful Price of a Pint”** (issue 20) - brewers add insult to Norman Lamont’s budget injury by increasing beer prices even further. The average price of a pint in the South West is £1.44, but beer in independent brewers’ pubs is well below (Hardington Traditional Bitter at 97p was one of the ten cheapest pints in the national CAMRA prices survey). The final issue of 1993 goes local with **“Second Brew Pub for Bristol”**: the Hope and Anchor, due to open on Jacob’s Wells Road in December 1993, announces brewing plans.

**Other news:** Pub Vandalism award announced: readers are invited in issue 18 to nominate the worst pub ‘refurbishment’. Reports of high rents in issue 19 with Innpreneur pub company houses and an increase in beer duty in the March budget by more than the rate of inflation. Local pubs and breweries past and present are also in the news: the new guide to Avon’s pubs, “Avon Ale”, is launched; a second helping of pub and brewery history appears with an article on Bristol United Breweries and there is a profile of Courage Bitter Ale, a beer then under threat and now gone. The Bristol Brew House celebrates its anniversary under management of Ross Brewery by selling 70 different real ales over a four day period in November, whilst the local branch appeals for venues for their own Beer Festival (did it really take us another five years to find one?!). The Anchor Inn at Oldbury on Severn is the Avon branch’s pub of the year 1993.

## Issues 22-25: Spring-Winter 1994

The current editor takes over at the beginning of 1994: Avon Drinker increases in size to ten pages by the end of the year and circulation increases to 4,000. National campaigning themes are high on the agenda in the **top stories** this year. **“Mine’s a Pint! – Or is it?”** in issue 22 saw CAMRA renew calls for a full pint after a recent government u-turn permitting landlords to stick to guidelines that say that 19 fluid ounces (not 20) is close enough to a pint. **“Keep Your Pub Alive”** in issue 23 suggests your local is under threat: use it, lobby MPs to reduce duty on beer, fight unsympathetic refurbishments - and join CAMRA! - all still valid today. Issue 24 pleads for the option of all-day **“Sunday Opening”** whilst the Christmas issue looks at the local impact of national brewery moves, lamenting the demise of three city pubs and the increasing battle between the chains in Corn Street with **“New Pubs for Old”**.

**Other news:** Concerns over the amount of beer being brought into the country from France and the potential threat to pubs and real ale (no change there then) and a back page lament in issue 23 over the use of the swan neck and sparkler. In the summer, the Great British Beer Festival breaks attendance records with 45,000 visitors and the prices survey shows the average price of a pint in the UK is £1.47: one of the cheapest pints is Wickwar Coopers

WPA (88p). The Christmas issue campaigns for more disabled access, and for the removal of fake handpumps in pubs. On pubs and breweries, Wickwar Brewery is profiled, home of BOB, Olde Merryford Ale, Cooper's WPA and the more recent addition - Station Porter, now a firm winter favourite, and JD Wetherspoon announce plans to open their first pub in the city with a refurbishment of the Georgian Commercial Rooms gentlemen's club. And finally, a light-hearted back-page prediction that in 10 years' time (2004) CAMRA will be extinct, its job done, real ale firmly in the market.

## Issues 26-29: Spring-Winter 1995

Avon Drinker becomes available - experimentally - in Braille, circulation rises to 5,000 by the end of the year, and page numbers increase through 12 to 16. **Top stories** in issues 26 and 28 reprise the campaign for the option of Sunday afternoon opening with **"Sunday Afternoon Opening: it's up to you"** and the jubilant **"Sunday Afternoon Opening at Last"**. Stop press in issue 27 announces that S&N's £553m bid for Courage was successful, giving them approximately 33% of the UK beer market with **"The Two Faces of Scottish & Newcastle"**. The last issue of 1995 announces publication of the **"Last Guide to Avon's Ale"** local pub guide just as Avon the county ceases to be.

**Other news:** the campaign for a full pint starts the year, which ends with a campaign to save the tie (no, not gentlemen's sartorial accoutrements, but the tie between brewers and their pubs). In between, there are reminiscences as CAMRA Avon branch (formerly Bristol branch, now Bristol and District) celebrates 21 years in operation. Ross Brewery is profiled, featuring Uncle Igor's Falling Over Water at 21% ABV, the world's strongest beer and the 2nd Bristol Wetherspoon's, The Berkeley, opens in the summer.

Issue 28 features a profile of Courage Brewery, featuring photos of the high-tech equipment and a George's family tree, and issue 29 sees my first contribution to the newsletter with a report on the 'birth' of Bath Ales and its two beers, Gem and Barnstormer. There are profiles of Tisbury and Hall & Woodhouse breweries, and Butcombe's acquisition of The Bell in Hillgrove Street. The Rising Sun at Frampton Cottrell is local pub of the year.

## Issues 30-33: Spring-Winter 1996

Avon Drinker settles at 16 pages for 1996, Avon CAMRA announces name change to "Bristol and District" - but Avon Drinker stays the same for now. **Top stories** range far and wide. Issue 30 reports that the Courage Bristol Brewery is reprieved after S&N's business review and announces a series of limited edition cask ales, featured in ads throughout the year (Old Chopper, Navigator, etc).

The summer edition focuses on **"Beer, More Beer and Skittles"** with advance notice of the Great British Beer Festival at Olympia. Issue 32 carries reactions to the proposed EC widening of the guest beer law - **"Brussels Threatens Real Ale Choice"** - to include any draught beer (i.e. not just real ales). The Christmas edition features **"CAMRA's National Inventory"**: a review of local pubs in CAMRA's National Inventory of pubs with historic interiors, including the Old Green Tree and the Star Inn in Bath (both still well worth a visit for well-kept beers and atmosphere). The King's Head in Bristol is also still the "gem" originally

described, whilst the Richmond Spring's refurbishment, though using salvaged materials, has destroyed some of the original floorplan.

**Other news:** Against a backdrop of CAMRA's 25th birthday, real ale prices keep pace with inflation for the first time since surveying began! Real ale in the West country is still slightly higher than the national average at £1.64 per pint. Locally Butcombe launches its second beer, Wilmot's Premium, and the Seahorse (now incorporated into the new Children's Hospital) is awarded best pub refurbishment award. Issue 31 reports the startup of new local brewery, Moor, in Ashcott, Somerset. The local pub of the year is the Old Lock and Weir at Hanham and other pubs profiled this year include the Beaufort Arms at Hawkesbury Upton: "a little gem of a pub". Avon Drinker joins a campaign to retain the name of the Blue Bowl at Hanham.

This year also sees a **"Special Student Edition"**, bringing together stories from the last year's newsletters, adding competitions and special articles, prepared for circulation to new students during freshers' weeks at the University of Bristol and University of the West of England.

## Issues 34-37: Spring-Winter 1997

New year, new name: **Pints West is born** and the current circulation figure of 6,000 is reached by the end of this year. **Top stories** campaign and inform: **"Pub Chains now own a third of pubs!"**: issue 34 notes that 200 pub-owning companies have set up since 1989 and now own 19,000 pubs, with pub chains now accounting for more than one pint in five of all beer sold in bars. Victory against the EC's proposal to extend the Guest Beer law is applauded in issue 35 with **"Guest Beers - our Triumph!"**: Issue 36 congratulates **"Champion Beer of Britain"**, Hop Back Summer Lightning wins first prize in the Bottle Conditioned Beer category, whilst Mordue Workie Ticket takes Gold in the overall champion competition. And finally, **"Beer Festival for Bristol"**: we finally find a venue - the Council House on College Green - and announce our first Beer Festival for February 1998.

**Other news:** A sad year, with the obituaries of Jim Murray, late of Humber's Off Licence and Stephen Simpson-Wells of the Hope and Anchor. National campaigns concentrate on extended pub hours. CAMRA nationally hits the 50,000 membership mark, whilst Bristol & District boasts 650 members (now 60,000 and 900+ respectively). Real ale prices keep pace with inflation for the second year running. 42,000 visitors sample over 500 different beers at the Great British Beer Festival at Olympia, whilst I recall the agony and the ecstasy (well, largely agony) of being a Trainee Bar Manager at the Festival.

On the pubs and breweries front, the Landlord of the Beaufort Arms, Hawkesbury Upton, provides a potted history of the pub and its brewery-owning antecedents; a special refurbishment award for The Commercial Rooms and JD Wetherspoon introduce the (short-lived) use of oversized, lined glasses; a review of pubs in the Hotwells area, including the newly-opened Bag O'Nails (formerly the American Eagle) and a pub profile of the Hare on the Hill, Bath Ales' first pub. Fuller's first pub outside London, the Old Fish Market, opens. The Ring O'Bells, Compton Martin is pub of the year and Alan 'Bad News' Morgan opens Bath's first brewery for nearly forty years - Abbey Ales - brewing Bellringer. Real bad news comes in the form of influx of Australian theme bars, high prices in city centre superpubs and more brewery closures announced by Carlsberg-Tetley, Brains and Bass.

## Issues 38-41: New Year-Christmas 1998

**Top stories:** “**Roll up, Roll up**”: to the first Bristol Beer Festival, Council House, College Green, featured in issue 38 is followed depressingly by “**Another Tour of Destruction?**”: yet more brewery closure announcements from Whitbread, this time of Flowers in Cheltenham and Castle Eden Brewery in Sedgfield. Beer of the Festival (Deuchar’s IPA) is announced in issue 39, whilst issue 41 trails the 2nd Festival in February 1999. Success for RCH when “**Local Brewery Wins Gold**”: RCH wins the gold award in the Best Bitter Category with Pitchfork, in the Champion Beer of Britain competition.

**Other news:** Wickwar wins an award for Station Porter for the second year running. Smiles announce 12 seasonal beers. Castle Eden brewery is saved, whilst another new brewery opens in the area: Home County in Wickwar, S.Glos. There are profiles of Cotleigh and Exmoor Breweries and an announcement of closer links between the branch and RCH Brewery. The Hare on the Hill is named local pub of the year, and pub profiles include the Kellaway Arms: “the welcoming atmosphere of a well-run pub serving top quality real ales” (and it has a garden too!) and the Rose and Crown at Iron Acton: “a splendid and increasingly rare example of a traditional pub at the heart of a local community”. Gordon Beresford of the Bag O’Nails in Hotwells provides a ‘day in the life’ of a publican. In the final issue of 1998, CAMRA’s week of action goes back to basics to promote real ale, whilst Morrells of Oxford announce closure.

## Issues 42-45: Feb-Christmas 1999

Bumper issues this year, reaching 20, then 24 pages. **Top stories** concentrate on breweries: after Wolverhampton & Dudley’s hostile bid for Marston’s, Marston’s join the throng and make a counter-bid for Wolves. Closer to home “**Courage Scotched!**” features in a suitably black-rimmed Pints West issue 43 announcing the closure of Courage Bristol Brewery after almost 300 years of brewing, and the start of our (ultimately unsuccessful) campaign to save it.

Another special edition is published, the “**Courage Supplement**”: produced to support our campaign to save the Bristol Courage Brewery, featuring a history of the brewery, photos of campaigners, a petition form (ultimately 8,000 signatures were obtained) and our own campaign CD ‘Save the Bristol Brewery’ by local band Blackfire. In response to the closure of Courage, “**Real Ale Sales in Decline / Real Ales are Booming**” decries the big brewers’ lack of promotion and support for real ales, and lauding the efforts of local independent brewers and publicans. Issue 45 reports “**Courage RIP ... what now?**” - despite a high profile local campaign, the Bristol Brewery closed.

**Other news:** Abbey Ales stops brewing Cardinal Sin because of a dispute over the name. Cask Marque is launched to assure beer quality. Bristol and District branch’s 25th birthday - and still campaigning. CAMRA’s traditional Mild Month of May is celebrated. The Crown Inn at Churchill is named local pub of the year, with The Cornubia as runner-up. Beer of the Festival at our second event in February is named as Sarah Hughes Dark Ruby Mild. Profiles of RCH Brewery, brewers of the Champion Best Bitter of Britain (Pitchfork), Moor Brewery, The Crown Inn, Churchill: “timeless rustic charm” with a reputation as a real ale mecca and The Bell, Kingsdown: candle light and good beer in this small but perfectly formed pub.

Pints West looks beyond the local area at beer in the Czech Republic and Amsterdam. The year ends on an up-beat note with a report on the Real Ale Showcase, an event to promote local independent brewers including Butcombe, Wickwar, Abbey Ales, Oakhill, Bath Ales, RCH, Smiles and Home County. Smiles Brewery starts brewing George’s BA, whilst Butcombe celebrates 21 years in business.

## Issues 46-49: Spring-Winter 2000

Last year, so you should remember the **top stories:** “**I am 15: I am 10**”: birthday celebrations for Uley and Wickwar breweries; “**Saving the British Pub - it needs your support**”: launching CAMRA’s ‘save the British pub’ initiative; “**Georges Bitter Ale**”: production finally ceases despite Smiles efforts to keep the brand alive and “**Pubcos - who needs them?**”: fallout from the Ushers closure and tenancy agreements with new pub owners Innspired at the Portcullis and Eldon House.

**Other news:** another loss: issue 47 includes an obituary and tribute for Dave McCredie of Berkeley Brewery. The new Weston-super-Mare sub-branch gets its own centre page spread of news and views from the area, and outline why the town is no longer a real ale desert. The pub profile of “Off the Rails” at WSM railway station: “a good, no-frills, friendly pub with big attractions for real ale fans - good choice, quality and value”. Dave Unpronounceable offers a day in the life of a brewer at Moor Brewery. Bristol Beer Festival’s third successive sell-out year is reported, with Napalm, from Moor Brewery, announced beer of the festival. Hop Back and Stonehenge breweries open pubs in Bristol and The Star Inn in Bath comes under Abbey Ales’ wing.

Ushers brewery in Trowbridge closure announced, to coincide with an insensitive advertising campaign. Whitbread looks to be quitting brewing and pub ownership. The Bag O’Nails is named local pub of the year: welcoming atmosphere in this small gas-lit pub with changing range of guest beers. Tisbury take on the Cornubia. Smiles news includes new beer boxes and the sale of its pubs to Youngs. The prices survey shows average price of a pint at £1.82 - up 3.9% on the previous year, with drinkers in the South West paying 2p higher than average. There are concerns over Cask Marque’s attitude towards beer temperature and a campaign for rate relief for rural pubs.

Pints West has come a long way since its modest beginnings as Avon Drinker over a decade ago.

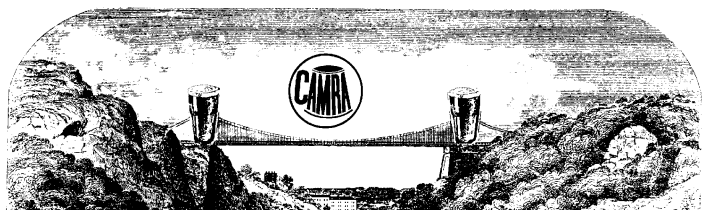
The editor would like to express his gratitude to the many people who have contributed to it over the years and helped to make it what it is today.

Long may it continue to campaign and promote the cause.

CAMRA: the Campaign for Real Ale.

Cheers!

## The Avon Drinker



# DIARY



See centre pages for Weston-super-Mare sub-branch diary.

**Tue May 8:** Trip to Bath Ales brewery. Depart from the Cornubia, Temple Street, Bristol, 7pm.

**Wed May 9:** Committee meeting, Smiles Brewery Tap, Bristol, 8pm.

**Sat May 12:** Bath pub crawl with Bath CAMRA Branch. Meet at the Ram (behind Bath Spa train station), 12:30pm.

**Wed May 23:** Branch meeting, Horts City Tavern, Broad Street, Bristol, 8pm.

**Sat May 26:** Trip to Spinning Dog brewery. Departure time to be announced.

**Wed May 30:** Trip to pubs in North Somerset. Depart from the Cornubia 6:45pm.

For more information on local events either attend our branch meetings, check our web site [www.bristolcamra.org.uk](http://www.bristolcamra.org.uk) or contact Phil Cummings on 0117 9858220 (evenings). See centre pages for Weston-super-Mare contacts.

**STOP PRESS**

Wickwar Brewery's Brand Oak Bitter (BOB) has received the Gold Award in the recent SIBA Beer Competition. Their Olde Merryford Ale collected Silver. Look out for their new beer Premium Spring Ale at 3.8% abv.

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Bristol BS2 0ER

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**Suggestions for future entries for the CAMRA GOOD BEER GUIDE**, and any comments on existing entries, can be made to our GBG Coordinator, Richard Walters, care of the editor (above).

**FURTHER INFORMATION** on all aspects of CAMRA can be had from Ray Holmes on (0117) 9605357 (h).

**SIX THOUSAND COPIES** of Pints West are distributed free to pubs in and around the city of Bristol.

**SUBSCRIPTIONS:** To be put on a mailing list send a cheque to the editor (payable to Steve Plumridge) – rate is £2 for four issues (one year).

Published by the Bristol & District Branch of the Campaign for Real Ale, April 2001 ©

**NEXT EDITION:** July 2001 (probably).

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