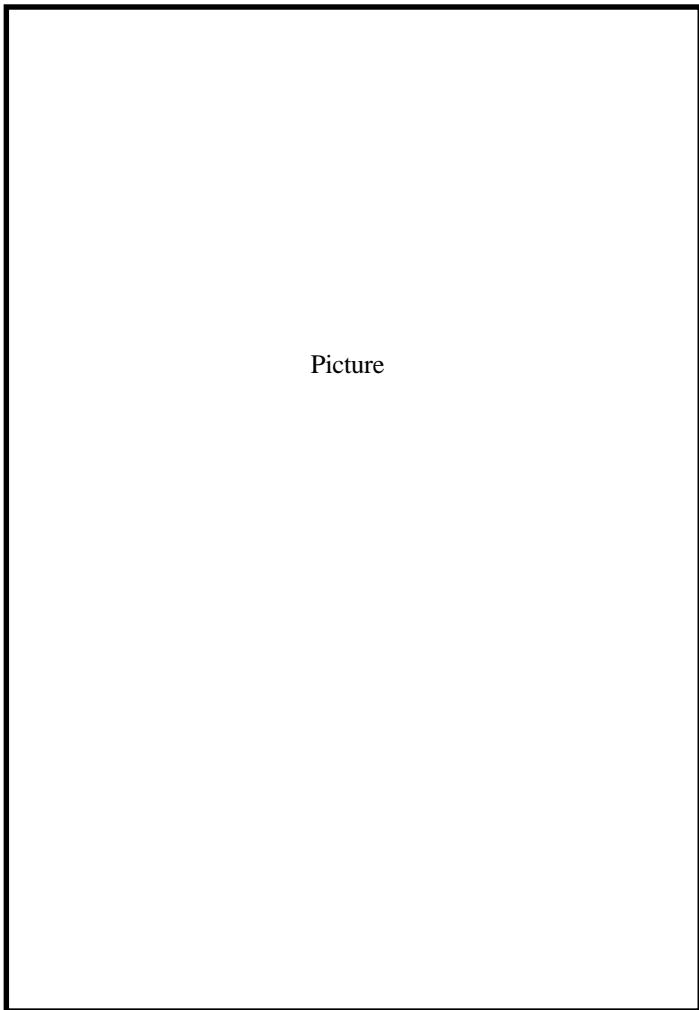


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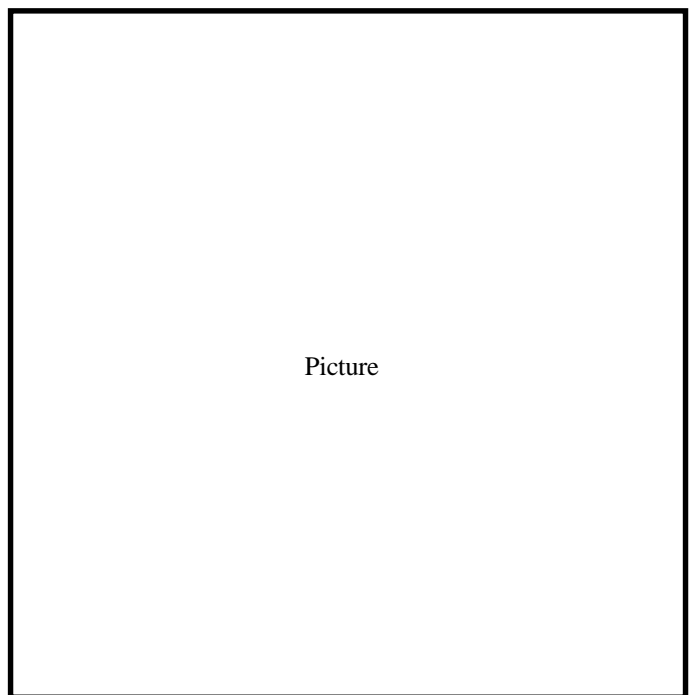
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Newsletter of the Bristol & District Branch of CAMRA, the Campaign for Real Ale

100% NATURale



Picture

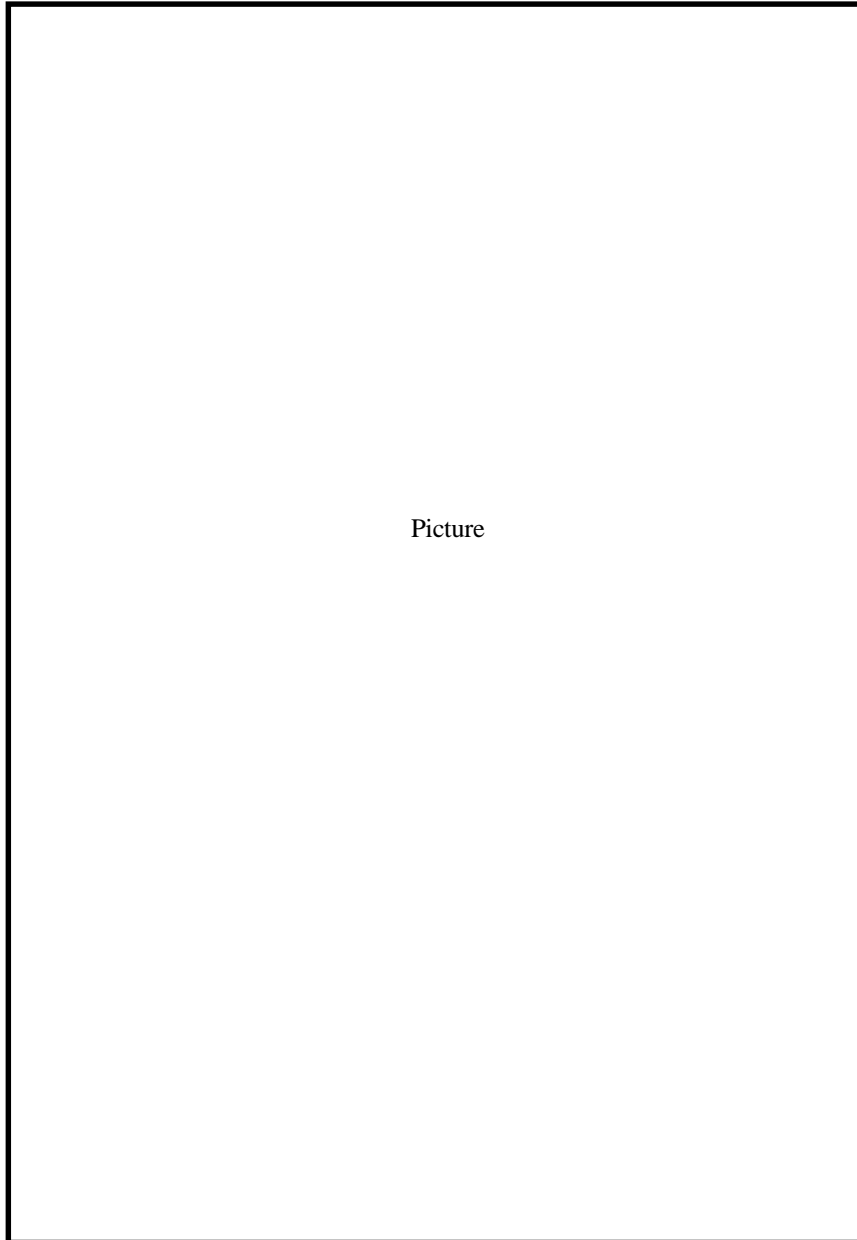


Picture

JUST ASK FOR CASK!

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100% NATURale



Picture

FOR some months now, CAMRA has been running a major campaign to promote real ale to a new audience of younger people of both sexes. **Ask if it's Cask** is designed to show that traditional beer is not only for one group of people; young and old, men and women, all can enjoy it.

It doesn't have to be drunk in smoky places in back streets either – high street megapubs, wine bars, restaurants, arts centres and social clubs can all stock diverse tasty brews, and serve them in good condition.

You can also drink real ale at home or at sporting events, in the form of bottle-conditioned beers or draught beer in "takeaway" containers.

Big brewers have been neglecting this sector of the beer market for too long, preferring to spend their lavish advertising budgets and promotional efforts on lager and keg beers. The top five lager brands account for 50% of all UK beer advertising; while 80% of the spending on ale and stout advertising goes on five brands, none of which is a real ale.

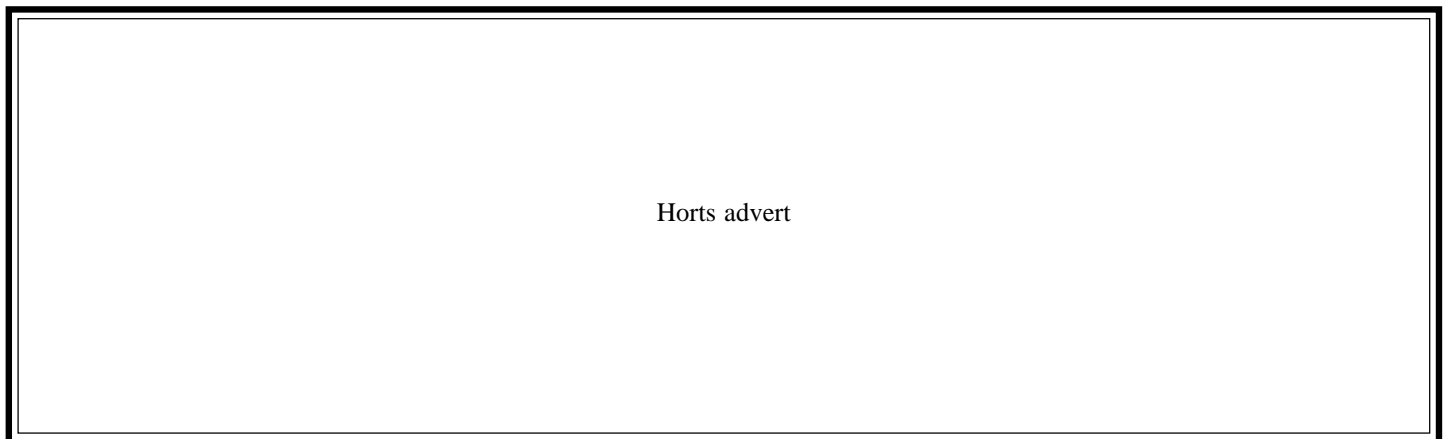
Real ale on draught is rarely found anywhere in the world outside the UK, but here there are over 2,000 beers available – if you know where to find them. There is an amazing variety of styles, tastes and strengths. The heavily advertised alternative, lagers and smoothflow beers, are designed to be inoffensive rather than exciting. They are all competing for the same target market: younger people who are interested in image rather than taste.

CAMRA's own research, conducted in June 2001, shows that only 17% of 25 to 34 year olds and 10% of 17 to 25 year olds drink real ale regularly. Ten per cent of women drink beer, and half of those choose real ale. The "laddish" approach of most beer advertising encourages this difference in preferences.

The **Ask if it's Cask** publicity material breaks away from these stereotypical images, presenting tasteful pictures of attractive models wearing very little except hops. This emphasises the quality, diversity and taste of properly kept and served real ale – miles apart from the popular "smoothflow" brews which try to imitate real ale's attributes.

Next time you're in a pub wondering what to drink, go on – **ask if it's cask!**

Norman Spalding



Horts advert

Butcombe celebrates record sales

Butcombe Brewery is celebrating its 23rd anniversary with sales at a record level.

Total sales of the micro's two brands, Butcombe Bitter and Butcombe Gold, increased by 7.2% during the past 12 months.

The brewery, based at Butcombe, near Bristol, is now producing 14,600 barrels or 4¼ million pints a year.

Managing Director, Simon Whitmore (pictured), attributes Butcombe's performance partly to the popularity of Butcombe Gold, a classic golden ale introduced two years ago, which was selected as a finalist for this year's Champion Beer of Britain competition at the Great British Beer Festival.

Butcombe Brewery was set up in converted farm buildings by Simon, former Managing Director of Courage Western, and his wife, Maureen, in September 1978. Production in the first week was just 10 barrels or 2,880 pints.

"We have come a long way when you consider that we expect to be producing in excess of 15,000 barrels or 4,320,000 pints in the coming year", said Simon.

Photo of Simon Whitmore

Butcombe advert

Wolves live to howl another day

WE are pleased to report that the pub-owning company Pubmaster's hostile takeover bid for Wolverhampton and Dudley Breweries (W&D) failed in August. CAMRA had campaigned for some months to keep W&D independent, and we were delighted when the W&D shareholders rejected Pubmaster's revised bid.

Although W&D (whose brands include Banks's and Marstons) do not have national distribution, they are strong in the East and West Midlands, North-West and North-East. CAMRA was keen to see them stay independent because they have four breweries and a large number of local, community pubs; not the most profitable kind of property these days, but important to the community it serves.

W&D still have a good deal of work to do if they are to stay independent. They have promised to return £200M to their shareholders by their next AGM. This will mean selling the Pitcher and Piano chain plus 170 other pubs, closing a large, relatively modern brewery in Mansfield and selling another in Hartlepool. This is likely to cause the loss of several local brews, as Mansfield alone brews two long-established milds and three bitters for the East Midlands trading area. There will also be a considerable cost to the community in some depressed areas, in the form of unemployment.

CAMRA would have liked to see the Mansfield brewery sold as a going concern with pubs, although W&D have now ruled this out. We will certainly have to settle for a reduction in beer choice, but that is preferable to what would have happened if Pubmaster had won; it planned to dispose of all four W&D breweries.

Norman Spalding

Train to drink

AS an alternative to one of Vince Murray's excellent days out by bus, as featured in the last two editions of Pints West, here is one a bit closer to home and by a different mode of transport. This day out utilises the train and starts and finishes at Bristol Temple Meads.

A group of local CAMRA volunteers undertook this trip on a Saturday in early June, purely in the name of research, and this is our itinerary. We left Temple Meads on the 11:55 to Severn Beach but with the recent demolition of the only pub in that village we purchased tickets to Shirehampton. On alighting after a journey of about 20 minutes, we proceeded to the **Lamplighters**, a couple of minutes away in Station Road. This is a fairly large, multi-level pub on the banks of the Avon and also boasts a garden, although the weather put paid to sitting outside.

There was a choice of local beers from **Butcombe (Bitter)** and **Bath Ales (Gem)** together with **Courage Best** and **Draught Bass**. Manager Paul Tanner (no relation) even showed us around the spacious cellar without too much prompting. As the trains run at approximately 45 minute intervals at this time of day we had an hour and a half to enjoy the beers before returning to the station for the train back towards town.

Missing out Sea Mills, we made our next stop at Clifton Down and crossed White-ladies Road to the **Penny Farthing**. Here we sampled from their range of **Wadworth's** beers as well as classic brews from

Adnam's and **Butcombe**. The stop here was a quick one as we took the next train down to Montpellier, by-passing Redland Station. Our objective here was the **Cadbury House** in Richmond Road (turn right with your back to the station building, first left, left again and it is up the hill on the right).

The pub sells from the full range of **Wickwar** beers (the licensee's brother owns Wickwar Brewery) and has a large, partly covered garden with views over Bristol.

Back to the train again for the short journey down the hill to Easton and the **Sugar Loaf** in St Mark's Road. This pub, which is at the bottom of the station approach path, offered the choice of **Abbot Ale**, **Pedigree** and their own '**Easton Ale**', which is produced especially by Moles. There was a large crowd of people there enjoying the atmosphere and the diverse selection of music on the juke box. This was the last pub on this trip before heading back to Temple Meads.

The railway option is not as flexible as the Rover Ticket on the buses, but provided you are on the return part of your journey you can get off at any station and resume your travel later that day. For information on train times and prices phone National Railway Enquiry Line on **08457 484 950** or for a copy of the timetable phone **0870 900 2318** and ask for **Timetable E** Bristol to Severn Beach.

Pete Tanner



The CAMRA Bristol Beer Festival was a sell-out success in 1998, 1999, 2000 and 2001. February/March 2002 sees the fifth annual Bristol Beer and Cider Festival making a welcome return to the Council House, College Green, in Bristol city centre.

As in previous years the Festival offers a showcase of high quality real ales (around eighty of them) and ciders and perries from around the UK.

The Festival will be open to the public from Thursday 28th February to Saturday 2nd March at the following times:

Thursday evening	7:00-11:00	£3.00
Friday lunchtime	11:30-3:00	£3.00
Friday evening	5:30-11:00	£4.50
Saturday lunchtime	11:30-3:30	£4.00
Saturday evening	6:00-11:00	£3.00

Prices include souvenir glass and programme, plus a free half pint of any beer, cider or perry for CAMRA members.

Tickets should be on sale – from about Christmas time – from the following Bristol outlets:

Bridge Inn, Passage Street
Cornubia, Temple Street
Bag O'Nails, Hotwells
Hare on the Hill, Kingsdown
Humpers Off Licence, Soundwell
Kellaway Arms, Kellaway Ave, Horfield
 (More details in the next Pints West.)

First impressions - 1

Hello Bristol (Dave Graham)

Having recently relocated from Bridgwater to Bristol and, as a consequence, transferred within CAMRA from the Somerset to the Bristol & District branch, the purpose of this article is to give you my first impressions of the real ale scene in Bristol.

I'm pleased to be able to report that my new friends in Bristol & District CAMRA have made me most welcome – note that new/transferred members get a free pint from the Membership Secretary at their first branch meeting! In addition, they have provided me with several opportunities to visit a number of local hostellers.

Home is now in the Westbury-on-Trym area on the north west side of Bristol, approximately four miles from the city centre. Fortunately there are a few quality real ale outlets within reasonable walking distance, such as the Post Office Tavern, the

Prince of Wales and the Victoria. The first two are free houses serving a good selection of real ales with the emphasis being on "local beers" from Smiles, Bath Ales, Butcombe, Wickwar, Otter, etc., in addition to the "local favourites" of Courage Best and Draught Bass. The third is a Wadworth tied house, recently awarded the Cask Marque in recognition of the quality of its real ales, offering the usual range plus Draught Bass, Adnams Broadside and a guest beer.

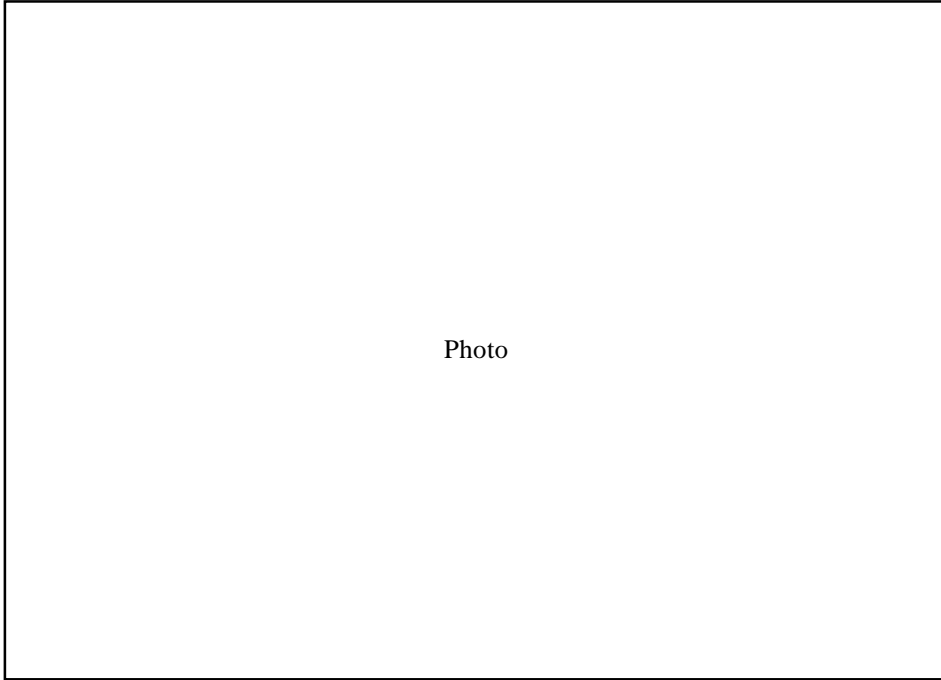
Public transport in Bristol is such that getting into the city centre by bus is easy and it's here that things start to get much more interesting. The two premier free houses that I've visited so far are the Cornubia and the Bag O'Nails (Hotwells). Both of these establishments specialise in serving an interesting selection of beers from far and wide in tip-top condition. Others include the Bunch of Grapes, the Reckless Engineer and the Hope & Anchor (Hotwells). Another excellent free house that I used to visit when I was passing through Bristol was Horts City

Three people new to Bristol give their impressions of the beer and pubs scene

Tavern, but Young's has now acquired this pub. All that remains of the Smiles tied estate is the Brewery Tap, the remainder having been acquired by Young's too. Bath Ales have three fine pubs: the Bridge Inn, the Hare on the Hill (Kingsdown) and the Merchants Arms (Hotwells); and Wickwar have recently taken on the Princess of Wales (Bedminster). Hop Back beers can be found at the Coronation (Southville) and the Fuller's range is available at the Old Fishmarket. For those of you who enjoy the Wetherspoon's experience, there is the Commercial Rooms in the centre and others slightly further afield such as the Robert Fitzharding (Bedminster) and the St. George's Hall (Redfield).

So, all in all, my first impressions of Bristol are all positive. There is plenty of choice for the discerning real ale drinker and the recent successful launch of the Nursery Brewery (Keynsham) will provide us with even more to choose from.

Enticing the students



Photo

AS anyone who lives here can tell you, Bristol now has a huge intake of students every year. As part of our ongoing CAMRA membership drive we decided to try and convince some of them to try the real stuff and maybe even get a few of them to sign up.

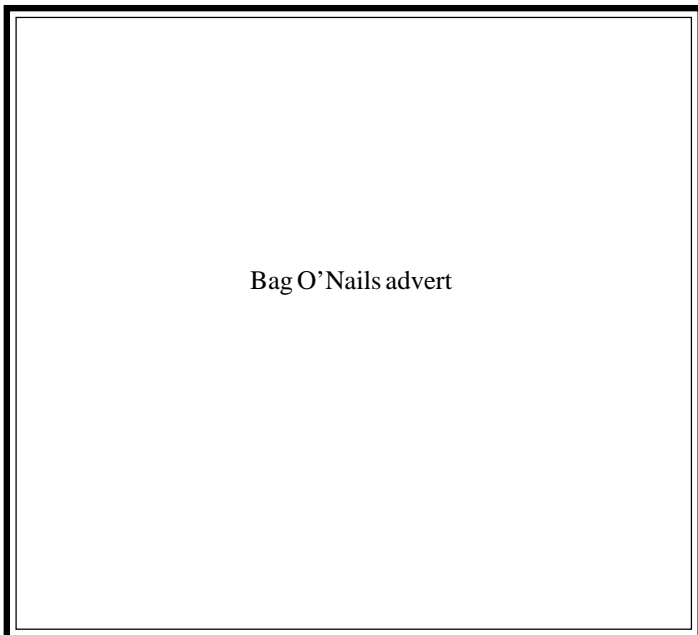
To this end we booked a stall at the Freshers Fair for the new intake at the University of the West of England (UWE for short). Local brewers were good enough to donate some quality products to tempt these potential new members – our thanks go to **Abbey Ales, Smiles, Wickwar** and **Westcroft Cider**.

The stall was set up by branch chairman Richard Brooks along with Chris Bradley, Phil Brooks and membership secretary Pete Tanner, who then had a long day answering questions and dispensing tasters.

It was hard work with over 500 people visiting the stall, but ultimately very rewarding. Many people were new to real ale and cider and said they would try it again, much campaign literature taken away and 24 new members actually signed up, which was even more than we were hoping for.

The picture above, taken by Pete Tanner, shows (left to right) Phil Brooks, Richard Brooks (with hammer) and Chris Bradley.

RB



Bag O'Nails advert



Pub News

The **Bay Horse** in Lewins Mead, central Bristol, should have reopened by the time you read this. Believe it or not this was where the Bristol branch of CAMRA held its first meeting way back when. It has been closed for several months and looks like it may have gone up-market.

The **Three Tuns** in St Georges Road, just along from College Green in the city centre, has had a nice refit, presumably to coincide with influx of students in the area and the close proximity of the new flats being built next door. The beers on offer are Courage Best and Butcombe Bitter.

Martin Gibson, formerly of the Bell in Stokes Croft, the Queens Head in Easton and the Red Lion in Whitehall, has taken over the **Duke of Cambridge** in Seymour Road in Easton. Well worth checking out!

Young's have started work on refurbishing the currently closed **Rope Walk** in Bedminster Parade and hope to be open in time for Christmas, subject to them finding a new sign painting company!

The **Red Lion** in Worrall Road, Clifton, has been disposed of by the House of Bellingham and is now being run by the former head barman from the Prince of Wales in Westbury-on-Trym. Beers available include Bass, Butcombe Bitter and one from Bath Ales.

Just around the corner from the Red Lion, the **Port Of Call** in York Street, Clifton, has joined the Unique Pub Company's Cask Ale Club. This venture, being run in conjunction with SIBA (Small Independent Brewers Association) will give landlords a selection of six or so different guest beers each month and should be in addition to the real ales already on sale.

Pete Tanner

Globalisation of beer!

THE fact that the vast majority of our beer in the UK comes from less than a handful of producers is well known – the concentration has become more acute in recent times with a whole variety of changes in pub and brewery ownership.

This situation is not unique to the UK.

Carlsberg has bought three small local breweries in Poland; the Bosman Browar Szczecin and Kaszetlan Browar Sierpc from Bitburger and a majority stake in Browary Dolnoslaskie Piast.

The above acquisitions boost Carlsberg's share of the Polish market from 7.2% to 16%. In addition, those other major international players, Heineken and South African Breweries, have 32% and 30% respectively of the Polish market.

The above is just one example, in one country, of how the major brewers around the globe are on the march.

Where will it end? A bit scary, don't you think?

Pete Bridle

Tales from the Nursery

Nursery Brewery's imminent birth was announced in the last issue of Pints West and owner, Malcolm Shipp, and brewer, Steve Cheeseright, launched the brewery's beers at the Cornubia on the 21st of August to a delighted crowd.

Four Nursery beers were on offer and I realised straight away that it would have been very rude not to sample all four and decided to start with the weakest which was the very tasty **Little Miss Muffet** at 3.8%; then to work up through the range via **Three Blind Mice** at 4.2%, **Hey Diddle Diddle** at 4.7% and finish with the "pretty damn dark" **Old Mother Hubbard** at 5.2%.

I thought they were all excellent and, judging by the number of people that congratulated Malcolm and Steve, most of the other drinkers did as well.

Plans are to brew several seasonal beers with two having been brewed already.

Little Jack Horner is a fruit beer that has been flavoured with plums

to 4.8% ABV and will be available in October and November.

The second is a porter, which is now maturing nicely in Oak casks and will be ready mid November. Called **Oat King Cole**, it is expected to weigh in at about 6% ABV and will be available at the Bag O'Nails beer festival between the 22nd and 25th November.

Other seasonals will be **I'm a Little Teapot** which will be a dry stout, **Hickory Dickory Dock** which will be a lager brewed with hickory chips, a Hefe Weiss beer in the summer and a powerful 10% beer.

The White Horse Inn in Compton Bassett as well as many pubs in Somerset now have Nursery beers permanently and they also feature regularly at the Cornubia.

Four beers will be available in polycasks for Christmas. Anyone may order them, either from the brewery (telephone 0117 9861212), or direct from the Cornubia by Monday 10th December. The polycasks can be collected from the Cornubia, Temple St, Bristol, between Thursday 20th and Monday 24th December.

Prices, for 18 pints and 36 pints respectively, are:

Georgie Porgie	3.7%	£20	£38
Three Blind Mice	4.2%	£20	£38
Hey Diddle Diddle	4.7%	£23	£44
Old Mother Hubbard	5.2%	£23	£44

Phil Brooks

Nursery Brewery advert

First impressions - 2

Bristol – a CAMRA voyage of discovery (Ken Gray)

What a disaster! I've left my CAMRA Good Beer Guide in Glasgow. You don't realise how much you rely on that excellent publication whenever you're into unknown territory.

When I arrived in Bristol in February this year, the GBG was thankfully in my possession. Armed with a duly annotated A-Z, crosses for each of the published Good Beer pubs, I started my tour with an open mind.

Living in Clifton and working in Stoke Gifford, my first port of call was the Prince of Wales in Westbury. This was conveniently placed for a beer after work with many new beers to try from breweries I had never heard of then: Smiles, Moles, etc.

Then closer to home, I visited the Penny Farthing on Whiteladies Road. A Wadsworth pub, this always has a large selection of beer – especially for a recent arrival from the frozen North. A couple of my particular favourites, "Adnams Broadside" and "Tanglefoot" from Hall & Woodhouse's Badger Brewery, are always in tip-top condition.

I must admit though that being the gregarious Scotsman I am, I initially found the average beer-drinking Bristolian (better watch what I say here!) to be difficult to engage in a conversation for more than about five minutes. Mind you, that was all soon to change with some intense involvement in the local CAMRA group and a fortuitous discovery in Hotwells.

The "Bag O'Nails", at the bottom of Jacobs Well road, owned and run by Gordon and Geoff, was a home from home. What a wonderful pub and a wonderful find! An atmosphere unlike any other pub in Bristol then and since: gas-lit, wooden floors and then there's the beer! I've lost count of the number of times I've gone to that pub, did not recognise a single beer, was gently guided through each one by the able aforementioned publicans and ended up scoffing the lot!... and have been scoffing ever since.

It was here that I bought my tickets for the then upcoming Bristol Beer Festival in March. It was also here that Geoff told me about the Cornubia, a supposedly well-hidden pub on the south-side of the river. Armed with my A-Z, I set off in search of this 'gem' as he put it.

Crossing Bristol bridge, into the land of

Three people new to Bristol give their impressions of the beer and pubs scene

industrial office-space – I thought I must have taken a wrong turning! Left at the first roundabout and then right... and lo, nestled like a maisonette surrounded by high-rise building on all sides lies the Cornubia – a veritable oasis. Stepping inside to the smiling welcome of publican Michael Blake, this oak-lined pub offers a country-wide selection of well-kept ales – this was to become my second home!

The story doesn't stop there! Amongst my favourite pubs in Bristol, both for the beer and atmosphere, (and probably in order of discovery) are: the Highbury Vaults; the Smiles Brewery Tap; the Bell in Kingsdown; the Hare on the Hill; the Merchants Arms; the Shakespeare Tavern; the Bunch of Grapes – not forgetting one of my favourite jazz pubs, the Old Duke. I won't supply you with individual summaries of these – the GBG will do that. Enough to say that you if you don't already know them, you should seek them out at your earliest opportunity – you will not be disappointed!

I find it heart-warming that in this age of designer lagers (and designer pubs), there are still such gems to be found deep in the heart of Bristol... long may it continue!

One final word of warning... remember your GBG and don't leave home without it!

Bowled over!

There has been plenty of controversy over the years concerning the issue of changing pub names. Some changes are not unreasonable but CAMRA has always believed that if changes are proposed, the owners should always listen to the locals.

If there are strong objections to a change, then perhaps the owning brewery or pub chain should listen to these and retain the existing name. It is, after all, the regulars who support the pub so why should the name be changed by some faceless suit in the name of "branding".

It can be said without question that Bristol pubs have been the subject of enough half-wit branding. This has been well documented in previous editions of Pints West with examples of Finnegan's Wakes, Carrots & whatever, Dirty Nellie's, B J's Liquor Emporium (what a success that was!), as well as various silly "Aussie" names. Suffice to say, there have been plenty.

Undoubtedly one of the most controversial in recent years was The Blue Bowl in Hanham, East Bristol. The pub, thought to have been named after a bowl of Roman origins found on the site in the 1800s, was rebranded in the mid 1990s despite massive local opposition.

A pub group, who insisted on calling the pub The Millhouse, had acquired The Blue Bowl. Such was the opposition that regulars and locals

launched a huge campaign. This attracted wide media coverage as well as inspiring a protest song and even a pantomime called "Whose Bowl Is It Anyway?".

Despite all the opposition, the pub was rebranded. As a result of this insensitive, highhanded attitude, many of the regulars boycotted the pub and took their business elsewhere. And who can blame them?

Now, the pub has been acquired by Jodsel, and whoa, guess what? They have returned the pub to its original name The Blue Bowl! Well good for them. I guess they have seen the sense of keeping the customer happy and not hacking them off. Doesn't that beg the question, why did the previous owners enforce the change in the first place against the wishes of the customers? If it had been so successful, would the current owners have changed it back?

The above is by no means the first time a pub has gone back to its previous name and I don't think it will be the last. Let's hope the owners of Finnegan's Wake (fake) on the Gloucester Road restore the original name of The Golden Lion soon. There have been rumours.

That's not to say that the trend for stupid name changes is behind us – but let's hope we are not subjected to a Hairy Lemon – I kid you not – these do exist in other parts of the UK and they have been imposed on existing pubs!

Get ready to campaign.

Pete Bridle

I Chanced Upon An English Pub

by Dr Lyndon Smith

I chanced upon an English pub,
In the dankness of the night,
Found ingress to a wonderland,
Of cheerful sound and sight.

I soon found, it held within,
Its ancient wall and door,
Tales of the phantastical,
Of peaceful times, and war.

The fabric of the hostelry,
Spoke of another age,
The stories of the traveller,
The wisdom of the saged.

Tradition still is paramount,
In the Englishness of ales,
Landlord, insist on quality,
For every of your sales.

The wizened host had told me,
With his ruddy cheery face,
Of the history and majesty,
Of that famous meeting place.

Let us hope the beauty,
And magic that I saw,
Will remain in the future
As it was of yore.

News from Bath Ales

THE Bath Ales brewery is continuing to have its best year ever with sales over 30% up on last year. Regrettably the Rare Hare (5.2%) season is coming to an end as we head into winter; this year's brew is exceptionally good and the brewers had to triple production to keep up with demand. John at the Hare on the Hill sold a firkin in under three hours, but some say he drunk most of it himself.

The good news is that it's now the time of year that Festivity (5%) hits the pumps. This is a specially crafted rum porter. Rich, dark and warming, it is perfect for those cold evenings. Hints of rum mingle with coffee and vanilla flavours, a truly wonderful old style beer. This is one of the few good things about the British winter.

A new beer called Salamander Ale (4.4%) has been created by brewer Craig This was launched at the Bath Beer Festival to great acclaim and is mainly going to be available at the brewery's own pub in John Street in Bath called The Salamander Ale and Chop House. Following extensive renovations it combines a traditional pub downstairs with supper rooms above.

Steve Lovell, formerly of the Smiles Brewery Tap, has now settled into the Merchants Arms at Hotwells and has reintroduced the Monday evening quiz (proceeds to Guide Dogs for the Blind). In addition Steve has introduced a culinary delight in the form of delicious pies from the Split Tin Bakery – steak and stilton is proving to be very popular.

Incredibly, we are approaching the fifth anniversary of Bath Ales opening their first pub, the award-winning Hare on the Hill in Kingsdown, so look out for news of any celebrations which hopefully will include cheap beer.

If you are looking to get some real ale to drink at home or for a party, Bath Ales are now available in a 5 litre (8.8 pints) mini-cask. This adds to the range of 10 and 20 litre polypins. During November there will be some stunning promotions of the polypins involving free gifts – check in the Bath Ales pubs for details.

Tours of the brewery, located at Webbs Heath between Bath and Bristol, are available most weekdays and can be booked by contacting Alison at the brewery (0117 9071797). More information about tours and what's going on at Bath Ales can be obtained by visiting the website, www.bathales.com.

Steve O'Shea

Bath Ales Brewer and pubs advert

The SIBA Pub Associate Membership Scheme

Peter Haydon, General Secretary of the Society of Independent Brewers, explains the association's latest initiative.

ON September 24th SIBA – the Society of Independent Brewers – launched a new category of membership at the Pub and Bar Show at Olympia, and in doing so embarked on phase three of a long term strategy of support for Britain's independent brewers.

Phase one was the implementation of a Code of Practice, designed to ensure that all SIBA members brewed to a standard. This enabled us to claim professionalism as an industry and as a trade body.

Phase two was to raise our profile within the industry. This we have now achieved and it is now rare to meet anyone in the brewing and pub industries who does not know who SIBA are.

Phase three is to build on phases one and two and bring the SIBA name before the drinking public, and the key element in this strategy is the Pub Associate Member scheme.

The scheme aims to build strong bridges between brewers and those publicans who are keen to sell their products and who wish to help ensure that there will be independent brewers producing quality beers for them to sell tomorrow.

Membership costs £20 per annum, and



pub members get a plaque to display outside their pubs. Replete with the SIBA logo, it bears the motto, "Supporting Britain's Independent Brewers", a phrase which applies equally to SIBA and the pubs which wear the plaque.

Publicans will receive SIBA's in house journal, will be listed on SIBA's website, receive point-of-sale material to explain our philosophy to their drinkers (as well as enable them to buy our polo and rugby shirts), and be encouraged to work more closely with their local brewery in order to increase sales for them both.

Our aim is for drinkers to recognise – eventually – the SIBA plaque and know that in this pub there is a publican who cares about beer and Britain's brewing heritage and is prepared to stand up and be counted amongst those who will do something to preserve that heritage. The drinker will know that on entering that pub he or she will find quality beers from amongst the cream of what the country has to offer, and if they have not seen that beer before, or don't know the brewery, they will have the confidence to know that they are in for a treat regardless.

CAMRA members can help us achieve this end. You can ask your favourite publican whether he has heard of the SIBA scheme. If he hasn't you can

explain it to him. If he has, you can ask him why he hasn't joined. Your branch can even sponsor membership of your favourite SIBA selling outlets (membership forms available from peter@siba.co.uk). Where you see the SIBA plaque you can tell the publican that you know what it means and that you appreciate their displaying it – this is perhaps the easiest and most valuable contribution of all.

The UK beer market is in constant turmoil, but the only constant factor is the uphill struggle faced by smaller brewery firms in finding outlets and keeping their beers in them. Free houses get bought up and tenancy agreements expire and are renegotiated without guest beer rights. The net effect is to daily reduce the number of pubs free to stock quality locally produced beers that plenty of people want to buy. The SIBA pub membership scheme aims to draw this to the attention of the drinking public by making dedication to quality a visible badge. In a perfect world every pub would have a SIBA plaque for every pub would want to sell the best and boast about it. Sadly we live in a world where publicans sell the brands that accountants tell them to.

The new SIBA scheme is designed to reward and identify those outlets which, like CAMRA members and independent brewers, refuse to live in the penny-pinching world of the bean counters. We urge CAMRA members to join us in our common cause.

*For further information contact:
Peter Haydon,
General Secretary
Society of Independent Brewers
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Adnams Brewery advert

Bear Inn, Wiveliscombe
advert

Back in harness in Wiveliscombe ...

GENTLE GIANTS, Prince and Clyde, helped Cotleigh Brewery turn back the clock when the magnificent pair of shire horses (pictured right, outside the Bear Inn) pulled a horse-drawn dray around the the brewery's home town recently.

The vintage dray is the latest addition to the brewery's delivery fleet, and made its debut delivering to all three pubs in the small town of Wiveliscombe in Somerset. Local people came out of their houses and shops to witness what was once an every day sight in the historic brewing town, where William Hancock's Brewery was the major employer between 1807 until its take over and closure by Grand Met in 1959.

Cotleigh have been continuing Wiveliscombe's brewing traditions since 1979. Owned and run by husband and wife John and Jennifer Aries, the brewery employs nine staff and produces around 1½ million pints of beer each year. More modern methods of transport are usually used to deliver their award winning beers to around 200 pubs in Somerset and Devon.

Brewery boss John Aries admitted he bought the unusual vehicle from a man he met in a pub. "After a couple of pints it seemed like a good idea!" he joked. It took three months to fully restore and repaint the dray.

John added, "Wiveliscombe is proud of its brewing heritage. It was tremendous seeing the dray delivering to the town's pubs – just as Hancock's Brewery drays did around a hundred years ago."

Photo

... and Bristol

SHIRE HORSES from Young's Brewery in London recently made two trips to Bristol. Their first visit marked Young's acquisition of Horts City Tavern in Broad Street from the Chapman Group.

Below left: Matt Jackson and Sarah Weekes of Horts with John Young.

Their second appearance accompanied the reopening of Le Château in Park Street, one of 15 pubs that the London brewer bought from Smiles last year.

The horses are among a team of ten that make daily deliveries of beer to pubs in south London.

Below: Catherine Gully and Nick James of Le Château.

Photo

Photo

Humpers Off Licence – 10 years in the Good Beer Guide

IT was in 1991 that the local CAMRA branch first became aware that something was stirring in the Staple Hill area of the city. Humpers Off Licence in Soundwell Road, run by Jim and Michelle Murray, was gaining an excellent reputation for its range of cask conditioned ales.

The very fact that it offered draught real ale made it unusual, but it went much further by offering several beers from local independent breweries plus varying guests. We were therefore delighted to enter it into the CAMRA Good Beer Guide 1993, as one of a very small number of off licenses to make it into the best 5000 "pubs" in Britain. It has remained in the Beer guide ever since, completing 10 consecutive years in the newly published 2002 guide, whilst very few local pubs have done so. All the more remarkable as Michelle has run it solo since Jim's sad and untimely death some years ago.

Today Humpers boasts a range of four hand pumps, dispensing Bass, Butcombe, Smiles Best and Wickwar BOB, plus between one and three guest beers, which could be anything, served by gravity from casks behind the bar counter. Guests at the time of writing were Badger Tanglefoot and

Hope & Anchor advert

Dorothy Inn, Weymouth
advert

Bateman's XXXB, with RCH Double Header next up. Michelle is likely to add either Butcombe Gold or Badger Champion Ale to the range shortly.

Bring your own container or buy one with your beer, which is always very reasonably priced at between £1 and £1.45 per pint. Several draught ciders at very low prices and draught Stella Artois (if you must!) are also available.

Where Humpers has changed most is in its range of bottled beers. Michelle stocks around 45 or 50 different beers (often changing), including 20 or so that are bottle-conditioned, and can choose from over 200. She is happy to receive requests from customers for future beers – both bottled and in casks. To illustrate the choice, on a recent visit bottled beers included the following (I've indicated bottle-conditioned beers with an asterisk):

Hop Back Summer Lightning*, Thaiphoon* and Crop Circle*.

RCH Pitchfork* and Ale Mary* (champion bottled beer of Britain 2001).

Skinner's Cornish Knocker*, Who Put The Lights Out*, Betty Stoggs Bitter and Honey Beer.

Wickwar Station Porter*, Old Arnold* and BOB*.

Cropton Uncle Sam's*.

Wood's Hopping Mad*

Fuller's London Pride.

St Peter's Best Bitter and Old Style Porter.

In addition, Humpers specialises in obtaining polypins for the Christmas and New Year Period (18 or 36 pints). A list is available from early December from which you can order your beer – usually from a choice of 20 or more, and this year Michelle

promises to include the full Hop Back list.

So now that you know all this you really have no excuse for either hosting or attending a party with inferior tinned or keg beers. Pop down to Humpers and be the person who turns up with the quality stuff – but beware because everyone else will want to drink your beer!

Congratulations to Michelle and all at Humpers for ten years of excellence – and long may it continue.

Vince Murray

Interbrew declares beer victory

ANOTHER chapter in the saga of Interbrew's attempt to become Britain's largest brewer opened in September.

Regular Pints West readers will recall that during 2000 the Belgian-based multinational bought all of Whitbread's breweries, and subsequently those of Bass Brewing. This gave the company a UK market share of 32%. This caused the Government to step in on competition grounds, ordering that either the Bass or Whitbread breweries would have to be sold again. Since there are relatively few potential purchasers around who would satisfy the Government's competition criteria, this looked likely to be very expensive for Interbrew, who would have to accept a knockdown price in order to achieve a sale by the required date. (In case any reader is interested in making a bid, £2,000M should be a reasonable opening shot).

Interbrew then sought a judicial review of the Government's decision – successfully – and this led to trade and industry secretary Patricia Hewitt's announcement on 18th September. She said that the Government would be satisfied if only the Carling operation was sold off, allowing Interbrew to keep the Tennent's, Caffrey's and Bass brands. This would reduce Interbrew's market share to 15.8% rather than the 10% level it would have reached if it had been forced to sell the whole of Bass.

Even without Carling, Interbrew will still be a major international player; it owns Stella Artois and recently paid £1,000M for the German giant Beck's, to name but two of its many well-known brands. Its entry into the ranks of Britain's biggest is therefore likely to be a mixed blessing for real ale, since its marketing muscle will naturally be focussed on its globally known lagers and other drinks rather than beers with only a regional interest in one country (i.e. the UK). However, it does have a reasonable track record of letting its smaller acquisitions carry on without too much interference, which is more than can be said for the other companies who were interested in buying Bass Brewers. Time will no doubt tell whether UK drinkers will regret further erosion of their beer heritage because of this takeover; but things could definitely be worse.

Norman Spalding



National Fest hits all time high

FANTASTIC media coverage of CAMRA's *Ask If It's Cask* campaign attracted a record attendance to this year's Great British Beer Festival.

Almost forty-four thousand thirsty drinkers (including three male streakers) descended upon the Olympia exhibition halls in London and quaffed over two hundred thousand pints!

With attendance up a staggering 10% on last year at the beginning of its five-day run, Bristol-based organiser, Alison Bridle, was faced with having to instigate a re-order of a further 2,000 gallons of real ale to meet demand.

After three years as organiser of the UK's largest beer festival, Alison is stepping down from this awesome challenge and is looking forward to some seriously free time in the months ahead – just like many CAMRA volunteers, the organisation is all done on top of the day job and Alison has been a member of the organising committee since 1993.

The festival recruited an additional 648 members taking CAMRA membership, nationally, to over 62,000 – an all time high.

As usual, the Champion Beer of Britain competition was the curtain-raiser to the 2001 event with Welsh and West Country beers featuring strongly:

Supreme Champion Beer of Britain - Oakham JHB
Silver - Hop Back Summer Lightning
Bronze - Brains Dark

Milds

Gold - Brains Dark
Silver - Moorhouse's Black Cat
Bronze - Boat Brewery Man in the Boat

Bitters

Gold - Oakham JHB
Silver - Adnams Bitter
Bronze - Harviestoun Bitter and Twisted
Bronze - Barge & Barrel Bargee

Best Bitters

Gold - RCH Pitchfork
Silver - Woodfordes Nelsons Revenge
Bronze - Goddards Special
Bronze - Hogs Back Tea

Strong Bitters

Gold - Hop Back Summer Lightning
Silver - Goacher's Gold Star Ale
Bronze - Slaters Supreme

Bottled Conditioned Beers

(Competition sponsored by The Guardian)

Gold - RCH Ale Mary
Silver - Hop Back Summer Lightning
Bronze - Fullers 1845

Speciality Beers

Gold - Oakham White Dwarf Wheat Beer
Silver - Harviestoun Schiehallion
Bronze - Cheriton Village Elder

Every year, CAMRA Fundraising auctions off a visit to a couple of breweries in one town or city. This year it was the turn of Bristol which, on 22nd September, hosted visits to Smiles Brewery and our newest brewery, Nursery of Keynsham. A great time was had by the fifteen or so lot winners and the Great British Beer Festival would like to express its thanks to both Smiles and Nursery.



News from Smiles

Smiles recently staged a special student promotion, with a stall at "Fresh 2001" at the Students' Union, Clifton on 4th and 5th October. Students were offered Smiles Best, Heritage, Bristol IPA and Original in the Union bars at £1 a pint during the event – this apparently proved very popular.

Another Smiles promotion has taken place with that delightful young brewer Neville Mort, assisted by Jane and Gill, out and about in local Safeway supermarkets. Bottled Heritage was the product and shoppers were tempted in stores at Thornbury, Weston-super-Mare, Yate and Fishponds. Funny how I never get given any beer when I go to the shops! It looks like Smiles may do more of this activity with Tesco, Sainburys and Asda, so keep your eyes open whilst pushing that trolley.

The company held its Annual General Meeting on Friday 7th October at the University and Literary Club, Berkeley Square. It was a smoothly run affair attended by some loyal shareholders, with all resolutions passed unanimously.

The Smiles web site at www.smiles.co.uk has recently been updated and includes the latest news and faces.

And finally, the beer news.

Heritage is now back in production and Bristol IPA (4.5%) has been added to the portfolio. IPA is new to many drinkers made of a fusion of selected malts and Challenger plus Styrian Golding hops. This recipe creates an ale of the finest quality. The addition of Fuggles hops late in the brewing process results in a delicate aroma and balanced bitter palate.

Holly Hops will be available in December as Smiles strong festive winter ale at 5.0% abv. If you would like to order 18 or 36 pint boxes at Christmas for parties and for drinking at home over the festive season these are available from the depot at Gordano or the Brewery Tap, Colston Street. If you would like to order early please contact Jane on 01275 375894 or Katrina at the Tap on 0117 9213668. These will be available with Smiles Best (4.1% abv) and Original (3.8% abv).

Richard Brooks

Smiles Brewery advert

WATERING HOLES IN THE DESERT

News from Weston-super-Mare

Branch News

Summer tends to be a peak time for beer festivals and four local ones are covered in varying depth in this thrilling instalment of “Watering Holes...”.

The real enigma was WestonFest 01, which we have trailed for several months. Although CAMRA had no formal connections with the event, we were very keen for it to be successful and had tried to play our part by urging the real ale community across the South West to support it.

In terms of the musical entertainment, this was generally received very well (aside from the fact that you often had to see/hear it from the dry sanctuary of the marquees a long way from the stage).

However, events conspired to make the event a disappointment for many, including the organisers. Some of these events were outside of the control of the organisers – for example, the foul weather that had a major impact on numbers attending and the time spent by the council dithering over whether to give it the go-ahead, which resulted in a woefully-inadequate 10 weeks to plan and advertise.

The organisers recognise that mistakes

were made in the timing of the event – the same weekend as the bizarrely popular Bristol Balloon Fiesta and a peak time in the school holidays when many families have fled to somewhere dryer and warmer.

There were also complaints about the cost of the event programme (I am sure many advertisers would have winced when they saw the £3 charge) and some of the grim offerings from the catering concessions.

Real ale fans also had some gripes, largely due to the way their expectations had not been met. Originally, we were told that there would be over 100 different beers on offer. Press releases shortly before the event scaled this down to a more realistic “30+ different beers on offer at all times.” In reality the number turned out to be 12.

Admittedly, these contained some renowned favourites such as RCH Pitchfork, Hop Back Summer Lightning, Exmoor Gold and Greene King Abbot, but given the expectations many hearts sank when they saw what was on offer. Visitors to beer festivals expect to see a few beers that they would rarely, if ever, get to see. I also

received two written complaints about beer quality.

I have met John Waft, one of the organisers and discussed these issues. John says that the organisers’ expectations were that many of the regions breweries would be mad-keen to be involved and use the event to showcase their beers by taking a stand. In reality, there was hardly any interest (two brewers have expressed to us the view that the financials would have made it unviable for them to have a presence). As a result the entire beer order was put into the hands of Beer Seller, who recommended that 12 would prove to be adequate for a first-time festival. As events transpired this was probably a wise decision given the small attendance, although many ale fans will know of pubs that run their own festivals that get through many more beers than 12!

With regard to the quality complaints, John was surprised as his feedback from talking to people in pubs and clubs in town and the feedback from the festival questionnaire, was that the vast majority of people were very happy with both the beer and the entertainment.

What of the future? The organisers accept that mistakes were made this year and that next year (oh, yes!), things will be different. The broad plan appears to be that the festival will be linked with a major 4-day event being organised by the town council to commemorate the Queen’s Golden Jubilee. Bigger acts are being sought and although there will still be a real ale link, it is accepted that the scope of this needs to be clearly defined and communicated accurately. I have emphasised that there is nothing wrong with not having a vast range of beers, but that a smaller range can still be adventurous, ideally with one or two beers brewed especially for the festival. Given that the event will take place around the Jubilee, it is certain that there will be many brewery “specials” around to commemorate the event.

Time will tell how the lessons learned from this first attempt will be used to make the next event better. The organisers certainly represent a potentially great channel to enhance the profile and opportunities for real ale in Weston.

Tim Nickolls

Wadworth JCB advert

THE SOMERSET BEER FESTIVAL

A GRAND DAY OUT

HAVING been unable to visit last year's Somerset Beer Festival at Minehead I was looking forward to this year's event with great anticipation. As last year's venue apparently proved such a success it was again held on the platform at Minehead railway station, which is at one end of the West Somerset Railway line.

And so, on a glorious day and along with a small number of other Weston CAMRA members, I set off early from Weston Station to ensure that we made it in reasonable time to Taunton, the first connection. From the railway station we took the bus, which would pick us up directly outside and then on to Bishops Lydeard railway station and the West Somerset line.

Having arrived in good time as planned, we explored the delights of this well maintained working museum then patiently waited for our scheduled steam train. No asthma-inducing diesel loco for us! Eager with anticipation we caught our steam locomotive to Minehead station and the festival itself.

For those thirsty early morning travellers who couldn't wait to sample the fine ales at the end of the line, Cotleigh Tawny was available on board the train although many abstained until the journey's end.

Upon arrival at 11.45am the platform was already packed with many people queuing for their tickets and glasses and by that time most were running the rule over the beer list. Lots of choice as anticipated with many 'festival specials' on offer.

Settling down with our chosen 'starters' along with a fine hot pasty from the refreshments carriage this was indeed bliss! Fine weather, steam trains, real ale straight from the barrel and good company. What more

could you want?... A little music perhaps?

On this particular session two guitarists known as 'Boulevard Jango' entertained us with an entirely appropriate set of nostalgic instrumental classics from the 1930s onwards.

There were around 30 beers available including local Somerset beers from Cottage, Butcombe and RCH amongst others. There was also a choice of cider and perry too. RCH had brewed a special for the festival called 'Somerset Campaigner.' No one knew the origin of this one but there were hints that this was a blend of some of their regular brews. (*I find that hard to believe.*)

My particular favourite at the festival came from Timothy Taylor in West Yorkshire but not the famous 'Landlord' ale. In my recent experience this can vary dramatically from pub to pub and in reality it's probably been some time since I've truly enjoyed it. No, this time it was Tim Tee's 'Ram Tam' that hit the spot for me with nice body and plenty of flavour at 4.3%.

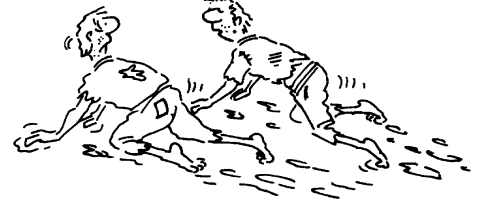
Before too long it was time to return to Bishops Lydeard and begin our journey home. Unfortunately our stay was at least an hour too short as we

had a certain appointment in front of the goggle box with the Germans and Gary Lineker in Munich around 6.00pm which we did not want to miss. It was such a shame but with various connection times to meet we had to leave around 2.00pm. Still a last minute purchase from the festival to take with us on the train kept us happy. Short but sweet and probably, all things considered, one of the best festivals I'd been to in a very long while!

A GRAND DAY OUT.

Steve Reed

That's the last time we let you sort out the train times home.



RCH Brewery advert

Moles Brewery advert

Branch Socials

A review of our recent socials and a look ahead to upcoming events

July

Partly as a response to suggestions that we seem to visit the same old places when we have an event in town, we opted for a crawl visiting places that we had never been to as a CAMRA group.

The itinerary involved a fair bit of walking so we were hoping for good weather. After a turbulent day of wind and rain (surely not in Weston!), the weather thankfully eased-up for the evening. We met-up at **Weston Golf Club**, at the Uphill end of the beach. We had had numerous reports of good beer at the club, including some interesting guests appearing alongside the regular Butcombe. Sadly, on our visit the guest was Shepherd Neame – a decent enough beer, but frequently seen these days, largely due to the link-up with Wetherspoons. However, no problems with beer quality.

Visiting the golf club meant an evening without jeans, t-shirts or training shoes. This was too much for some of our clan to cope with and our number doubled at the second venue of the evening – **The Ship** in Uphill. A decent selection of beers – Greene King Old Speckled Hen, Fullers London Pride and Bass. They normally have Tetleys as well, but this was off (no tears shed). Everyone opted for the London Pride, which appears to be very popular amongst the connoisseurs in the area. No complaints on quality. The Ship bills itself as “the oldest pub in Weston” and has a good reputation for its food.

We made the arduous few yards trip to **The Dolphin**. Here we had the choice of Bass, Butcombe and John Smiths Cask. Again no problems with quality of beers sampled, but we were beginning to yearn for something a little bit different from the commonly-seen beers we had encountered to date.

The evening finished at **Weston Cricket Club** on Devonshire Road. We had spoken to the club in advance of our visit and received a warm welcome. Beers on were Butcombe and London Pride again. Butcombe Gold had recently finished. We had a lengthy chat with Brian Chambers from the club who was keen to talk about beer and asked whether there were any particular beers we would like to see made available from the list he has to choose from. (We had one or two suggestions!) Brian was eager to take some Pints Wests and I would heartily recommend that anyone who has not been to the club gives it a try. If you are not a member or with a member it is best to ring first.

All in all a worthwhile venture to some different venues. Beer was okay everywhere, although a little more ambition in the range being offered at some places would be welcome.

August

An evening in Banwell. As ever, heading out of town has an adverse effect on the numbers attending. However, ten or so stalwarts made the short trip, including a couple of new faces.

We began at **The Brewers Arms**. As reported in the last Pints West, this pub is now under new management. However, there are no signs yet of any adverse changes. The inside was as inviting as ever, with quite a good midweek crowd watching football. The garden is one of the most pleasant around and being a fine summer’s evening (really!) we enjoyed a couple of nice pints outside. Most opted for Oakhill Bitter – not a beer to make the eyeballs roll around, but a good, solid ale and it was served in very good condition. One or two had Butcombe and Bass – no complaints heard.

We moved on to **The Bell**. As reported in previous Pints Wests, this pub has been thriving under Rob and Donna Doddington and has gained a growing reputation as one of the best ale houses in the area. As ever when you enter a pub, your eyes head straight for the row of pumpclips. We weren’t disappointed, as nestled alongside the regulars (Butcombe and Old Speckled Hen) was one of our favourite beers – PG Steam from the local RCH brewery. We settled down for a good few pints, joined for part of the time by a sizeable group from the main Bristol & District Branch out on their rounds. They too seemed pretty impressed but, diligent people that they are, they headed off to check out other hostelries in the North Somerset area. Shortly before departure time Rob came over holding a murky looking pint of beer. This turned out to be the very wonderful Firebox from RCH. This beer is rarely seen on draught in pubs and Rob had intended giving us a treat. Sadly, it was not yet ready to be served, although it still tasted marvellous. A few people popped back over the next few nights to sample it in its prime.

Alas and alack, last bus time approached all too quickly, but we had enjoyed a very good evening.

September

A three-pub town crawl commencing at **The Major From Glengarry**. I personally did not get to the Major and met up with the gang at the second venue – **The Regency**. We had an excellent turnout with several new faces and everyone who had visited the Major was full of praise for it. All five beers had been tried – Wadworth 6X, Henrys IPA, JCB, Summersault and Odda’s Light (a pub brew recently acquired by Wadworth) – and all were reported as being in excellent condition. Even the non-Wadworth fans were complimentary. Several people remarked on the friendliness of the service,

which was to become very significant as the night wore on.

The Regency was its usual welcoming self. Unfortunately, I got the bottom of the barrel of Gem and the beer went off for good. However, the Charles Wells Bombarrier (now a regular) was very good. No adverse comments from people drinking the other beers on offer, including Bass and 6X.

An advance guard of about ten of our number headed off for **The Dragon Inn**, whilst the rest of us finished off our pints. The second group arrived at The Dragon about five minutes after the rest and we were greeted with the sight of none of the first group having been served and only one person serving. We joined the rest and began a long wait. The barman appeared to be as miserable as we were rapidly becoming and he also appeared to be picking off all other waiting customers other than our group. After a further five minutes wait, several people walked out, opting to head for Off The Rails where they knew they would encounter staff wanting to serve them. I considered walking out myself, but was itching to try the Celestial Steam Gale from the Freeminer brewery. Eventually a second barman appeared. No apologies for anyone, but at least the queue started moving a bit. By the time I got served, the Celestial Steam had gone off (probably evaporated), but having waited so long I decided to have a pint of Pitchfork to keep me going. The lucky few who had got a pint of Celestial Steam were giving it rave reviews and everyone else was happy with the quality of their beer (Hop Back Summer Lightning and Exmoor Gold were popular picks).

I have always been a great champion of Wetherspoon. In fact, one of my previous articles on The Dragon in Pints West was used by Wetherspoon in their company magazine “Wetherspoon News” but this evening’s experience (and service complaints about The Dragon are not uncommon) must rank as one of the worst and most bizarre drinking experiences of my career.

Wanting to end the evening on a positive note a few more of us drifted over to **Off The Rails**. The usual friendly greeting has rarely been more welcome and we settled down for a comfortable “one for the road.” Pitchfork, Hewish IPA and Barleymole were the offerings. The Pitchfork was excellent.

Overall, a very good evening with a great range of beers to sample and mostly of very good quality.

Moral of the evening: it’s not just about good beer – customer service is important too.





Weston Whispers (Pub & Beer News)

Upcoming events

On Halloween, we will be taking a stake, sorry I mean a minibus, deep into the heart of Somerset. We will be commencing at **The Halfway House, Pitney**. This pub is described in the 2001 Good Beer Guide as follows – “An absolute gem: this old village pub features flagstone floors and basic furniture. It usually stocks six to nine ales, mainly from West Country micros. The home cooked food includes superb curries.” If this does not whet your appetite, nothing will. We will probably visit one or two other pubs on the way back, depending on when we can drag ourselves out of The Halfway. A likely contender is **The George, Middlezoy** – Somerset CAMRA Pub of the Year 2000. By the time you read this places on the bus will be scarce – ring Mike Coleman on 01934 631441 for details.

On November 15 we will be heading for **Congresbury** for a three-pub crawl. This is a civilised 15-20 minute bus ride from WSM and there are options for buses back. We will be visiting Congresbury for the third time in 12 months, as the previous visits have been so popular.

The following Wednesday (21 Nov) we will be holding our regular 3rd Wednesday monthly social at **The Queen's Arms, Bleadon**. This is a great pub on Weston's doorstep serving at least six ales straight from the cask.

The thought of Christmas arouses mixed feelings. However, for real ale fans it promises a range of Christmas specials from the more-enlightened and imaginative breweries. Our social on 19 December will try and ensure we cover all those beers that have successfully made it into Weston pubs and clubs. The precise itinerary for the evening will be decided nearer the time, but we will be commencing at **The Regency** which always comes up with the goods by offering one or two seasonal brews.

Into January and we begin the arduous task of surveying pubs for inclusion in the 2003 Good Beer Guide. This job is not always as appealing as it sounds (particularly as you have to try all a pub's beers), but it is good fun and the more people that contribute, either by suggesting pubs that are worth considering for inclusion or by actively getting involved and visiting pubs, the better quality the finished result. So, if there are pubs that you feel we neglect to recognise or pubs that we rave about that you think are rubbish, please let us know!

All are welcome on our socials, so why not join us for an evening of good beer. Dates, times and contacts for Branch events are shown in the diary section.

THE Pints West distribution turned up a nice surprise. For the first time, we decided to pop into **The Raglan** in Upper Church Road. We were somewhat startled to see Brains SA from Cardiff. Not a bad pint and The Raglan is the only pub in Weston to offer this beer. Before we had the chance to ask whether the landlord would like to take some Pints Wests, three copies were whisked from our grasp by customers.

As suggested in the last Pints West, **The White Hart** in Palmer Row has given Butcombe a rest and after a brief flirtation with RCH Hewish IPA, it seems to have now settled on Sharp's Cornish Jack as their sole real ale. This is a pleasant session beer weighing in at 3.8% abv.

The Dragon Inn ran a brief Exmoor brewery festival. It was not publicised anywhere outside of the pub and most CAMRA people missed it. Beers were Hart, Fox, Gold, Stag and Wild Cat.

Another recent festival was a three-day music and real ale festival held at **The Old**

Inn, Hutton. Fourteen beers were on offer, including Orkney Raven Ale, Ridley's Rumpus, Brains Buckley's Merlin's Oak and Timothy Taylor Landlord. Both the quality of the beers and the entertainment were very good.

The same weekend saw a festival at **Winscombe Cricket Club**. No less than thirty-five beers on offer, including six from Sharps, three each from Otter and Ringwood and two from Robinsons.

Nice to see the odd dark beer appearing in town for a change. **The Dragon Inn** recently had the excellent Bateman's Dark Mild. If anyone thinks a beer has to be strong to be tasty, they should try this 3% mild and be proved wrong. **Off The Rails** all too briefly had Granny Wouldn't Like It from the Wolf Brewery which is located in Attleborough, Norfolk. It is described in the Good Beer Guide as “a symphony of taste” and it certainly travelled well.

Haven't been to **The Imperial** for a while, but sources report that a change in management has seen the demise of real ale.

Off The Rails wins the award for best bargain this time round, selling RCH PG Steam at £1.40 a pint. Something to ponder on the next time a landlord is explaining to you why he has to charge over £2 for a pint of beer.

One recent Saturday, Smiles employees were handing out free Heritage in **Safeway!** Apparently this was the first time they had done anything quite like this and the view was that it was successful. Certainly during the ten minutes or so that I was hanging around the stand there was a constant stream of customers and the beer seemed to be very well received. Some interesting discussions took place – several people asked where you could get Smiles beers in and around Weston and some were surprised to hear that it was brewed in Bristol. I got the impression that plenty of people would probably prefer to consume local produce. My personal view is that if people had the necessary information (not a bombardment of expensive, gimmicky advertising), they would move away from the pseudo German/Danish/Australian offerings that sell in such bizarrely high numbers. Speaking of which.....

Seen on a beer menu in a bar in Brussels – “Budweiser: For rednecks who don't know or care what they are drinking.”

Tim Nickolls

Diary

Wednesday 31 October – Minibus outing to hidden-away gems in deepest Somerset, starting at the Halfway House, Pitney. Bus leaves Off The Rails at 7:45. Cost £5. Places limited. Ring Mike Coleman on 01934 631441 to book your place.

Thursday 15 November – Congresbury crawl. Joint social with Bristol & District Branch. Bus X1 from Marine Parade 7:35, Borough Arms 7:45. Return buses at 10:17 and 11:37.

Wednesday 21 November – Queen's Arms, Bleadon, 8:30.

Wednesday 19 December – 3rd Annual Seasonal Ales Crawl. Meet at The Regency 8:00-8:45. Rest of itinerary to be decided on the night.

Wednesday 16 January 2002 – Good Beer Guide survey trip. At least 4 pubs to be visited. Minibus leaves Off The Rails 7:45. Cost £5. Book place with Mike Coleman on 01934 631441.

Contacts

Tim Nickolls - 01934 628996 (eves)
Rich Neale - 01934 429808 (eves)

CAMRA Bath & Borders Branch

Beers of the Festival

AQUAE SULIS



FESTUM CEREVISIAE
MMI

The results of the Beer of the Festival competition, voted on at the Bath Beer Festival held in the Bath Pavilion between Friday the 12th and Saturday the 13th of October, are...

- First:** Wickwar Mr. Perrett's Traditional Stout
- Second:** Abbey Bellringer
- Third:** Cheriton Village Elder

SOCIALS and MEETINGS

Tuesday 30th October. Minibus trip to west Wiltshire area, taking in a good selection of pubs, including the Two Pigs in Corsham, and the Pear Tree in Witley.

Thursday 8th November. Social at the Fleurs De Lys in Norton St Philip, a lovely old haunted pub.

Thursday 15th November. Social at the Pig and Fiddle, Broad St Bath. This is now a free house with an excellent range of ales.

Tuesday 20th November. A trip to the Wheatsheaf in Combe Hay, south of Bath. This is a lovely country pub overlooking the Limply Stoke Valley.

Tuesday 27th November. Branch meeting at the Star, on the Paragon in Bath. One of this year's Pubs of the Year and serving the Beer of the 2000 Festival, Abbey Bellringer.

Wednesday 5th December. Social at the Horse and Groom at East Woodlands, near Frome. A good selection of beers in this country pub.

Wednesday 19th December. A social in the Salamander in Bath. This is Bath Ales' new pub in Bath and if as good as the Hop

Pole should be a welcome addition to the city centre.

Friday 11th January. Minibus trip to the Lackock area.

Wednesday 16th January. The Yew Tree, Warminster.

Socials contact only

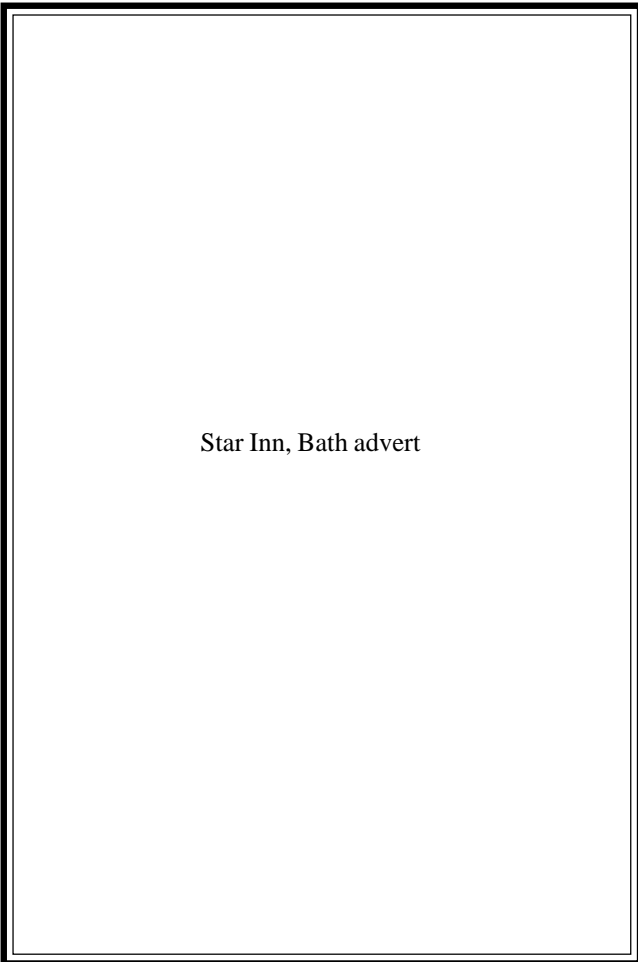
James Honey
Tel 01225 868481

Branch contact

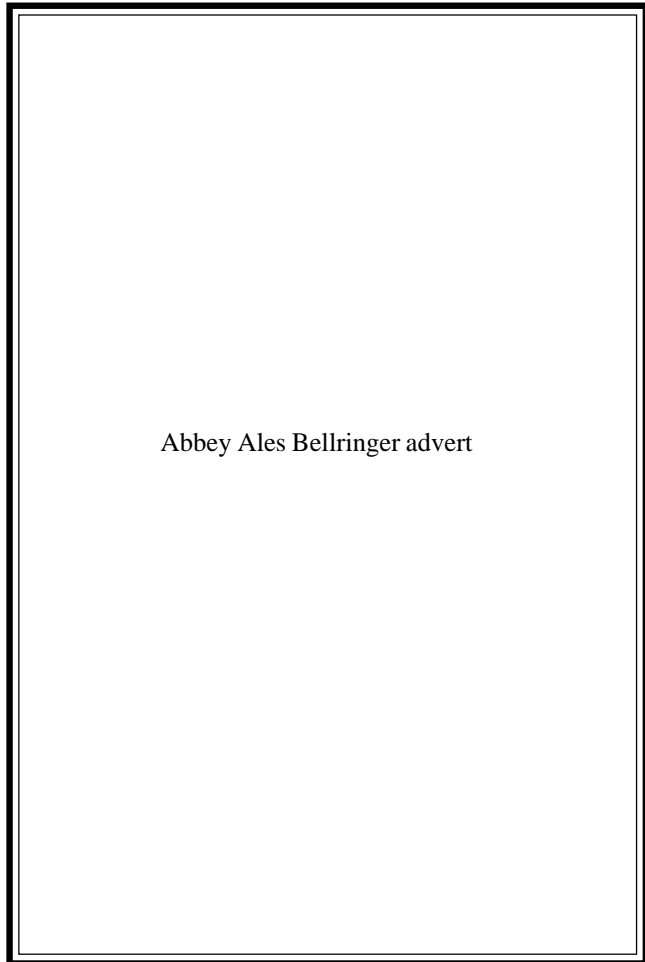
Denis Rahilly
Tel 01225 791399 or 07711 004501
Email: DENRAHILLY@AOL.COM



Apologies from Bath CAMRA to the **Belvoir Castle** which we claimed was closed in the last edition. We have been informed that it is still open and thriving. Our deepest apologies again.



Star Inn, Bath advert



Abbey Ales Bellringer advert

News from the Abbey

Chorister, the new autumn seasonal ale from Bath's Abbey Ales proved so popular just a week after it was released that the brewery has agreed to brew another batch!

The 4.5% abv dark, malty brew launched in September sold out almost immediately it went on sale. The best bitter brewed initially for CAMRA beer festivals will still only be sold locally to pubs in the brewery's distribution area, a 15-mile radius of the famous Bath Abbey.

One of the first pubs to serve the new beer, the Star Inn on The Paragon, re-ordered almost immediately. Landlord Terry Langley said, "The day we put it on sale we noticed the good response from our regular customers, followed by visiting real ale enthusiasts who had seen news of Chorister

on the internet and who travelled to Bath especially to try it. We felt we had better re-order quickly as we the knew the brewery only intended to do just the one brew." The Belvedere on Lansdown, Lambrettas Bar in the Parade, Park Hotel and the Jolly Sailor Saltford also all re-ordered immediately.

Managing director Alan Morgan said, "Martin Langham, our head brewer, wanted to brew a different beer to our regular brew Bellringer which is a golden, hoppy beer and produced Chorister, a dark, malty beer, completely opposite in fact to Bellringer. Ten brewer's barrels were produced initially (just under 3,000 pints) which is all we

intended to brew. He was very pleased with the response and is now fitting in another brew."

Abbey Ales had intended to produce a range of seasonal beers on a regular basis since its launch four years ago in 1997 but the popularity of its prize-winning best bitter Bellringer proved so successful the brewery had to fit seasonal beers in when the opportunity arose. The arrival of a new assistant brewer and work at the Lansdown Road brewery has now eased the situation and the brewery is confident that the next seasonal brew Twelfth Night will follow on time at Christmas.

"I am sure Twelfth Night will prove just as popular," added Terry. "Quality always sells."

Another festival

In the last edition, under the heading of "Festivals Galore!", we told of the gaining popularity of real ale festivals, ranging from large events organised by CAMRA showcasing scores or hundreds of different beers; through pub chains hosting festivals throughout their estates (e.g. Wetherspoon or Hogshead); to enthusiastic and enterprising local publicans promoting a modest selection of well-chosen real ales. The Lamplighters in Shirehampton and the Shakespeare in Totterdown were mentioned as examples.

Another pub that hosts an annual mini beer festival is the Bag O'Nails in Hotwells. Following the success of last year's there will be another – bigger than the last – from Thursday 22nd to Sunday 25th November featuring at least 30 real ales. At any one time there should be ten available including a mild, a stout and an organic beer. The pub will be open all day from noon with food available up to 8pm.

There will be two other attractions at the festival. Firstly, it will host the "premiere" of Nursery Brewery's newest offering, Oat King Cole, on the subject of which, Malcolm Shipp of Nursery says: "We have already brewed the Christmas porter Oat King Cole, at 6% ABV. This is an oatmeal porter which is resting currently in 40-gallon ex-rum wooden casks. This first brew is completely sold out in advance and is not actually on release until December, but such is demand that we'll brew a second batch and that's it for this year." So get down to the Bag for a special sneak preview of this beer.

Secondly, there will be a special CAMRA membership promotion (at least on day one), so any non-members are welcome to come along and see what we have on offer for them.

SP

Cornubia advert

READERS' LETTERS



Dear Sir,

Recent articles in the trade press have further highlighted the growing crisis affecting pubs leased from the ever more powerful 'Pubcos'. These reports reflect the calls I have received from around the country from landlords operating under one of the most feudal business systems in existence in the business world. For my part, the long-standing disagreement I have with 'INNSPIRED' serves as a classic example of what many tenants are struggling to deal with. My views and experiences have already been given space in this magazine, but I can sense a growing feeling of discontent in the industry. More and more of us are prepared to stand up against what is clearly an outdated and unfair system. Pubcos are beginning to realise that just because the law (in the form of a wholly inadequate 'Beer Orders' legislation) says they can operate as they do, doesn't mean it is either right, or just.

Recently I called upon my local Member of Parliament, Val Davey, to listen to and hopefully lend support to the concerns fellow licensees and I have concerning rent levels, the tie and the contractual obligations of the pub owners (the pubco). Although low-key I asked if any of the 'INNSPIRED' management would like to attend and was pleased to see the Chief Executive, Peter Brook and the Director of Operations, Richard Ing accepted the offer.

The meeting was slanted toward a case for abolishing the tie within the Pubco estates. To support this I had produced a document listing the many points that had been put to me over a period of some 18 months from Pubco landlords supporting my stance. The two most common items were those of beer wholesale pricing and the calculation of rent. To the first, my enquiries still support our view that Pubcos impose a 25-30% mark-up from dealing direct with a brewer/wholesaler. Why do I need to contact a telesales team in Trowbridge that no longer supports its own, independent brewery and merely acts as a third party for a large national brewer? The argument that this protects my lower rent in relation to the Free Trade is a myth that can be easily dispelled. INNSPIRED produced information some time ago that went to print in the trade press. In it they claimed that their rents were based "ON A FAIR, MAINTAINABLE TRADE". The reality is that like all landlords they in fact charge the maximum market value obtainable. Individual pub accounts and

actual barrellage are not even considered. I know, I've been there! The INNSPIRED Target Incentive (for barrellage) merely returns to the tenant that which they paid over and above in the first place.

When asked to comment, Peter Brook offered the defence I expected. If I didn't like it, buy a Freehouse! The law allows him to do it, so do it he will! The whole point of the discussion was to investigate ways of preventing such comments. If the law allows such people to cast aside the aspirations of a dedicated section of the trade then the law must be reviewed. The tie is under scrutiny by the European Court and hopefully some sense will come of it. Throughout the meeting I had the feeling that I was talking to deaf ears and a management blind to the concerns of its own tenants. Val Davey listened attentively and questioned every point. My management cast our concerns aside as an irrelevance.

On the subject of contractual obligations, recent problems encountered by many of us with cellar cooling and electrics in general led to all INNSPIRED tenants receiving a letter detailing a new 'service charge'. This amounts to a common charge levied to all, covering Periodic Gas and Electrical Testing, Cellar Cooling Maintenance and Building Insurance. Under the terms of my lease and under law, I think gas and electrical safety testing are wholly the responsibility of the landlord. Furthermore, by recharging me the building premium I am now

indirectly responsible for all repairs to their property. My lease clearly states that structural repairs are the Pubcos responsibility. If the policy is used in such repairs then surely it's me that is paying for it. More claims, higher premiums!

As far as proving responsibility for repairs is concerned, precious time is wasted by tenants who should be channelling their energies into their businesses instead of constantly performing 'finger-in-the-damn' remedies until the Pubco admit responsibility. In my experience, 26 weeks is the average response time for work to be done. If I fall foul of the company, it's a visit from the bailiff within a week. Too many local tenants have experienced this very one-sided aspect of our lease agreements.

I remain dedicated to resolving what many now see as a neglected side to our trade. Intimidation and bullying is not the way to create a mutually profitable company. Sense and fairness must prevail over greed and an eye to quick profit before sell-off. I am always keen to hear from anyone with views or similar experiences. As a unified voice we have a say. As frightened, intimidated individuals we have nothing!

Raymond A. Barnes
Eldon House,
6, Lower Clifton Hill,
Bristol BS8 1BT
Tel. (0117) 9264964

More letters on pages 22 and 23

Photo

Better late than never – Richard Brooks (right), chairman of the Bristol & District branch of CAMRA, presents John Harris of West Croft Cider with an award for his Janet's Jungle Juice. This excellent concoction was declared Cider of the Festival at the Bristol Beer and Cider Festival 2001. Sample it at next year's festival, or in the meantime at the Coronation in Bedminster.
(Photo by Mike Lang – www.imagery.org.uk)

Cider I up Landlord!

I HAVE been a dedicated real ale drinker for around 15 years now, visiting festivals, breweries and public houses in all areas of the country. However, I also get a great deal of enjoyment from drinking natural cider made from traditional apples, and also perry, made from pears, if and when on the extremely rare occasion a pub sells it!

Readers may or may not be aware that in 1998, a group called APPLE was set up within CAMRA to officially support cider in a more pro-active manner than had previously been the case; to promote, campaign, advise and collect information on all aspects of cider and perry.

In addition to this, late last year an excellent **Good Cider Guide**, edited by Dave Matthews, was published. This is an extremely informative and well-researched guide. It gives vital information on where the best cider producers and pubs are located, county by county, what they sell, opening times, and particularly in case of the producers, how to get there, plus many other informative articles which are well worth a read.

Fortunately, in the geographical area that we cover, Bristol & District, we are blessed with a decent range of pubs selling the 'good stuff' (though perry is a rare site indeed). There are the large but still enjoying a good reputation **Thatcher's** outlets, to the award

winning **West Croft** cider, which can be imbibed in a pub that I will mention shortly, although some might argue that the range is somewhat limited.

I thought I'd suggest one worthwhile crawl of four of Bristol's pubs which sell decent cider, and I would suggest starting at the **Apple Tree**, located at 27, Philip Street, Bedminster, which is on a side street close to Bedminster Parade. Here you quaff **Taunton Traditional** in a single-roomed cider house which is a contender for the smallest pub in Bristol, and is full of local characters.

There are several ways of getting to the next pub, and I am sure most readers will be familiar with it anyway. For the purposes of this article, I'll suggest going back up Bedminster Parade, and turning left onto Coronation Road. A road on the left (I think it's the third) is Dean Lane. Walk a few yards down here and to the right is the Coronation, home of both the excellent Hop Back beer range and the magnificent, award-winning **West Croft Janet's Jungle Juice**, which is a personal favourite of mine.

After a couple of thirst quenching pints here, go back up Dean Lane and prepare yourself for quite a long walk along Coronation Road to the left. It's worth it though because you eventually arrive at the **Avon Packet** at number 185. This is a wonderful



pub full of character selling **Taunton Traditional**, **Thatcher's Traditional** and **Cheddar Valley** (which is almost orange in colour). Don't miss going outdoors, with ducks and the site of a bear pit once used for bear baiting. This pub also sells home-cooked food right up to closing time.

After a couple more pints it might be time for some to go home, but if you've got the energy, come out of the Avon Packet, and cross the bridge over the river which is close by. Walk a few hundred yards to the right up Cumberland Road and you'll eventually reach a left-hand turning called Hanover Place. Here you'll find the final destination, the excellent **Orchard Inn**, which sells more **Taunton** and **Thatcher's**. A couple of more pints here, and that's certainly enough for me – I'm going home!

In the next Pints West, I will endeavour to suggest more pubs worth visiting, including classics like the **Cotham Porter Stores**, and another gem further into the countryside, the **Star** at Pucklechurch.

Richard Walters

Wickwar BOB advert

Hopback Brewery and Coronation advert

A visit to the Nursery (the BAD tour)

As the readers of the last edition of *Pints West* will recall, we now have a new brewery in our midst, so it was with much anticipation we headed to Stockwood Vale, near Keynsham, to be the first CAMRA branch to visit the Nursery Brewery.

Some of us had already sampled the beers in advance, at the brewery's launch evening at the *Cornubia* in Bristol, at Worcester beer festival and at some of our more enterprising local pubs, but somehow a beer always tastes better in the brewery!

There are breweries that look as one imagines a brewery should look like, set in a picture-postcard, peaceful country scene. Nursery is not one of these! The brewing equipment, which migrated from a closed Yorkshire brew-pub, is contained in a small unit which adjoins the offices and storage area of **Shipping Beer**, a beer wholesale company whose supremo Malcolm Shipp is the driving force behind the new brewery, and the size of the area Malcolm has now leased is a testament to the success his enterprises are enjoying.

Brewer Steve Cheesewright gave us a most informative and enjoyable talk, and then it was down to sampling the beers. Steve is a brewer of considerable pedigree, having joined from Sutton brewery in Plymouth, and all the Nursery beers are very enjoyable,

each having its own character. The beer range currently includes **Hey Diddle Diddle**, **Three Blind Mice** and **Old Mother Hubbard**. Personally, I look out in particular for **Little Miss Muffet**, which carries a lot of flavour for its 3.8% gravity, and knocks spots off many of the bland beers we find brewed at a similar gravity. Our thanks go to Malcolm, Steve and all the team at Shipping Beer for their excellent hospitality.

Earlier in the summer, on a typically rainy Saturday, a group of us set out from Temple Meads to try something new, a Bristol pub crawl by train! The Severn Beach line is an economic and quick way of visiting both outlying and central areas, a return to Shirehampton (at the time of writing) costing only £2.40, with a train running around every 40/60 minutes (please note, no Sunday service).

The *Lamplighters* at Shirehampton was our first stop. This pub is rapidly gaining a good reputation for quality real ales, as those who attended the beer and music festival recently held there will know. After a very pleasant hour we boarded the train, our destination being Clifton Down station. Here we alighted and headed straight to Wadworth's *Penny Farthing*, a real ale haven in

the area, usually featuring at least half a dozen real ales. Next stop was Montpelier, where we visited the *Cadbury House*, which features Wickwar beers, plus a guest beer. We sat in the patio area out the back, watching the rain come down and trying the very interesting food.

Dashing through the showers, we took the short journey to Easton, where you practically fall off the platform into the splendid *Sugarloaf*, a free house featuring four real ales, including a house beer from Moles, and also real cider. Last stop before returning to Temple Meads was Lawrence Hill station, where five minutes walk towards Redfield takes you to the *St Georges Hall*, a typical Wetherspoon's outlet.

Pub surveying trips have taken us wide and far around Somerset and South Gloucestershire, a couple of pubs which have stood out recently have been the *Castle of Comfort* at East Harptree, which has good beer, good food and a good atmosphere, the amazingly traditional *Blue Flame* at Nailsea, and closer to home, the *Princess of Wales* at Bedminster, now in the hands of Wickwar brewery.

For details of more Bristol & District CAMRA activities, look at the "Diary" section on the back page.

Phil Cummings

Bell, Kingsdown advert

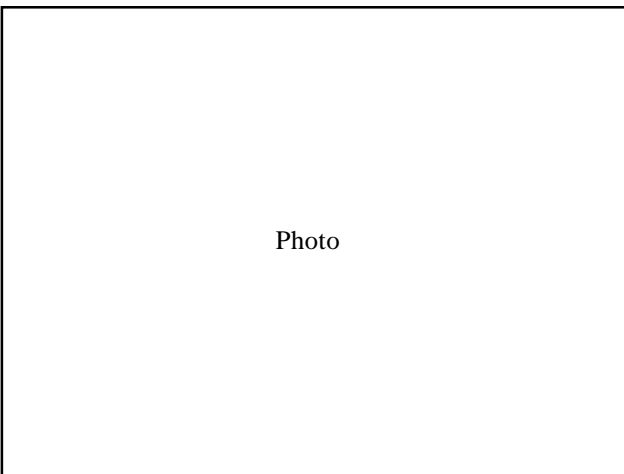
Bunch of Grapes advert

A trip to Oakhill

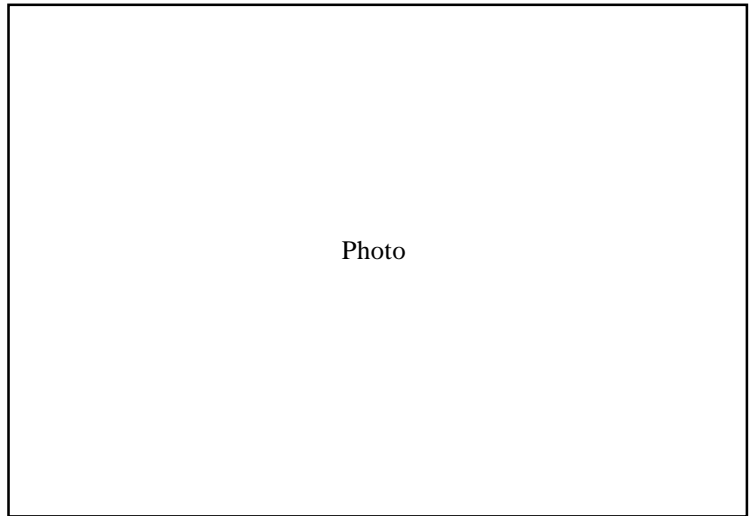
One of our more recent trips was a visit to the Oakhill Brewery in the Mendips, where head brewer Gary Lumbar was on hand to give us a guided tour and explain how their excellent beers were made.

Oakhill is steeped in history. First established in the Mendip village of Oakhill in 1767, Oakhill Brewery was nationally known for its "Invalid Stout" until brewing ceased as a result of the buildings being destroyed by fire in 1924.

Brewing was started again in 1984 on part of the original site, and in 1993 to meet the increasing demand a larger site was acquired in the village at the Old Maltings. A further £500,000 expansion in 1997 increased the



Photo



Photo

Fermentation vessels

brewing capacity to 60 barrels per day.

In May 1997, Oakhill Best Bitter won the Champion Beer Award from over 300 entries for the Taste of the West, presented by the chairman of Safeway's at the Royal Bath and West Show.

Oakhill have also won awards for their beers in 1998 and 1999, and they continue to receive awards for excellence.

One of my favourite beers, being a dark beer fan, is Oakhill's Black Magic Stout, which Gary was kind enough to let us sample on our visit. This is a bitter stout brewed to 4.5% abv, with a roast malt flavour and hints of mellow coffee and chocolate. It has often featured at the Bristol Beer Festival and I hope it will again in the future.

The mash tun

First impressions - 3

Bristol – a surprising city!

(John Armstrong)

Having just moved here from Liverpool and Leicester, the variety and historical character of Bristol comes as a pleasant surprise, as does the real ale scene.

On the beers front, the distinctive flavours of local micros such as Abbey Ales, Bath Ales, Wickwar, RCH and Nursery have impressed. The city is fortunate to have such a range of micros. A great pity about the closure of the Courage Brewery, and the shaky performance of Smiles on both the brewing and pubs fronts. Courage Best (or should that be Worst?) retains a strong following, as did Higsons in Liverpool long after the taste and quality had departed to breweries new and various (as did the beer itself after a few lacklustre years). A pity Bristol did not have the equivalent of Cains to restore its brewing tradition. Another pleasant surprise has been the strong local following for flat Bass, a preference that

would be appreciated in Burton on Trent. Let us hope that the brewery ownership changes will take Bass back to the glory of its union days.

As a fan of real cider, the Bristol cider pubs have been a bit of a pilgrimage, but a shame that only the big brands tend to be sold. How about some smaller farmhouse products?

On the pubs front, it is good to see real pubs surviving the influx of scene and cafe bars. Again, Bristol enjoys good variety of real ale pubs, and has not yet been swamped by nitrokeg as some cities have been. Good to see a basic pub like the Phoenix surviving in the city centre, alongside the flagships such as the Cornubia and the Bag O'Nails, both excellent, friendly pubs. Other favourites have been the Merchant's Arms in Hotwells, the Myrtle Tree for its flat Bass, the Coronation in Bedminster, the Bridge Inn and the King's Head for its special interior. It is good to see pubs like the Bunch of Grapes working hard to raise their real ale

Three people new to Bristol give their impressions of the beer and pubs scene

profile and expanding their range. And that's not to mention the excellent rural pubs yet to be explored!

Shame about Horts. A centrally-located real ale micro brewery pub offering variety and quality. Being a Young's pub is not quite the same thing. Will another company realise there is a market opportunity for a centrally-located freehouse showcasing micro breweries? Anyway, thanks to Horts, Mark One and Matt for showing it can be done. Shame about Clifton – again, crying out for a real ale freehouse. Shame about high prices – £2.40 for London Pride – pardon?! Shame about the hopeless bus service, shame on FirstBus!

What about Bristol CAMRA? Friendly, welcoming, active, with well-organised meetings, excellent trips, a newsletter the size of a telephone directory and several times more interesting to read! So why not come along to a meeting, join a trip, and find out for yourself? I did.

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)

Swamped

Take a peek at the "Swamp"...

Since I wrote to you last I'm a little embarrassed to admit that I received a short-lived notoriety for achieving what it seems was a classic touch down in the "Swamp" (Kings Head on Kingswood High Street) – touch down being the phrase used to describe a temporary collapse into oblivion after an overdose of Thatcher's. Sarah, the landlady, is proud of them. (*Are you sure about that?* - Ed.) I understand that the record stands at something like six or eight in one day.

Despite these quite regularly-witnessed glutinous binges, as daft as it may sound I genuinely believe that an ambience of respectability and even sophistication is achieved on Sunday afternoons when generous servings of nibbles are put on the bar for all to enjoy amongst recently refurbished surroundings. I go there with Carmen on Sundays and by tea-time her appetite is always ruined as so many people fail to resist her adoring eyes and give her titbits. Mind you, it doesn't much as she's a miniature Pekinese, with a very good pedigree I'll have you know. Just maybe her presence even adds to that air of decency I spoke of. Despite popular belief she is not, as Sarah the landlady sometimes describes her, a bog brush on legs. I beg to differ. In fact I'll just leave it to future customers to see and decide for themselves.

Go on now, you really have no reason not to take the plunge and get stuck in. Cheese, biscuits, pickled onions, and a pint of Thatcher's – lovely.

Craig Weaden
Staple Hill
Bristol



Dismayed

Dear Mr Plumridge,

I have just enjoyed reading your Summer issue of Pints West, having picked up a copy in the 'Bunch of Grapes' in Bradford-upon-Avon upon a recent visit.

As an ex-student of Bristol, I was somewhat dismayed to hear that the Highbury Vaults has been taken over by Young's. I hope its unique character has not been too adversely affected.

I enclose a cheque for £2 and request that I be added to the Pints West mailing list. I also wonder if you may have a contact address for a similar publication for the South Wales area.

Anthony Williams,
Penarth, Vale of Glamorgan.

Gwent branch produce "Beer Necessities" – contact Chris Gillette: 01633 867559 (eve), chris.gillette@gwentcamra.org.uk, web page www.gwentcamra.org.uk.

As for the Highbury, though the beer range has changed, the pub remains otherwise pretty much the same - Ed.

Friend wanted

I'm sorry to trouble you but I am trying to locate a good friend of mine called Martin Goodliffe. I believe he is now is a publican in Bristol where I was raised. Would you be able to pass my enquiry on to him? I would appreciate any assistance you can provide.

Yours sincerely

Bob Langridge, Western Australia.

If Martin Goodliffe is out there he is welcome to make himself known through the editor.

Oh! Le Chateau!

We paid a visit to Le Chateau on Park Street just after its reopening. On entering, it looked like any of the trendy refurbished bars opening in Bristol: stripped flooring, marble table tops and restaurant-priced food. Oh, where's Le Chateau of yesteryear, the dark interior, the old spiral staircase, candles in the bottles and the atmosphere? Where is it all gone? The standing room has been replaced by more tables, obviously geared for dining as the waitress asked what we wanted to eat as we were enjoying our drinks. (We weren't there to eat!) Obviously food is a priority here now. But what of the beers? A selection of three Young's Ales: Wagglance, Young's Special and Young's Bitter. There was also Smiles Best and a couple of lagers and cider. The Wagglance was OK, but not as good as the one just sampled in Young's other recently-acquired Bristol pub, Horts. In our opinion, the Smiles was nothing special either. The new Le Chateau: bright, airy restaurant-style bar. Oh, for the old atmospheric, dark watering-hole of yesteryear!

Will Malik and Lin Gilks.

Magic

Dear Steve,

In your 51st edition, I was pleased to note the letter from a Mr Tim Mars regarding our Bass.

In response to this, I thought it would be appreciated to mention our new promotion at The Magic Box. Bass, Directors, Butcombe, Theakstons and a wide selection of guest ales (abv 3.8 to 5.7%), some of which are even picked by our regulars, are now at a fantastic 99p all day every day!

With myself being a member of CAMRA, I feel it is important to promote and sell good quality cask-conditioned ales at reasonable prices. This is reflected at the Magic Box and throughout JD Wether-spoon.

Also, I enjoy a good pint and was pleased to see my regular, the Red Lion in Mangotsfield, mentioned for its quality ale. Many thanks, and keep up the good work.

Nigel Thorpe
Manager, Magic Box
Cheltenham Road, Bristol.

No Smiles so no smiles

Hello Bristol CAMRA,

Enjoying a couple of excellent pints of "Otter Head" at the Dorothy Inn, Weymouth, today, I picked up the beer stained Pints West and read it with great interest. Congratulations on a superb magazine and I will look for the July edition when I go in again! (*This letter was received just as the July edition had gone to press - Ed.*)

I noticed the Dorothy Inn has an advert and of course lots of Bristol drinkers love Weymouth. I'm a connoisseur of Eldridge Pope's Royal Oak myself and my regular drink is at the Wellington Arms in St. Albans Street, about four minutes away. I like the Dorothy – it has character and they keep a good range of ale well.

I have long been a lover of Smiles Heritage (nee Exhibition) and used to visit our friends in Gloucester on a regular basis, just so that I could get to the "Linden Tree" where there would be three Wadworth beers (including Farmers Glory, now murdered by design) and three guest beers from Smiles, Butcombe and Hall & Woodhouse. Smiles Exhibition was often one of the guests.

Smiles has always been difficult to find and in March, Joan and I went to the Double Locks near Exeter in the hope of enjoying Smiles. A marvellous pub in a magnificent location by the GWR main line, but bought-out by Youngs. No Smiles and no smiles on our faces either, although they had nine other good beers on offer. The Manager said Youngs had taken over all the Smiles houses recently and Smiles beers were all taken out. However there was an impressive selection, three on handpump and six on gravity: Youngs Bitter, Special, Triple A and Winter Warmer, plus Mauldons Black Adder (very tasty), Admans Broadside, Branscombe

Vale Branoc, Everards Old Original and Batemans XB.

There are bottles of the Smiles beer in Safeway and I have bought a dozen, but much prefer the draught. Where can it be found in these parts? Does anyone know? As I said earlier, Wadworth houses used to have it, but no longer.

We will have to plan an expedition to Bristol and Colston Yard. My wife wants to go to the Belgo Restaurant, just apparently opened in the City. A good combination.

Well done on an excellent magazine and obviously a very alive CAMRA Branch.

Michel Hooper-Immins,
Radipole, Weymouth, Dorset.

Heritage nowadays is only a seasonal beer from Smiles, not available in cask all year round. Ed.

And now no Eldridge Pope!

Hello again Steve,

I looked into the Dorothy Inn this afternoon for a pleasant couple of pints of Rare Hare from Bath Ales. I saw your newsletter there, stained with beer and plainly well read. You do produce an excellent magazine.

The story I've included below may be of interest to your readers – there are a number of Eldridge Pope houses around your area.

Best wishes,
Michel Hooper-Immins.
Radipole, Weymouth, Dorset.

ELDRIDGE POPE AXES LOCAL FAVOURITES by Michel Hooper-Immins...

Dorset pub company Eldridge Pope are axing all three Dorchester brewed ales in October, first blaming “quality and brewing run” problems, then lack of demand. Peter Ward, Managing Director of Thomas Hardy Brewery, is unequivocal in allocating blame. “The decline of EP’s brands has been brought about by a deliberate policy to buy in national brands at the expense of supporting their own and is nothing to do with the quality or service provided by the Brewery, as implied in a recent letter.” The last pints of Royal Oak and other Dorchester ales are being served.

The famous Royal Oak, Hardy Country Bitter and Pope’s Traditional ales are produced on contract by the Thomas Hardy Brewery at Dorchester, although Eldridge Pope retain ownership of the brands. In a leaked letter to licensees, EP Trade Director John Yonwin claimed: “The declining market in cask ale has meant we shall stop stocking products from the Thomas Hardy Brewery. This has come about primarily because of quality and brewing run reasons. It is almost impossible to achieve constant high product quality when volumes are now so small and declining.”

A week later, Finance Director John Harper changed tack and contended: “The

reason for discontinuing our brands arises from lack of demand and not poor quality from the brewer.” He denied EP has deliberately reduced the volume of beer purchased from the Thomas Hardy Brewery. Peter Ward countered: “When I bought the Brewery, EP brands were forecast in excess of 20,000 barrels a year. Because of substitution, sales are now less than 4,000 barrels a year. EP have consistently replaced their own brands with bought-in beers from national brewers Scottish Courage, Bass and Carlsberg-Tetley, since the sale of Dorchester Brewery to Thomas Hardy in 1996.” EP is the smallest customer of the Thomas Hardy Brewery, which contract brews for Morrells, Ushers and others.

Imminent loss of the popular flagship Royal Oak Strong Ale, Hardy Country Bitter and Pope’s Traditional, produced to suit local tastes, has upset many of Eldridge Pope’s customers in Dorset and elsewhere. Landlords are expressing alarm and concern at withdrawal of the whole range, particularly as replacements are all bland national brands- including Ansells, Tetley, Courage, John Smiths and Theakston.

One EP licensee said: “If I lose my popular Royal Oak and Hardy Country, then have to replace them with undistinguished Tetleys and Ansells, most of my customers will simply go elsewhere for a local beer. Eldridge Pope is going to have some very unhappy customers- then no customers at all. No customers equals no pub equals no job.”

Eldridge Pope are heavily criticised by local campaigners for giving no thought to consulting their customers. Since news broke in the Dorset Echo that all three favourite EP beers are to be axed, there has been much concern expressed among customers, managers and tenants, who do not want to lose them. Neither do they favour replacement of the distinctive Dorchester beers by nationals trucked in from Yorkshire and Newcastle.

Some say, if EP beers must be axed, why could they not be replaced by similar local brews such as Palmers 200 from Bridport, Ringwood Fortyniner or Smiles Heritage from Bristol? West Country brews from Palmers, Wadworth, Weymouth Quay, Hall & Woodhouse and Ringwood are all easily available in South Dorset.

Many loyal EP customers have seen it coming and some say it has been long planned, ever since Eldridge Pope started gradually replacing Dorchester ales with Courage and Tetley. The Station and The Junction, two EP pubs within sight of the Brewery, opened after refurbishment with no EP cask beer at all, just Tetleys. Earlier this year, Operations Manager Mike Henderson claimed the switch at The Junction was “in response to the majority of customers.” Questions about how such a customer poll had been conducted during closure, were ignored! The Old Ship in Dorchester, similarly refurbished, reopened

with no EP ale, just Courage Best Bitter and Directors at £2.30 a pint. Two doors away, Wetherspoon sell the same beer for £1.49! The opportunity to promote and showcase a distinctive local product was lost.

EP Finance Director John Harper claimed: “We have done nothing to discourage tenants from buying our brands and offered them in our managed houses for as long as it has been viable.” This flies in the face of known history, where it is now unusual to find an EP pub that sells EP beer! “Our customers are not buying our own brands, even when they are on offer, but prefer the well known brands,” bravely continued John Harper, ignoring the overwhelming evidence of mass replacement by Courage, Bass and Tetleys over several years.

“I have a great sentimental interest in the Thomas Hardy Brewery and a great liking for a lot of the Eldridge Pope brands,” said EP Chairman Christopher Pope last month. “I am personally very sad about the decline in the sale of EP ales.” A longtime champion of good real ale, Christopher Pope takes “every opportunity to drink a pint of EP beer, but I do not interfere with decisions made by the executive team.”

Looking back ten years, Eldridge Pope was the leading Brewery and Pub Company in South Dorset, known for all round quality, owing a chain of 178 public houses, mainly 90 throughout Dorset, but others all over neighbouring counties. Led by Christopher and Jeremy Pope, it was a much respected regional company with a superb reputation for both its ales and public houses, mostly solidly traditional with hand pumps. In January 1999, Peter Phillipson became Chief Executive, now suddenly departed to Madame Tussauds. He was paid £241,264 in 2000. Michael Johnson took over as Chief Executive this month, formerly in charge of Costa Coffee and Bella Pasta, a former Director of Whitbread. Today EP has 117 managed houses and 63 tenancies.

Two other issues rumble on in the background. Rumours persist that Eldridge Pope will be soon be subject to a takeover, by Greene King, Fullers or Youngs. Freehold of the 11.27 acre EP site in Dorchester is to be sold to a property company, but 80% of the Weymouth Avenue land is occupied by the Brewery. Peter Ward, Managing Director of Thomas Hardy Brewery, was forthright last month: “As far as I am concerned it is business as usual. We have two leases on the Dorchester Brewery site for 24 years from 1997 and have not agreed to surrender them. We will be brewing at Dorchester in the foreseeable future.” Other obstacles to development would include the three listed buildings – the 1880 Brewery itself, Eldridge Pope’s headquarters and the Wine Shop. There is also the possibility of substantial Roman remains being found, which would delay any redevelopment.

CAMRA'S flagship gets makeover for 21st century

THE GOOD BEER GUIDE, the flagship publication of the Campaign for Real Ale, has been given a complete overhaul for its 29th edition. It's part of the drive by CAMRA to shed the "beards-and-anorak" image beloved by satirists, and to prove that real ale is the smart drink for young people.

The guide still includes 5,000 of the best pubs serving cask-conditioned beer but 4,000 of them now have much longer descriptions.

Explains editor Roger Protz: "In the early days of CAMRA you needed a fast car, a powerful torch and an Ordnance Survey map to find real ale pubs. Today, with cask ale pubs in abundance, the problem is to single out the ones that serve the beer in tip-top condition. The old GBG descriptions, such as 'friendly back-street boozers', will no longer do for today's more sophisticated drinkers. They want to know more about the history, the architecture, the welcome, the food, and facilities for families when they choose which pub to visit.

"We set CAMRA members the daunting task of writing 100-word descriptions of pubs

and they have come up trumps. The Good Beer Guide is not only the longest-running and best-selling guide to pubs and breweries but also offers the most up-to-date information about them as a result of the efforts of our 60,000 members."

Just as CAMRA's major Great British Beer Festival has been masterminded by women organisers in recent years, the Good Beer Guide also has a powerful female influence, proving that good beer and good pubs are no longer the preserve of men.

Deputy Editor, Jill Adam, has worked on the Good Beer Guide for 11 years. She has been joined for the 2002 edition by new assistant editor Kate Green. Along with CAMRA's Editorial Co-ordinator Cressida Feiler, they form a powerful voice and influence over the direction of the guide.

And to underscore the point that women enjoy good beer, the guide's national launch was held in the Pelican pub in Ladbroke Grove, West London, the third in the group of organic pubs run by two women, Esther Boulton and Geetie Singh.

Picture of
Good Beer Guide

CHEFS FOLLOW IN CAMRA'S FOOTSTEPS TO BOOST PUB FOOD

'Pub chains hate chefs' - Antony Worrall Thompson

THE CAMPAIGN FOR REAL FOOD is following in the footsteps of the Campaign for Real Ale and is fighting to improve the quality of pub grub.

CARF was founded by publican Tom Finlay in 1997 and this year he won the support of top TV chef and restaurateur Antony Worrall Thompson, who is now president of the campaign. "I'm putting my name behind CARF because there are such important issues here," he told pub food writer Susan Nowak in the 2002 Good Beer Guide. "It's like the Campaign for Real Ale, which has been a fantastic campaign for a lot of pubs serving real ale. We need to do the same for food."

He does not have the highest opinion of British pub food and believes this an area where his campaign must concentrate. "Pub chains hate chefs," he says. "The majority of pubs buy in ready-made food." CARF aims to be a powerful voice promoting fresh food and forcing action on everything from GM crops to the EU red tape strangling small producers.

"What we want is a voice for the ordinary people. We all have to eat, and what we eat is important. There are 600 people in the Food Standards Agency and it's just a cop out. If the government had set up an agency with teeth, as they promised, it would be different - we might not have such a massive increase in cases of food poisoning, for instance. People are too reticent about complaining. We have to get on our soap boxes and make the British people the biggest moaners in the world, then perhaps we'll get somewhere."

Carl Smith, a director of CARF, added: "There really is a crying need to encourage pubs and restaurants to prepare wholesome meals from quality ingredients in their own kitchens."

CRAFT BREWERS SQUEEZED OUT OF MOST BRITISH PUBS

Beer drinkers denied "Best of British" says SIBA chairman

NICK STAFFORD, chairman of the Society of Independent Brewers (SIBA), writing in the 2002 edition of the CAMRA Good Beer Guide, says that small craft brewers are excluded from 73% of the country's pubs.

Mr Stafford, who brews prize-winning beers at Hambleton Ales in Yorkshire, argues that the main reason why craft brewers cannot get on to the bars of pubs owned by giant pub companies and national brewers is because they can't afford the vast discounts demanded by retailers.

He says that in 2001 SIBA, which represents most of the 400 British small craft breweries, has negotiated supply deals with two pub companies, Unique and Enterprise Inns, which will take the small brewers' beers in selected pubs.

"But no other national pub group, such as Punch or Pubmaster, have made similar commitments to small brewers' products," he writes. "The consumer does not know what he or she is missing when it comes to the real ale being produced by Britain's smallest brewers. Pub groups control 58% of the pubs in Britain. Add to that the big brewers' national and tenanted pubs, and the percentage of pubs closed to small brewers rises to 73%. Don't think for a moment that the inroads with Unique or Enterprise are going to change that: these two groups are making less than 10% of their estates available - a mere drop in the ocean."

Nick Stafford says the result of the stranglehold exercised by pub groups and national brewers means that the price of a pint for the consumer continues to rise.

"Pub groups' tenants and lessees have to buy from their pub groups. The pub groups negotiate with national brewers to get the lowest priced beer, and actively encourage the brewers to push up wholesale prices as far as they can.

"The licensee buys at these inflated prices

and, in order to make any significant margin - of say 45% - has to charge a retail price that consumers think is too high. To put it simply and crudely, the big brewers are having to offer the pub groups £120 discounts on a barrel of beer selling to the licensee at £240. Half of what the licensee pays goes into the pub groups' profits. The retailer will never be able to buy at a discounted wholesale price until the pub groups start taking less profit."

Beer drinkers are being denied true representation of the "Best of British" on the bar, Nick Stafford adds. "Just think of the number of times small brewers win the coveted Champion Beer of Britain awards and the beers are then not seen on the bars of the local pubs round the corner from the winning breweries. Market access is being denied to most brewers. There is a complex monopoly of beer distribution in Britain. Three quarters of pubs are owned by pub groups or national brewers, and they insist on centralised distribution systems. The pub groups have to have absolute control over distribution. These centralised distribution systems are run by just three companies: Bass Tradetean, Carlsberg-Tetley and Scottish Courage."

The answer, Nick Stafford says, is for pub groups to allow their retailers to buy one guest beer of their choice from an independent supplier delivering direct to the pubs. The advantages are obvious:

- Pub groups will suffer less from illicit purchasing - licensees buying beer outside their tied arrangement.
- Retailers will be able to source cheaper beer.
- Small brewers will have huge access to the market.
- And the consumer will be able to influence what he or she will drink and at an affordable cost.

BREWERS ACCUSED OF PASSING OFF FALSE BEERS SAYS GOOD BEER GUIDE

Brands names from dead breweries mislead drinkers

SEVERAL beers listed in the 2002 Good Beer Guide give the impression they come from living, independent brewers when in fact the breweries have been closed and the brands moved elsewhere, says editor Roger Protz.

He cites the case of pub group Morrells of Oxford. "Morrell's Oxford brewery closed in 1998, yet a full-colour brochure produced by the pub group declares it offers 'Three classic ales with the real taste of Oxford.'

"Warming to the theme, the brochure goes on: 'There's more to Oxford than its famous dreaming spires, noble lawns and ancient, honey-coloured colleges. Real Oxford life blends a rich cultural heritage with the here and now ... with Eights Week rowing on the Isis in May, languid punting on the meandering Cherwell and the clamour of Varsity match, and a pint or two of Morrells in celebration. Morrells have been part of Oxford life since 1782, so there's not much they don't know about the city, past and present. Today's 'silicon generation' of sporting, fun-loving students, thronging the city's bars, are equally well-informed. They know that classic Morrells beers are an essential part of real Oxford life'."

Comments Roger Protz: "What this risible hyperbole doesn't tell the well-informed, silicon-enhanced students is that Morrell's beers are now brewed a fair punt from Oxford

— in Dorchester, the capital of Dorset, to be precise. The Thomas Hardy Brewery there is a contract brewery. As well as Morrells of Oxford's brands, it also produces 'Ushers' beers for a retail company called Refresh UK. Ushers Brewery in Trowbridge, Wiltshire, closed in 2000, and its large pub estate is now run by a company called InnSpired.

"Drinkers who, understandably, are not up to speed on all the rapid changes in the brewing industry could be forgiven for thinking they are consuming genuine Wiltshire beers brewed in Trowbridge when they frequent pubs badged as Ushers."

Roger Protz says the most high-profile offender in the passing-off business is Greene King. "The Suffolk brewer, Britain's second-biggest regional, as a result of the closure of both Ruddles of Rutland and Morlands of Abingdon, now owns the Ruddles and Old Speckled Hen brands. There is no mention of Greene King on labels for these brands. They are labelled respectively 'Ruddles Brewing' and 'Morland Brewing'. The uninitiated could draw the conclusion the beers are brewed by existing companies bearing those names.

"Such is the affection for Ruddles County among the older generation of cask beer drinkers that many may think they are getting a true Rutland beer. But in its region of origin,

Ruddles County was 5% alcohol. The Greene King version is 4.3%, an alcohol rating that conveniently plugs the gap between the company's IPA and Abbot Ale."

The Good Beer Guide editor says there is a similar problem with the former King & Barnes brands from Horsham now owned by Hall & Woodhouse's Badger Brewery in Blandford Forum. "Sussex Bitter brewed in Dorset? Odd things are happening to English geography," he says. "And did you know that the revered home of pale ale brewing, Burton-on-Trent, is now part of West Yorkshire? For Draught Burton ale, a former CAMRA Champion Beer of Britain, has moved from Burton and is now produced by Tetley in Leeds."

He says CAMRA's opposition to misleading brands is not based on pedantry but authenticity. "If we are to convince both current and future drinkers of cask beers that they should treat them as seriously as French wines, then authenticity and place of origin are of great importance. A Rutland beer cannot be brewed in Suffolk, any more than an Oxford beer can be brewed in Dorset, or a proud Burton pale ale be removed to Yorkshire. It couldn't happen to a chateau-bottled French claret. But French wines are protected by appellations — guarantees of place of origin as well as quality."

"Think on, as they say in West Yorkshire. Or, perhaps, Burton-on-Humber."

GOVERNMENT ACTION NEEDED TO SAVE BRITISH BEER AND DRINKERS' CHOICE

Call by Good Beer Guide editor Roger Protz

MANY of Britain's regional brewers face takeover and closure unless the government intervenes to support them, Good Beer Guide editor Roger Protz says as he launches the 2002 edition of the guide.

"Eight out of ten pints of beer brewed in Britain today come from three global giants — Interbrew, which includes Bass and Whitbread, Scottish Courage, and Carlsberg-Tetley. Interbrew owns Stella Artois, the leading premium lager brand, ScotCo owns the French and Belgian lager brands Kronenbourg and Alken Maes, while C-T brews the Carlsberg range in Northampton," he says.

Mr Protz continued: "In the past ten years over 40 breweries have closed. Since 1998 we have lost such famous names in regional brewing as King & Barnes, Mitchells, Morland, Morrells, Ruddles, Vaux and Ward. In August, the country's biggest regional brewer, Wolverhampton & Dudley, owner of Banks's and Marston's, escaped takeover by the Pubmaster group by a whisker. Pubmaster, one of Britain's biggest pub companies, has made it clear it may well bid for W&D again. If Pubmaster were successful it would sell off the breweries, which would almost certainly mean the closure of Bank's and Marston's. Marston's, in particular, is a site of enormous historic importance, with its unique 'Burton Union room' method of fermentation."

Roger Protz says the government must have an action plan to save independent brewing in

Britain. Without such a plan, more and more breweries that own estates of pubs will become vulnerable to predator pub groups whose only interest lies in owning pubs and stocking them with heavily-discounted national beer brands.

"The present government is becoming more interventionist," he adds. "Action has been taken to give more government control over the railway infrastructure. Trade Secretary Patricia Hewitt has called a 'manufacturing summit' of industries hit by the world recession. Marconi has asked for government help. But nothing is done to help British independent brewers. Mrs Hewitt's plans for Interbrew, announced last month, are a dog's breakfast. She has told the Belgian group it must either sell off Bass Brewers entirely or dispose of major brands and breweries to a new company called Carling Brewing. This would lead to the ludicrous situation in which Draught Bass, the leading premium cask ale, would be owned by Interbrew but brewed under licence in the old Bass Brewery in Burton-on-Trent by a lager brewer!

"As only another global giant, such as Heineken or South African Breweries, could afford the millions of pounds needed to buy the Carling business, nothing will have been done to weaken the power of the global giants and their stranglehold on drinkers' choice."

Roger Protz says the regional and family brewers' share of the beer market has fallen from 22% to 15% in a decade and continues to fall.

"The independents represent the best hope

for saving and maintaining our cask ales," he says. "Are their beers to be just props in photo calls for the Prime Minister at election time or are they to be saved for future generations to enjoy?"

The Good Beer Guide editor makes the following demands of the government:

- Stop all further takeovers that are against the public interest.
- Give advice and financial help to management who want to save threatened breweries by organising buy-outs.
- Investigate the scandal of back-door discounts between giant brewers and pub companies that excludes small brewers from thousands of pubs.
- Encourage the Department for Culture, Media and Sport to protect historic breweries by listing buildings and contents to deter predatory takeovers by pub groups interested only in brewery retail estate. For example, only small parts of Marston's brewery are listed: the entire site, including the 'Union Rooms', should be listed as a matter of urgency.
- A government strategy for the independent brewery section.

"If the great wine-making chateau of France were threatened by takeovers and closure, the French government would take action to stop such threats," Roger Protz says. "But the British government seems happy to see our independent breweries and their great cask ales disappear or fall into the hands of overseas lager brewers."

New Year – it's better abroad!

THE New Year period is usually a special time in most of our social lives. However, over the years I have become increasingly disillusioned with the way that we in Britain approach it, in particular New Year's Eve itself. The standard format seems to be to go out earlier than normal, drink copiously, sing a bit at midnight, and get kicked out about 12:30. The venue for this supreme experience is often the nearest half decent pub (because there's no public transport), without many of your friends who live too far away to walk. You find yourself paying about £5 just to enter an overcrowded and noisy bar full of drunks, and have to drink whatever is least unpleasant all night. OK – so I am exaggerating a bit, but I did decide a few years ago that we must be able to do better and set out to prove it.

Together with a group of friends, I spent New Year 1998-99 in the Czech Republic, and after a bit of trouble finding an open venue we enjoyed an excellent night which lasted until 6am, without the drunken yobbery that often spoils things here. Regular readers may remember that I detailed that trip in an earlier article. We vowed to go abroad again and did so for New Year 2000-2001.

Our venue this time was Ostend in Belgium. Using the *Good Beer Guide to Belgium, Holland & Luxembourg*, we contacted the Hotel Marion, which includes the renowned Café Botteltje that stocks around 300 draught and bottled beers.

They confirmed that they could accommodate my party of 12 (which quickly grew to 16 as word spread and would have got bigger still had I allowed it to!). They then stated that they were putting on a banquet on "Old Year's Eve" as they called it, consisting of a seven course dinner including fine vintage wines, plus a gourmet lunch on New Year's Day. All this plus two nights accommodation was offered for £100 per head. We decided to go for it.

We left on 30th December, by minibus to Dover. We left the minibus there and crossed by foot, as the hire company wanted a ridiculous £150 extra to take it to Ostend and park it up for two days. They preferred it to be left unattended in Dover – makes no sense to me!

Even more bizarrely, the ferry company **increased** our crossing fee by £40 because we **didn't** take the bus on the boat! Apparently 16 passengers and a bus is cheaper to convey than just 16 passengers! Am I missing something?

Anyway, we arrived safely and booked into the hotel. The rooms are somewhat basic, but they are en-suite and perfectly clean. After a quick sampling in the Botteltje, we split into two groups – one heading for the bright lights of Ostend, and the other (mainly older and perhaps wiser) taking the train to Bruges which is only about 15 minutes away.

Here we had the delights of yet another night at the Brugs Beertje, about which I have written much previously. Suffice to say that it is still my favourite bar anywhere. Much wonderful Belgian beer later we staggered off to the railway station for our train back well after midnight. The Botteltje was still going strong and most of us carried on until 2 or 3am. This is what civilised opening hours are all about and not a hint of trouble either.

It was about 2am when the landlord was heard to say that the "trouble with us British was that we always drank too fast on New Year's Eve and never lasted the pace". Also that "the locals would all still be up at 6am, when he traditionally served a free breakfast to the survivors but the British never made it".

The gauntlet had been thrown down!

We all went back to Bruges for a day's sightseeing and light drinking on New Year's Eve itself, including a visit to the new brew pub run by Jan de Bruin, husband of Daisy who still runs the Brugs Beertje (which is closed after 30th December for a few days).

Back in Ostend the meal commenced around 7:30 pm. They really pushed the boat out and most of us had never tried most of the food before. Courses included pate de foie gras, caviar, venison, scallops, crayfish and a sorbet more alcoholic than anything we drank all weekend. The wine was magnificent and not rationed at all – and it was all part of the package deal. People were drinking and eating but not getting seriously drunk.

At midnight everyone went to the seafront for a stupendous firework display that lasted about 20 minutes. It was then back to the bar for what turned into something of a long session. All Belgian beers are served in individual glasses, fresh each time and we tried a lot of different beers. After a while we started a game of spoof with the loser buying a 75cl bottle of a beer of their choice to be shared between all 7 players (most beers were 8% abv or more). Each therefore came with 7 glasses and I'm afraid we caused some almighty washing up that night! During the night 5 of our number dropped by the wayside and went to bed, but at 6am 11 were still going strong. There was virtually nobody else still up and no sign of the "stalwart" locals. The landlord then produced 11 somewhat stale croissants – so much for the special breakfast. At 7:30am he sheepishly asked us to go to bed, having had his bluff well and truly called!

The lunch next day was conspicuous by the almost total absence of our party, except for some of those that retired early. I made it down but could only face coffee and bread, which was a pity as it looked seriously good. Everyone was dreading the ferry crossing at 5pm that evening. Not without good reason, as it turned out to be quite a rough one – and we had slightly delicate stomachs! We all vowed never to cross on New Year's Day again but would stay another night instead.

Anyway, to conclude – I am convinced that the European way of celebrating New Year is much better than ours. The common pattern seems to be that they have a pleasant evening and meal, either at home or in a restaurant, celebrate at midnight and **then** start the party in earnest. We set off too fast and everything goes flat after midnight, or worse still turns ugly. I have promised myself that I will try never to spend another New Year in the UK.

Vince Murray

Annexe Inn advert

Prize crossword

Across

1. The 3.5% ABV light bitter from Teme Valley Brewery of Knightwick, Worcestershire (1,5)
5. See 14
8. What is the 4.5% ABV beer brewed by the Blue Moon Brewery of Hingham, Norfolk? (4,4)
9. At 5% ABV what wish can you get from Dark Horse Brewery of Hertford? (5)
10. Salisbury based Hop Back Brewery's first pub in Bristol (10)
11. See 14
13. Pub in St Georges Rd, Hotwells (3,5,4)
- 14,11,5. Brewed to 4.5% ABV by Daleside Brewery of Harrogate this well-balanced robust tawny bitter has a long dry finish (10,3,5,3)
17. What can be seasonally Cheeky, Luscious, Saucy, Voluptuous and Whiplash from the Batemans Brewery of Wainfleet, Lincolnshire? (4)
18. What is Hogs Back's 4.2% ABV Traditional English Ale affectionately known as? (3)
19. The tawny full bodied 4.5% ABV best bitter from Rebellion Brewery of Buckinghamshire (6)
21. Pub in Windsor Place, Mangotsfield or Newton Rd, Cadbury Heath but no longer in West St Bedminster as it has been demolished to extend a local business's car park (4)
22. See 23
- 23,22. At OG 1042 and ABV 4.2% this beer is brewed by Northumberland Brewery (7,3)
24. Which Triple Brewery brews the pale brown, Billericay Dickie and the dark brown mild, Pressed Rat and Warthog both at 3.8% ABV? (1,1,1)
26. Pub in Westbourne Grove, Bedminster which is also Wickwar Brewery's first pub (8,2,5)

Down

2. At 5.3% ABV and "pretty damn dark" this beer is brewed by Nursery Brewery of Keynsham (3,6,7)
3. Pub in Dove St, Kingsdown which was Bristol and District CAMRA's Pub of the Year in 1998 and the first to be owned by Bath Ales (4,2,3,4)
4. Edinburgh brewery that brews Leith IPA at 3.8% ABV and Otter of Leith at 4.2% ABV (9)
5. Described as being a typical Scottish 80 shilling beer what is the 4.2% ABV beer brewed by Black Isle Brewery of Munloch, Ross-shire? (3,4)
6. At OG 1043 and 4.4% ABV which Ale is brewed by Sharp's Brewery of Wadebridge, Cornwall? (4)
7. At 3.8% ABV this beer is brewed occasionally by Nursery Brewery of Keynsham (6,4,6)
12. Brewed to 3.8% ABV by Evesham Brewery of Worcestershire this beer has a

Crossword grid

fruity flavour and a delicate balance of malts (4,3)

15. Arrow-firing brewery? (7)
16. At 4.5% ABV what is the Bear Ale brewed by Fenland Brewery of Chatteris, Cambridgeshire? (5)
20. What is the 4.7% ABV light amber beer brewed by Rooster's Brewery of Harrogate that has an unexpected hoppy finish? (6)
25. Many a CAMRA member can be found propping this up (3)
27. A 4.2% ABV beer from Tomos Watkin Brewery of Swansea or the abbreviation for Original Gravity (1,1)

Phil Brooks

Send your solution to the editor (address under 'Contacts' on the back page) by 15th January 2002. The first correct entry selected at random after that date wins £10 worth of Oddbins vouchers.

Last edition's solution

Across: 6 Eco. 8 SA. 9 Coronation. 10 LA. 11 Abbot Ale. 12 Entire. 13 Tarkas. 14 Ric. 17 Corn. 19 Cornubia. 22 Parkers. 23 Witches. 25 Princess of Wales. 28 Old Boy. 29 Mildly.

Down: 1 BA. 2 Boat. 3 Worle. 4 Mad. 5 Lion. 6 Ensign. 7 Old Eli. 8 Scattor. 9 Clockwork. 14 Rock. 15 Cardiff. 16 Pub crawl. 18 Nursery. 20 Ass. 21 Barrel. 24 Asum. 26 Nob. 27 Spa.

The winners were Ian Smith of Kingswood, and David Jones of Llandtrisant, Mid Glamorgan, who each won pizzas from the Coronation in Bedminster.

What price beer?

How many times have you gone into a pub or bar ordered a drink and been horrified at the price when the request for payment is made?

In theory the law should protect you from this situation but it frequently doesn't. This protection comes in the form of the Price Marking (Food and Drink on Premises) Order 1979, which means in simple terms that there should be price list on display.

The law is quite complicated but this is my attempt at interpreting what should be on the list.

○ A pub or bar must show a list of at least 30 items that are available, but if less than 30 items are on offer then all products must be included.

○ When the list is split into categories, e.g. real ale or malt whiskies, then all the products on offer must be included if there are five or less available, but if there are more than five then only five need to be shown.

○ All prices must be inclusive of VAT and the unit by which it is being sold must be stated.

○ Most importantly the price list must also be readily available and clearly visible for customers, not hidden away in a dark corner behind the bar or obscured with the raised bar flap.

Any breaches in providing the statutory price list could be taken up with your local Trading Standards Officer (see back page for contact details) and magistrates can impose fines of up to £5,000 if a successful prosecution is made – but perhaps a friendly word with the landlord may mean that it won't come to that.

Pete Tanner

DIARY



Diary of the Bristol & District branch of CAMRA. (See inside pages for Weston-super-Mare sub-branch and Bath & Borders branch diaries and contacts.)

Tuesday, 30th October: Trip to East Bristol and surrounding districts. Depart from the Cornubia, Temple Street, Bristol, 6.45pm.

Wednesday, 7th November: Trip to North Somerset. Depart from the Cornubia, 6.45pm.

Thursday, 15th November: Joint social with Weston-super-Mare sub-branch at Congresbury. Start at the Ship & Castle, 7.30pm.

Wednesday, 14th November: Committee meeting, Smiles Brewery Tap, 8pm.

Wednesday, 21st November: Trip to Thornbury and district. Depart from the Cornubia, 6.45pm.

Wednesday, 28th November: Branch meeting at the Lamplighters, Shirehampton, 8pm start.

For more information on local events either attend our branch meetings or contact Phil Cummings on 0117 9858220 (evenings).

STOP PRESS... Wickwar are to acquire a second pub (they've just got the Princess of Wales in Bedminster), namely the "White Lion" in Bristol City Centre.

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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).

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