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PINTS WEST

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

LOCAL BEER FOR LOCAL PEOPLE

Question : Why don't we see more beers from our local independent breweries in our local pubs?

Answer : Because most pubs can't choose what they sell.

Sadly, most of the market is tied up by deals between pub groups and the large breweries, limiting consumer choice and the number of outlets that small independent brewers can sell to. There are very few genuine free houses where the landlord can make his own decisions about which beers to stock.

To highlight this we held a campaign event at the Cornubia in Bristol in July and invited along some local brewers and the press, getting reported on the radio and a good article in the Evening Post.

There was also the amusing scene of watching Ray Penny (Wickwar Brewery), Neville Mort (Smiles) and Chaz Wright (Uley) attempt to synchronise raising their glasses for a press photo. After several attempts the poor journalist wisely gave up...

This issue is particularly relevant at the moment as there is a real threat that the government is going to scrap the Beer Orders, which is the only bit of

legislation that tries to give licensees the right to stock and serve a guest beer of their own choice.

But that wasn't all: for an extra week the Cornubia was serving exclusively local beers, giving punters the opportunity to try some fine ale brewed in our part of the world, something we would like to see emulated.

Oh, and there was also the matter of a presentation to the Cornubia for winning Bristol & District Branch Pub Of The Year!

SEE INSIDE FOR:

- News from local brewers
- Threat to Beer Orders
- Pub of the Year
- Cider
- Pub news
- What's Real Ale anyway, and much, much more.....



www.camrabristol.org.uk

What is Real Ale anyway?



Definition

'Real ale' is a term coined by CAMRA in the 1970s to describe draught or bottled beer brewed from traditional ingredients, matured by secondary fermentation in the container from which it is dispensed, and served without the use of extraneous carbon dioxide. It may also be called 'cask conditioned' or 'naturally conditioned'.

Real ale is a living thing, and therefore requires some care and attention, unlike keg beer (and most commercial lagers) which are generally pasteurised, chilled and filtered to make them chemically inert, and can be handled by anyone with a minimal amount of training.

Ingredients

The traditional ingredients of real ale are malted barley, hops, water and yeast; dispense is usually via a handpump, or occasionally straight from the barrel ("gravity dispense"). Electric pumps or air pressure systems can also be used, but are often hard for the customer to distinguish from the ones used for keg beers and lagers.

Dispense

Real ale is usually delivered to the pub cellar in either metal or wooden casks. The cask is placed on a 'stillage' in a horizontal position to allow the hops and other sediment which results from fermentation to settle in its belly. A wooden bung on the side of the cask is pierced to allow excess carbon dioxide gas resulting from the fermentation process to escape. As with home made beers and wine, real ale is truly a living liquid; the live yeast cells will continue working to

convert the natural sugars into alcohol, and develop the flavour, long after it has left the brewery.

After the barrel has been on the stillage for a day or two, it should have cleared and be ready for serving. The landlord needs to exercise skill here, for if the beer is sold at the peak of its condition it will taste like nectar, but if sold too soon, it will have little body or flavour, although it may be clear in appearance.

Distinction from other beers

The most easily recognised differences between real ale and other beers are:

- Taste – traditionally brewed beers can produce an amazing variety and range of flavours; keg ones, and lagers in particular, have a much more restricted range of tastes.
- Diversity – real ale covers a panoply of styles, with names like mild, bitter, pale ale, strong ale, brown ale, stout, porter, barley wine – and that's only the British ones! Cross the water and you can find Irish red ale, wheat beer (made with wheat instead of barley), black beers, Bavarian smoked beers, beers fermented with wild yeast.... I could go on.....
- Fizziness – real ale should have enough of this to give it a sparkle, but not so much that you start burping after the first mouthful. Other beers are usually stored under pressure, to prevent contamination by airborne bacteria, and dispensed using the same gas pressure; gas tends to dissolve in the beer in these conditions, and to emerge in the drinker's stomach, causing discomfort and embarrassment.

Real ale without a barrel!

Bottled beers can be 'real ale' if they have been allowed to mature in the container without filtration or pasteurisation. Some of these will carry on improving in flavour for years. Well known brands include Worthington White Shield (although some say this is not the beer it once was), Gale's Prize Old Ale, and locally Wickwar Brewery's Station Porter and Old Arnold, and RCH Ale Mary.

Strength

It is a common fallacy to think that all real ale is very strong; at every CAMRA beer festival, we have some customers whose first question is "what's your strongest?", and who are not interested in drinking weaker beers until there is nothing else left. Strong beers have their place, and indeed some of the most renowned examples of the brewer's art are high in alcohol; but the great majority of drinkers are not out to get as drunk as possible as quickly as possible, and the typical brewer's range of real ales reflects that. Social drinking can be refreshing and enjoyable, and even nutritious. Well kept real ale will accompany any social occasion, and need not break the bank.

If you haven't ... try some!

Norman Spalding

Watch the Web

Bristol and District CAMRA would like to remind readers that we have a new web site: www.camrabristol.org.uk

This contains information on the local branch and the Campaign for Real Ale generally, as well as details of forth-coming meetings, socials and other activities.

The web site is regularly updated and so is the best place to find out about any last minute changes to arrangements as well as some of the latest real ale related stories. Any comments on the web site or suggestions of content for inclusion should be emailed to camra@camrabristol.org.uk.

Check out also the free, independent pub web site www.britishpubguide.com which is now up and running.

Some 438 pubs in the City and County of Bristol are featured, plus many in North Somerset and South Gloucestershire, with pictures of all! Visitors to the site can dynamically search for their favourite real ales and traditional ciders. It's a 'community' web site so comments, additions and updates are welcome.

Wadworth Summersault advert

Bath Ales – the Hare wins again

As in greyhound racing, it pays to bet on the hare when it comes to being first past the post. Another edition of Pints West and another National CAMRA award to report for Bath Ales Brewery.

Following the recent success of their Festivity (which sadly won't reappear until late Autumn) at the CAMRA Winter Beer Festival, the **Merchants Arms** in Hotwells has been recognised by CAMRA nationally for the work carried out on it. The pub has won the coveted Joe Goodwin award, having been judged the year's best-restored local. This award is named in honour of a former Chairman of CAMRA who died at an early age while in office.

The Merchants Arms is a former provisions shop-turned-pub and the exterior still retains fine inter-war tiling. Praised in the judges report: "The two small bars are dominated by splendid, chocolate-painted and beaded tongue-and-groove paneling, and above the dado, cream painted anaglypta. The newly commissioned etched glass for the front windows is a welcome sight. This is an excellent job by Bath Ales. Much has been done here recently, yet it looks as if the Merchants Arms has been this way for decades – a fitting testimony to the success of this conservation-minded refurbishment."

You can find the Merchants Arms by heading away from Bristol City Centre towards the Cumberland Basin end of Hotwells.

New

The newest Bath Ales pub, the **Wellington Hotel**, known locally as 'the Wellie', has now reopened following refurbishment in the renowned Bath Ales Brewery style. The difference is truly amazing and well worth venturing to the Gloucester Road, Horfield, and heading towards the floodlights of the nearby Memorial football and rugby stadium.

Bath Ales brewery and pubs advert

Merchants Arms photo

Inside the Merchants Arms - photo from the Evening Post

Real ale sales have increased six-fold since the pub was acquired, and the brewery have brought in an experienced team from the Lamplighters to continue this real ale revival. Plans are well in hand for the next phase of works which will see the hotel accommodation being brought back into use to provide bed and breakfast. Would this make it the only accommodation in Bristol in a top quality real ale pub?

Best

Staying on the pub front, the Evening Post recently featured the **Hop Pole** (one of the brewery's two Bath pubs) and gave it the accolade of being "the best food pub in Bath". This must make it a very special venue as it has previously been judged Bath CAMRA's real ale pub of the year. The Hop Pole is situated at the lower end of Victoria Park, about five minutes' walk east from the city centre. The pub features a delightful garden.

Delicious

The appearance of SPA Extra – a delicious golden 5% version of the brewery's reliable session bitter (Bath SPA) – means that it must be summer, despite the lack of any decent weather.

Tours

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 at www.bathales.com.

Steve O'Shea

In brief

At the recent Ashcott beer festival, the winner of Beer of the Festival was Dwan Black Pearl, and runner-up was Glastonbury Mystery Tor. Which brings me on to...

Glastonbury Brewery. This is a new brewery based at Somerton, run by Greg Nichols, and started in May this year. Beers include Lady of the Lake, Mystery Tor and Hedgemonkey. The beers have already appeared at festivals all over the country.

Also new is **Blackdown Brewery** at Dunkerswell airfield, near the Devon border, set up from a merger of Juwards and SW Fabrications, who have made brewery plants for a number of small brewers.

Dave Unpronounceable

Beer Orders should not be revoked

Competition Act alone cannot save 'unique and diverse' beer and pubs industry from damaging consolidation

CAMRA, the Campaign for Real Ale, has condemned Government plans to revoke the 'Beer Orders' in a report published recently. The report accuses the Government of failing to assess the effects of revoking the Orders on competition and consumer choice in the beer and pubs market.

The Government announced its intention to revoke the Beer Orders, the laws enacted in 1990 to overcome the 'complex monopoly' in brewing and pub retailing, back in February.

CAMRA claims that, while the orders are not entirely relevant to today's market, they play an important role in helping to prevent mergers and takeovers, maintaining consumer choice and preventing community pub closures.

Both the brewing and pub retailing

industries are consolidating at an alarming rate and the Government is proposing to scrap the only real legislative barrier to protect consumers. We predict that revocation of the 'Beer Orders' will lead to more mergers amongst vertically integrated regional brewers, larger pub chains buying breweries and a global company buying a pub estate. Any of the above will undermine the intention of the Orders and leave thousands of consumers out in the cold with less choice in pubs.

Recent acquisitions by Wolverhampton & Dudley Breweries and Greene King have taken them close to the 2000 pub threshold. The Beer Orders define a brewer with over 2000 pubs as a national brewer and therefore provisions such as the 'guest beer' law apply. The 'guest beer' law means national brewers must allow their tenants to buy an extra bottled and draught real ale outside the brewery tie from a supplier of their choice. If the Orders are revoked, brewers such as W&DB and GK will be free to grow (within the restrictions of general competition controls) without being obliged to

offer more choice to consumers.

Revocation of the Orders may also lead to more pub closures. There is a provision in the orders which prevents brewers attaching restrictive covenants to prevent pubs being used as pubs when they are put up for sale. CAMRA claims that revocation would be untimely as twenty pubs a month are closing, mostly in community rural areas.

CAMRA concludes that the Government should leave the Beer Orders intact and launch an immediate investigation into the industry in an attempt to overcome the complex monopolies which now exist in pub ownership and beer supply.

While it's true that the Beer Orders do not restrict the activities or growth of big non-brewing pub chains, the answer is not to throw the baby out with the bath water, but rather to investigate properly the need for a revised set of Orders to curb the power of pub chains and global brewers. Leaving British beer and pubs at the mercy of global market forces will erode our still unique and relatively diverse industry and lead to power falling into the hands of fewer and bigger global players.

Abbey Ales Bellringer advert

Moles Brewery advert

Thatchers Cider : modern and traditional



On our trips we have often found ourselves visiting “craft” cider makers, such as John Harris at Westcroft cider, but never before had we visited a major cider maker, until one night in April when we descended upon Thatcher’s Cider, located at Sandford near Winscombe in North Somerset.

Martin Thatcher himself, the great grandson of William Thatcher who started the business in 1904, guided us. These days production is over two million gallons annually, making Thatcher’s one of the big five cider producers.

The site is an amazing mixture of old and new. The state-of-the-art processing facility was the most modern in the world when installed, and its sheer size and complexity takes the breath away. It’s more like what you imagine visiting a major industrial plant would be like, and a million miles from the old cider mill! Of course, for much of the year there are no apples to process, and it was interesting to learn that to take up some of the slack all the blackcur-

rants for Ribena are processed at the site! The whole processing site only requires around four people to operate it – truly amazing.

We then moved onto the totally traditional maturation room, where huge oak vats dating back many decades hold up to 17,000 gallons of cider each, a sight that would have been familiar to cider makers at the start of the last century. Interestingly, Martin Thatcher says that cider making has more in common with wine production than brewing beer.

Finally, a most interesting evening ended in the tasting room where we sampled the range of the single varietal bottled ciders, which Thatcher’s are understandably proud of. Although filtered, they are not pasteurised and so are arguably “real cider”. This represents a departure from current practise, and is an attempt to do something different with cider and find a niche in the market.

These brands which include Katy, Cox’s and Spartan vary in alcoholic strength from

3.5% to 7.4% and can often be spotted on local supermarket shelves. It is of course worth remembering that Thatcher’s also make splendid traditional ciders such as their own traditional brand, and also Cheddar Valley, and Black Rat for Moles.

All Thatcher’s ciders are made with English apples, and there are none of the chemicals and apple juice extracts which find their way into the “national” keg cider brands.

All Thatcher’s products are available at their farm shop at Myrtle Farm, Sandford, and more information is available at their website, at www.thatcherscider.co.uk/index.htm.

Phil Cummings

Early release due to good record

Due to demand from local drinkers Abbey Ales has had to release Bath Star sooner than planned.

The 4.5% dark golden brew was planned for September but due to the demand from drinkers in and around the Bath and Bristol area, it has been brought forward and has already been released. The beer from the Lansdown based brewery is brewed from the finest pale Wiltshire maris otter malt and finished with cascade hops which give Bath Star its predominantly hoppy flavour.

Abbey Ales has also announced record sales for April, May and June, the best for these months since the brewery started brewing in October 1997, when it launched its golden prize winning 4.2% abv golden Bellringer at the Bath Beer Festival. Managing Director, Alan “Bad News” Morgan said, “We obviously benefited from the Jubilee and the World Cup, and not just from pubs but also from parties where our take-home Bellringer in the box proved extremely popular.”

Due to limited capacity at the brewery, Bellringer is still the only beer brewed on a permanent basis by Abbey, and it has won many Beer of Festival prizes at CAMRA beer festivals held around the country. The brewery took its first pub just over two years ago, the Star Inn. Situated on the Paragon in Bath, it is one of the city’s oldest hostelries and was first licensed as a public house in 1760 when the entrance was in Guinea Lane. Set amongst the splendour of Bath’s world famous architecture the pub is said to provide a welcome escape from the bustle of busy city life.

It is also the current Bath CAMRA pub of the year!

Star Inn, Bath advert

Pub Of The Year 2002

By a stroke of luck the **Cornubia** has won again, once more being declared Pub Of The Year, so that saves me having to do a new write up!

To be serious though, it's a great achievement and a testament to how well Mike Blake is doing as the landlord for the Cornubia to win Bristol & District CAMRA Pub Of The Year in both 2001 and 2002.

Many of you may already know the Cornubia – if not you're pretty obviously missing out on a real gem lurking a few minutes' walk from the city centre. It's all about good beer in a friendly pub. What more do you need?

Mike wisely attributes a lot of his success to the fact that he stocks a range of quality beers from independent breweries – many of them local.

Pictured here is the normally camera shy Mr Blake (beardy bloke on left) receiving his certificate from branch chairman Richard Brooks in his "plaque man" role.

The Cornubia, Temple Street, Bristol – if you have trouble finding it, look for the Fire Station and the site of the now closed Courage Bristol Brewery.

The runner up for 2002 is the **Castle of Comfort**, East Harptree, Somerset. But you'll have to wait for a future edition of Pints West for a write-up of this excellent pub.

Well done to them both!

Richard Brooks

Photo of Michael Blake receiving award from Richard Brooks

Wickwar BOB advert

Cornubia advert

Every one's a winner!

CAMRA branches around the country select a pub of the year which, like The Cornubia in Bristol, offers good real ale, good atmosphere and a place for locals and visitors alike to enjoy.

The South West region is large, with about a dozen branches and sub-branches, extending from Gloucestershire to Cornwall, and as far west as Wiltshire, so offers lots of scope for a good selection of branch area winners.

Whether city centre or rural pubs, they all have a history and are in interesting surroundings that offer a good way of entertaining those relatives and friends that tend to visit us in the warm South at this time of year.

Once you've checked out The Cornubia, why not do what we did recently, and explore the other regional winners closest to you?

Descriptions of those from the north of the region are based on our visits, but the CAMRA Good Beer Guide offers the definitive details of location, beers and opening times.



The Boat, Ashleworth

Just as you think you have taken a wrong turning and will end up in someone's drive, the lane signposted 'The Quay' from picture-postcard Ashleworth village in Gloucestershire widens out to a parking area on the West bank of the Severn.

The river is flanked with public footpaths for a pleasant day's walking, but the main attraction as far as we were concerned was the pub.

Also a mecca for members of the Cyclists Touring Club of Great Britain (so expect to mingle with the lycra-clad), the pub has a covered outside seating area and three inside areas.

As you enter, on the right, is a cosy sitting room (and it does feel like someone's sitting room!). Pass it by to reach the small bar, with its settle seats around the walls, a bar at one end, and another,

longer room attached, with bread oven and range to add to the atmosphere. Behind the bar is a room with casks where a changing range of beer is served on gravity. There's also a 'tuck shop' where we bought our first Curly Wurly for years (smaller than we remembered!).

A lovely pub, a lovely place, justly deserving of Gloucestershire branch's selection as pub of the year.



The Star, Bath

Nestling comfortably in The Vineyards, a row of buildings in Georgian Bath's The Paragon, The Star is an historic pub with fine panelled rooms and a friendly, welcoming atmosphere (you may find those words becoming repetitive in these descriptions!).

In a previous edition of Pints West, The Star was described as a 'bar crawl' in its own right as you can have a beer in one of several different seating areas, including the main bar.

Beers include those from Abbey Ales, and Bass served from the jug (beers are also available in four-pint jugs for sharing with friends).

Bath is always a good place to visit for the increasingly good range of pubs as well as the shopping and history value: Bath branch's pub of the year The Star makes it a must-see attraction.



The White Horse, Compton Bassett

Compton Bassett is a good base for exploring North Wiltshire, with its own chalk White Horse on the hillside, Stonehenge and Bowood House not too far away.

The village itself is very long, and the pub is at the end, just as you think you might have missed it.

The White Horse pub is a large hostelry set back from the road, with one long bar area with wooden tables, views of thatched cottages and the village church, and Wadworth beers with guests.

The other areas are devoted to food, including a 'proper restaurant' (bar meals also available) and there are rooms

(English Tourism Council 4 diamonds) for an overnight stay in the area.



The Red Lion, Cricklade

Cricklade is apparently the northernmost town in Wiltshire, midway between Cirencester and Swindon, with a long history including Roman occupation. The Red Lion is at the end (from the Bristol direction) of the main street, on the right-hand side.

We were luckily able to park outside, and were welcomed in to a wide front bar with the sight of eight handpumps on the bar on the left, and some curious wax candle 'sculptures' drooping from the mantle and several tables on the right.

Beers change regularly but on the day of our visit included Hop Back's Lemon Grass beer and a Woodforde's.

Indoors it's big enough for lots of room for drink and good conversation (depending on who you're with, of course!) and outside at the back there's an extensive garden with patios, bench seating and a grassed area with built-in barbecues (though it's not generally a 'foody' pub).

Very friendly, and far too many beers to sample in one visit (particularly for me, the driver!), Swindon branch's pub of the year is a lovely part of the country for a weekend away.



Winners further South

Branches in the South of our region have selected the following as their pubs of the year:

The Boringdon Arms, Turnchapel (Plymouth branch);

The Great Western, Exeter (Exeter and East Devon branch);

The Plymouth Inn, Okehampton (North Devon branch);

The Dartmouth Inn, Newton Abbott (South Devon branch);

The Fountain Inn, Newbridge (Cornwall branch);

The Masons Arms, Taunton (Somerset branch).

Lesly Huxley

Cider Sisters

The odds seemed stacked against us – a week long delay due to alcohol-induced incapacity, a failed MOT and no room at the inn – but the last weekend in June nonetheless saw us back in Devon takin’ on the South Hams, cider-style.

The late start resulted in an early stop, as we felt we had to make up for lost time. We’d barely got out of Bristol when we passed for a quick half at **The Black Horse at Clapton-in-Gordano** (cold but picturesque) – one Thatchers Dry (old fave, nuff said), and one Kingston Press (supposedly dry but actually sweet, nice but didn’t really cut the cider mustard).

Shocking traffic on the motorway so the journey took double the time it should have, but every cloud has a silver lining and we found ours in the perhaps unlikely locale of Newton Abbott. **Ye Olde Cider Bar**. CAMRA’s Cider Guide calls it a national treasure, we call it the crown jewels. Everything about it was cider and we loved it. It’s a real rough and ready place but friendly and unspoilt. They sell no beer, only a great selection of ciders and perries (and country wines for non-believers).

Previous readers will know that we like to get in the mix, and this time we created our own 6 o’clock sixer special (named the 666 – spot the theme?) from a half of Weston’s Herefordshire Perry and a half of

Sam’s medium: a brew that took the edge of one and knocked the socks off the other – ecstasia (and for only £1.50 a pint).

We couldn’t leave without trying more of what they had to offer so moved on the dries – Thatchers Extra and Sams. Unique, in our extensive cider-drinking experience – both seemed to disappear on entering the mouth, never getting as far as the throat – an enchanting apple-based mystery well worth experiencing.

Just as we were about to leave (honestly) we were persuaded to try a final glass of Sam’s Poundhouse – a new one on us so how could we refuse? A more populist, lightly sparkling cider with a well-rounded, easy drinking finish.

We left.

And headed to the **George at Blackawton** to settle in for the night (and get off the halves and onto the pints...). A nice country pub with a great view, the George is by no means a real cider pub, being more food-orientated, but had two ciders on offer – Heron Valley and Stowford Press. We started with the HV, being new to us, but weren’t overly bothered and quickly moved on to the old SP. When the foodies moved on, the S.C.R.O.T.U.M. Club moved in (not as bad as it sounds – Serious Cyclists Ride On Tracks Up Mountains) and by midnight we’d become honorary

members!

We contentedly took a couple of pints to bed with us and the next thing we knew it was six in the morning, the sun was shining and we woke up feeling fine and thinking it couldn’t be right. It wasn’t. We woke up again an hour later feeling decidedly ropery and yet somehow reassured that this was as it should be.

We took our usual restorative constitutional at the lovely Start Bay, after refusing to pay £4 for parking at Blackpool Sands (after all that’s about three pints at Ye Olde Cider Bar). To be honest we spent more time lying face down gazing at the pebbles than we did walking but it was ace all the same. And we saw a beachcomber wearing so many water-bottles around his waist that he looked like a suicide bomber.

All good things must come to an end, and we headed home with time for just one more stop in Dartmouth – nipping in to the **Cherub Inn** (Dartmouth’s oldest building) and enjoying an always welcome drop of Addlestones. We also had a horrible alfresco pasty, but we’ll spare you the details.

It was another great weekend, in gorgeous countryside, enhanced by lots of off-sale opportunities which we took full advantage of, but that’s a story for another column.

See you next time, cider fans – and remember... we’ve seen heaven and it’s in Newton Abbott!

Freya & Erica McLuckie

Bell, Kingsdown advert

Hopback brewery and Coronation advert

Jubilee weekend in Weymouth

I recently spent the weekend of the Queen's jubilee, which coincided with the start of the World Cup, on tour with Staple Hill Cricket Club in Dorset. We were based in Weymouth for four nights, which gave me a chance to sample the local real ale scene. As Weymouth is easy to reach from Bristol and a popular holiday destination I thought I'd share my findings with Pints West readers.

The town was exceptionally busy with every hotel showing "No vacancies" signs, and the main streets awash with mostly younger drinkers. Very few of our team are all that interested in real ale, but I did my best (quite successfully) to convert a few. There is no hope for the likes of Mike "three pints of Stella and Stella only" Kirley though! To lull them into a false sense of security I allowed some of them to take me to their choice of pub on the first night and was treated to the following pleasures.

We started well by taking in a pub that has often featured in the Good Beer Guide, the *Dorothy Inn* on the seafront almost next to our digs. Although it used to boast around ten ever changing beers, it now does about six, including a house brew from Otter Brewery. I visited several times over the four days and was always impressed with the quality of the beers on offer, if disappointed that the range remained virtually unchanged throughout. (Well, it was only four days.) The pub is an absolute money-making machine with food all day, accommodation and nightclub upstairs and a very late license (about 2 a.m. every night it seemed). It was frequently packed to the rafters and somewhat loud. It is probably one for the more sensitive to visit away from peak times or out of season, but how many pubs of its type show such a great commitment to real ale? We need more like it to attract younger drinkers.

Next came the *Old Rectory* in the High Street – a giant pub conversion run by the Hobgoblin chain (Wychwood Brewery) – very loud and brash with three bouncers outside. It offered three real ales from Wychwood including England's Ale at 4.5% – a mistake as although it seemed in fair nick it tasted like cold tea with ten sugars! Suffice to say I left it in favour of a pint of Guinness.

Next up was a trendy bar called *Toad* with no real ale on offer.

Next was the *Golden Lion* near the harbour bridge offering Theakstons and Courage Directors, both in very good condition (as they were on several more visits). This was another loud pub with a young clientele but not a bad place at quieter times.

The *Swan*, in the High Street, a Wetherspoon's, was next. I had high hopes as the Jubilee festival was on but I can't honestly say that I was impressed. After several visits I never experienced a single beer in what I would describe as top condition, service was slow, and measures often short. The evening finished

with another beer at the Dorothy.

After a fine game of cricket (honourable draw with Melplash CC) interrupted the drinking on Saturday, I took out my Good Beer Guide and persuaded half a dozen of the more discerning players to join me at the *Boot*, which is on the other side of the harbour from the High Street. This was undoubtedly the best ale pub in Weymouth. A Ringwood house, it sold four of their beers plus a guest (including Pitchfork and Firebox from RCH that week-end). The pub became my sanctuary whenever I wanted to escape the hustle and bustle of the seafront and High Street and the staff were extremely friendly and welcoming. It was heartening to see several of my team mates make several more appearances in there too. The landlord gave me the excellent news that Hopback Brewery have bought the *Dolphin* pub right by the train station in Weymouth, which is boarded up currently. I have since heard unconfirmed reports that it is to be run by the current landlord of the Coronation in Southville, Bristol. Should be excellent.

Sunday was a rest day so I decided to seek out the second entry in the current Good Beer Guide, the *Weatherbury* in Carlton Road North which turned out to be a considerable walk away. I arrived to see handpumps displaying Fullers London Pride and Brakspears Bitter plus Bass and one other. Unfortunately, having waited patiently while the barmaid potted around and ignored me for about five minutes I decided not to bother with a drink as I can't stand that kind of rudeness. So it was back to the Swan, Golden Lion and Boot.

Monday's game was senselessly called off after light rain so more pubbing was forced upon us. We tried a few bars along the harbour, some of whose names escape me now. One had a sign outside saying "Quay Brewery Tap" (the brewery is very nearby) which caused me to insist upon going in, only to be confronted by Bass and Courage Directors! When I asked, the barmaid said, "Yes we're planning to stock Quay beers but we haven't sorted it out yet" – hmmm!

I was getting bored with Weymouth

so one colleague and I caught the train to Dorchester for a mere £2.70 return. We went to *Tom Brown's* a long standing brewpub and home of Goldfinch brewery. It was very quiet and we sampled all three brews, which were pleasant if unexceptional but in good condition. We had planned to visit the *Blue Raddle* almost opposite (the other GBG pub) but a local informed us that it had started closing on Sundays and Mondays, and we were thwarted. Instead we headed up the High Street to the Wetherspoon's pub, the name of which I've forgotten. This was a very smart and plush pub with a very comfortable and civilised feel, and after a "Surf and Turf" meal washed down with an excellent pint of Wobbly Bob ale we were ready for the journey back. Alas the train was 50 minutes late and we ventured into the *Station* pub – an instantly forgettable experience!

We finished the tour with a glorious victory over Martinstown CC on the Tuesday and a couple of good pints of Ringwood Best in the local pub.

I would recommend Weymouth but probably best to avoid the peak weekends in the summer – if you go check out the Boot, the Dorothy, the Dolphin when it opens, and the Weatherbury if you can get served (maybe I was just unlucky?).

Vince Murray

Lamplighters, Shirehampton advert

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)

Craig Weaden often writes in to Pints West, usually, as I said in my introduction to his letter last time, extolling the virtues of cider. In his previous letter, by the way, he claimed he had given up cider for good, on health grounds. Now read on...

Dear Steve,

Did you see the article on HTV early evening news recently? It's now official that cider is good for you! John Thatcher said so. An apple a day keeps the doctor away and all that. Enough said I reckon.

Unfortunately my knowledge of English literature didn't extend to the word "extolling", but with the aid of my faithful Collins New English Dictionary I was soon educated and I'm glad to say not disappointed with its definition, "to praise lavishly".

Whilst now on this favourite subject of mine, I've been frequenting the Long Bar in Old Market regularly for some time now. If ever there was a short list of pubs that do the cider drinker proud this would certainly be in it, with prices that won't hurt him (or her) either. Consequently then, the Long Bar's excellent Thatcher's Dry and Cheddar Valley run very freely indeed amongst a choice of several other more commercial fizzy varieties. Drink prices are such that there need be little hesitation in feeding the juke box, or yourself for that matter with one of their excellent rolls behind the bar for a mere pound.

As for me, well I have to try and take the good lord's advice and resist temptation. Mind you I never have considered myself a religious person. Yes, the Long Bar has tested my powers of discipline to their limits. So on that note I'll leave it to what I'm sure is your excellent judge of character to decide whether I've succumbed or not like a lot of cider drinkers, or should I say ex-cider drinkers?

I begrudge paying inflated prices for what after all has always been, and in my

opinion should always stay, an inexpensive drink. For those who share my opinion the Long Bar's the place for them.

A last note now to say I've really enjoyed reading the adventures of the "Cider Sisters" that have appeared in recent Pints Wests. If ever they would like to meet and test out the establishment I've recommended here, I rarely miss Friday nights there. This night's karaoke night so if they're game for a sing-song all the better. After all me and those girls have a lot in common don't you think?.... If we really get on I might even treat them to my version of Ernie (and he drove the fastest milk cart in the west).

Cider is good for you!

Craig Weaden
Soundwell Road
Staple Hill.
Bristol.



Dear Sir,

REFERENCE: ARTICLES / LETTERS JUNE 2002 PUBLISHED IN 'THE MORNING ADVERTISER'.

Recent articles in the trade press and the ongoing saga of licensing reform have prompted this letter.

I think we all agree that reform is long overdue. However, I feel it is time to dispel some misapprehensions readers (and politicians) have about the 'tenant/Pubco' relationship.

In short, there is no relationship. The trade press is full of cries from tenants of leading Pubcos who desperately cling to a vision of a pub industry that is safeguarded by **their own** hard work, toil and sweat, **not** harassed by a 'suit' from Head Office, laughingly called a Business Development Manager, who, in fact has little, or no knowledge of the 'OUTLET' he is destroying via Head Office orders.

We, as tenants exist in an industry that is driven by asset-stripping financiers, first of whom must be "ALCHEMY". Gone are the days of the 'quiet local'. Your 'quiet local' must now make its packet to offset the debt the venture capitalists have staked in order to prop-up this ailing industry. An industry that simply needs the release of tenants from the feudal ties of the lordship of the Pubcos, who, after all have merely replaced the 'big brewers' (and then some).

Many Pubcos extol the virtues of the 'guest ale' (CAMRA members please take note). In my experience, Pubcos offer a wide range of ales, lagers and ciders to their tenants **PROVIDED IT IS SELECTED FROM A LIST SUPPLIED BY THEM AND ONLY IF IT IS PURCHASED FROM THEIR NOMINATED SUPPLIER.** So, this amounts to an extension of 'the tie' no less. The tenant has no free choice in the matter whatsoever! And bear

in mind that your average Pubco tenant is paying 40% above the normal wholesale price for his/her beer.

As to the many Pubco executives that perpetually state that we, as tenants, have selected a cheap and easy entry into the licensed trade, **take note and mark well my words!** You charge us market rents, offload your landlords financial and legal obligations to us and add premiums to our beer orders (40%), offering incentives over unrealistic targets that reimburse us with a fraction of your grossly inflated prices.

In fairness, not all Pubcos are the same. But you know who you are. **GET REAL! YOU ARE CANING US BECAUSE THE LAW SAYS YOU CAN. THE LAW IS FLAWED! WE, AS TENANTS WILL NOT PUT UP WITH THIS SITUATION FOR MUCH LONGER.** We are a body of people who work long hours at no expense to you and little reward for ourselves. We are here because we love and enjoy the traditions and expectations of a fine industry.

I for one will not sit by and watch the continuing demise of the 'traditional local'. Our public house estate is not safe in the hands of corporate financiers who regard our trade as a mere limb of the property market.

Recent comments from Pubco executives also state that they do not conduct business through the press. This appals me. How else do they recruit? We, as employees, have every right to question their practices. More and more the only way to get an answer from your Pubco is to 'go to press'. Most Business Development Managers are totally unaware of the real issues that affect the average pub because they are blinkered by the 'corporate message'.

Pubcos are 'fighting scared of the real issues because they are in the hands of venture capitalists who give not one jot for our industry. Forget the nif-naf and trivia of Pubco bosses blustering around the licensing law debate. They are merely diverting attention from their own archaic practices. What is the point in reforming the licensing laws if the very heart of that law-the pub-is being destroyed piecemeal the length and breadth of the country?

The real battleground is (and always has been) at your bar-front! Your obligation, as a tenant is to your customers. Without his/her support you do not exist. Without free choice in the smaller, traditional pub our customers will be driven to the large, impersonal pseudo-freehouses that the large Pubcos are given a free hand to develop because they abuse a flawed system of laws designed originally to prevent the current status-quo ever occurring! **FORGET THE SPIN: YOU NEED TO KEEP HIM/HER IN (AND HAPPY)!**

Yours sincerely
Ray Barnes
Tenant Landlord
Eldon House
Lower Clifton Hill
Bristol

Smiles Brewery Tour: Barley, Bread and Beer

Jamie Caddick wrote in to us to relate his experience of a visit to Smiles Brewery

There are some things in life, some experiences that you just don't want to end, or, as soon as they do, you wish they'd start all over again! A tour of the Smiles Brewery adjoining the Brewery Tap – at the top of Colston Street – can easily be classified as one of these experiences.

To say I was a brewery virgin, one of the uninitiated to the world of brewing and the glories of fermentation, would be an all-out lie. A year or so ago, a work colleague arranged a brewery tour at this very venue, and everyone had a fantastic time. So I thought it was only fair and proper – and certainly long overdue – to take it upon myself to arrange another one.

So I did. And we went. And it was great fun.

Myself, my dad, and six colleagues met at the Brewery Tap at 6:30, half an hour before the tour was scheduled to start. The thinking behind this, of course, was that we could all quench our thirst – well, it's a long hike from the city centre to the top of Colston Street! – with a pint or two of **Original, Best or Heritage**. It seemed to be good, logical thinking, too, because everyone was more than eager to participate in the quaffing of their selected pints.

Half an hour's worth of ale consumption and enthusiastic nattering later – and, of course, with our palates sufficiently moistened – our tour guide arrived to escort us to the brewery building next door. What followed was a beer-drinker's dream.

We were given a comprehensive history of the process of Smiles beer making; the fact that the only ingredients used throughout the various brewing stages are water, malted barley (a few grains of which we were allowed to crunch over), hops and yeast; the core, essential element to their brewing methods. The over-riding philosophy behind Smiles beer production is that the final product should be a perfect, fresh, *natural* beer.

From the malt hopper to the grist mill (yes, the phrase "grist to the mill" has its origins in the brewing tradition) to the mash tun. From the boiling vessel to the fermenting vessels (lift the lid on one of these mighty tanks and you can smell the yeast and

view its gorgeous, bubbling frothy surface). To, finally, the room where the finished products are stored in barrels and kept at the ideal temperature, we were left with no doubt as to the integrity and commitment Smiles has to produce the perfect pint.

(As a small – but very significant – side note, the contents of each barrel, or cask, are always at the high Smiles standard when they leave the brewery. However, once they have been transported to and served in another pub, the quality, as with any other brewer's beers, can – and sadly occasionally does – deteriorate purely because it has not been stored at the proper temperature and in the correct cellar conditions. This is, thankfully, regularly monitored by Smiles where they can. After all, it's *their* product, and poor quality when served at a different location has the potential to jeopardise Smiles' own reputation. I have heard stories of brewers who refuse to sell their products to certain pubs if they catch word their beers have not been served up as they should be: in my opinion, not harsh at all, but a stringent and inescapable measure that needs to be taken if a brewer is to maintain a tight grip on stock quality, and safeguard its integrity with the more discerning, and demanding, beer drinker.)

However, immersing yourself in the heritage (pun more than intended) and history of the Smiles ale making traditions is thirsty work! So, 45 minutes later when the tour had wrapped up, it was time to sample some of the finished products from the stillage.

Armed with a half-pint beaker, we were invited to sample as much as we wanted from the barrels which were lined up in front of us. Needless to say, the usual suspects in the Smiles production line were sipped and savoured: *Best, Original, Heritage*, and their recent special monthly brew, *Mayfly*.

As if this wasn't enough, a magnificent buffet had been laid out for us, consisting of a veritable cornucopia of breads, cheeses, crisps, sausages and pickles. There were admittedly only eight of us, but there was enough food to feed eight hundred! (Shame! Had I known there would have been so much I would have snuck in a doggie bag and stocked up on enough leftovers to keep me in wholemeal and stilton for the next week!)

Much discussion followed, a raffle initiated, and the toilet frequented! (As a

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polite word of caution, it might be an idea to have a leakage of the bladder *before* the tour starts, especially if you've indulged in a pint or two beforehand.)

We all then proceeded upstairs to the main bar, armed with a ticket allowing us a free pint of beer each. (Thinking about it, the tickets were all in my name, as I'd been the one who had organised the trip, but I'm a generous soul, and thought it would have been shamefully unfair to claim eight free pints for myself. So, a ticket was distributed to everyone amongst the Caddick Clan. Honest!)

The night finished relatively early – 10ish – but, considering the fact we'd learned a lot, eaten a great deal, and drunk even more – plus it *was* a school night! – we bid our tour guide a final farewell, swigged back the remnants of our pints, and marched out into the evening's cool, fresh air.

Education. Mastication. Inebriation.

What more could you possibly want?

Jamie Caddick

Pub news

Wetherspoon have just opened their 9th pub in the Bristol area, the **Knights Templar** in Temple Quay, near Temple Meads station. It was going to be called the Warrior Monks but it was changed before it opened – is this a record?

The former Finnegan's Wake mock Irish theme pub (formerly Crocker's) on Cotham Hill has been refurbished and is now called, imaginatively, the **Cotham Hill**. It is promoting itself as a "bar & pizzeria", but not much emphasis on real ale, unlike other good pubs we know offering pizzas such as the **Post Office Tavern** in Westbury-on-Trym, the **Victoria** also in Westbury, and the **Coronation** in Southville.

The **Alma Tavern** in Alma Vale Road, Clifton, was closed for a month or so to undergo a tidy up. No major changes have been noted and the theatre remains upstairs.

Bar Oz in Small Street, Bristol has reopened after being closed for a few weeks when it was for sale. No reports yet on any changes.

Paul and Dee Tanner (no relation) have moved from the **Lamplighters** in Shirehampton to the **Wellington** in Horfield.

Pete Tanner

WATERING HOLES IN THE DESERT

News from Weston-super-Mare

Upcoming events

In August we will be visiting **The Plough, Congresbury** on Wednesday the 21st. Visits to The Plough are always deservedly popular. We will be catching the X1 bus, which leaves Marine Parade at 19:35, Borough Arms at 19:45. There are buses back from Congresbury at 22:10 and 23:35.

On 4 September we will be taking the train to **Taunton** for a crawl of pubs in the town centre, including a visit to **The Mason's Arms**, voted Somerset CAMRA Pub Of The Year for 2002. Train leaves at 19:06 and costs a mere £2.60 per person for every group of four people travelling. The train back arrives in Weston at 22:59.

Also in September we will be having a two-pub social in town on the 18th, commencing at **The 49 Club**, Baker Street at 8:30, before moving on to **The Dragon** at 9:45.

On October 2nd we will be having a **minibus outing**, visiting four or five pubs outside of the city limits. Venues to be decided at the previous meeting at the 49 Club.

Later in October, on the 23rd, we will be hosting the Bristol & District Branch's monthly meeting. The venue will be confirmed nearer the time. See local press or ring one of the sub-branch contacts below for further info.

Dates, times and contacts for Branch events are shown in the diary section below. *Non-members particularly welcome.*

Wsm Diary

Wed 21 Aug: Plough, Congresbury. Bus X1 at 19:35 from Marine Parade, 19:45 from The Borough Arms. Return buses from Congresbury at 22:10 and 23:35.

Wed 4 Sept: Taunton crawl. Train from Weston at 19:06. Return train from Taunton at 22:28, arriving back in Weston at 22:59.

Wed 18 Sept: Two-pub town social. 8:30 the 49 Club, 9:45 the Dragon Inn.

Wed 2 Oct: Minibus outing 4 or 5 pubs. Leave Off The Rails at 7:30.

Wed 23 Oct: Bristol & District Branch Meeting in Weston. Venue to be confirmed.

Contacts

Tim Nickolls - 01934 628996 (eves)

Rich Neale - 01934 429808 (eves)

The Tenth Maltings Beer Festival

For the second year running, Colin Hicks of Off The Rails organised a trip to the Maltings Beer Festival in Newton Abbot. This year's trip attracted twice the number of attendees than in 2001, so a larger, more comfortable coach was laid on.

From a personal point of view the trip could not have been better timed. I had returned from holiday in a wet and windy Tenerife two days before, where the most interesting beer experience had been seeing a pub in my resort called "Tim Weatherpoons" (sic). I never actually saw the place open and with my nose pressed up against the window I saw nothing to suggest a half-decent beer might be on offer. A shame, as I would have loved to have asked the owner why he chose the name. A bizarre one for sure, although not quite as strange as the bar I visited in Lanzarote last year, whose exterior was adorned with Dwan signage (excellent Irish brewery for those who haven't had the pleasure). I feverishly entered and asked the waiter if they had any Dwan beers. Unfortunately, he didn't appear to understand any English (fair enough) and making a mental note to write to the local Trading Standards Officer about the misleading signage, I gave up and asked for a San Miguel. Again, I would love to know how and why the Dwan merchandising was installed. I digress...

The Maltings Festival is an annual event, which mainly functions as a showcase for breweries in the South West and the region's branch of SIBA

(Society of Independent Brewers) is heavily involved. My job entails me traveling all over the country and I can safely say that, as a region, ale in the South West is as good as anywhere and, indeed, better than most areas, in which I would include some of the supposed hotbeds for real ale.

This was my first visit and I have to say that both the festival and the venue were excellent. Over 150 ales were on offer, from 40 different breweries. Aside from the actual Maltings site (which is the home of

the Teignworthy brewery), there was a large marquee opposite, which provided a wonderful environment for a lunchtime's (and afternoon's and teatime's) supping.

My personal favourite beer tried was the Oakhill Original Stout, for which my grubby programme notes indicate I gave 11 marks out of 10. This wonderful 7.3% stout was the tenth beer I had tried, so the fact that it still managed to register so highly speaks volumes. Other beers which got high marks were Cotleigh Peregrine Porter, Hobdens Old Deverill, Moor Avalon Springtime, O'Hanlons Dry Stout (which managed to overcome the accompanying assault on my taste buds by a dangerous chilli sausage), Quay Silent Night and two from the wonderful Skinners Brewery – Figgy's Brew and Cornwall CAMRA 25. Berrow Brewery's Topsy Turvey (courtesy of those naughty boys, Vince Rutter and Kevin Brown) helped make the journey home bearable – but don't tell the driver.

Beers winning awards at the Festival included the following.
Champion Beer: *Quay - Weymouth JD 1742.*

Runner-up: *Princetown - Jail Ale.*

Strong Bitter: *RCH - East Street Cream.*
Porters, Stouts & Old Ales: *RCH - Old Slug Porter.*

Bottled Beers: *Keltek - Keltek King.*

This was a great day out. Look out for it in 2003.

Tim Nickolls

Nursery brewery advert

World Cup 2002 – A Real Ale Odyssey

A run-through of one man's thrills and spillages, ales and wails during the World Cup...

Friday 31 May – France vs Senegal, The 49 Club. Having commenced Jubilee weekend by confidently placing a £5 bet on Spain to win the World Cup at 8-1, I chose the 49 Club to watch the tournaments opening encounter. A pretty poor turnout (about ten people in the TV room), so little atmosphere, but a decent game with a shock result – the favourites beaten 1-0 by Senegal. Refreshments: a mixed grill accompanied by a very good quality pint of Butcombe, getting change out of five quid for the lot (this ain't Bristol!).

Sunday 2 June – England vs Sweden, The 49 Club. Back to the 49 for this 10:30 kick-off. A better crowd this time – about twenty – most of who tucked in to the huge breakfast on offer. A fairly dull affair (the game, not the breakfast), which did little to arouse much enthusiasm amongst the 49 contingent.

We had a beer called Jubilee Ale. An unspectacular beer to say the least. The barman said it was from Hancock's. Given that Hancock's HB, the flagship beer of this long-defunct brewery is now brewed by Burton (or to be precise – Bass Burton Brewery), I am not clear who exactly brewed this or why it was apparently produced under a Hancock's banner – although the pumpclip gave no indication of brewery. No matter – it was similar to England's second half performance. We quickly reverted to the Butcombe.

Friday 7 – England vs Argentina, The Windsor. Lunchtime kick-off for this one, which proved to be the emotional high of the tournament for England fans. The pub was fairly crowded with people who were most definitely "up for it."

Beers first – the pub has Bass and Courage Best as regulars and a changing third beer. For some months now this had been Charles Wells Bombardier and, indeed, there was much Bombardier World Cup promotional material around the bar. In my experience The Windsor has always served up a good pint of Bombardier and it was therefore sad to see that it had been replaced by tasteless Tetley's (and I don't care what

our friends in Leeds say).

We endured a pint of this, then moved to the Bass. This was fine although, in truth, even lager would probably have tasted like nectar when accompanied by this football match. Beating Argentina now ranks above Germany in terms of importance for most England footie fans and the result was accompanied by a performance that incorporated everything lacking in the second half against Sweden – passion, desire, commitment. A guy in front of me was holding a betting slip for England to be leading at half time and full time – didn't see the odds or his stake, but he was pretty pleased with life.

In effect The Windsor was a stand-up venue, which helped create the sort of atmosphere conducive to watching football. We left shaking our heads with disbelief. A memorable lunchtime.

Tues 11 – Republic of Ireland vs Saudi Arabia, Great Western Hotel, Exeter. It had been my ambition to watch as many of the key matches as possible across a wide range of venues in Weston, but work dictated otherwise. However, it is no ordeal visiting venues such as the Great Western, opposite St David's Station.

This is a renowned real ale mecca and became local CAMRA Pub Of The Year in 2000. My pen ran out writing down all the beers available, but they included Exe Valley Devon Glory, Branscombe Vale Branoc, Fullers London Pride, Bass, Taylor Landlord, Adnams Best and Hampshire Luv'ly Jub'lee. Food looked very good too. An enjoyable game, with Ireland doing all that was necessary to ensure their passage through to the next round of the competition.

Wed 12 – England vs Nigeria, Off The Rails. England's first 7:30 kick-off. We chose Off The Rails and were rewarded with possibly the best pint of the tournament – a beer called Western Druid, brewed by Moor Brewery as part of their Pathfinder Tours series. Not sure how it found its way to Off The Rails, but it went down a treat, especially when accompanied by rolls packed with bacon for a quid. The game was rather dreary, but "we did what we had to do." The crowd in the main bar was only about a dozen strong, with the numbers in the buffet area fluctuating with the train timetable.

Saturday 15 – England vs Denmark, The Winscombe Club. Now this is a nice venue. Mike "Head of Transport" Coleman and myself settled down with our nice pints of Wickwar BOB and large cheese salad rolls, at a total cost of £4.20. Bass was the guest beer, which we personally found a bit of a disappointment, but there was a good atmosphere with Simon Stabbins at the helm. Although England's 3-0 victory seemed to set the country alight, the experience left me a little cold. The game was more or less over after the first twenty minutes and the Danish goalkeeper was kind enough to give us two goals. Perhaps even more significant was that, even with a comfortable margin of victory, we only managed 39% of possession. Some of the more down-to-earth amongst us realized that a side with a bit more of a clue than Denmark (say, Brazil!) would make for more effective use of 61% of possession.

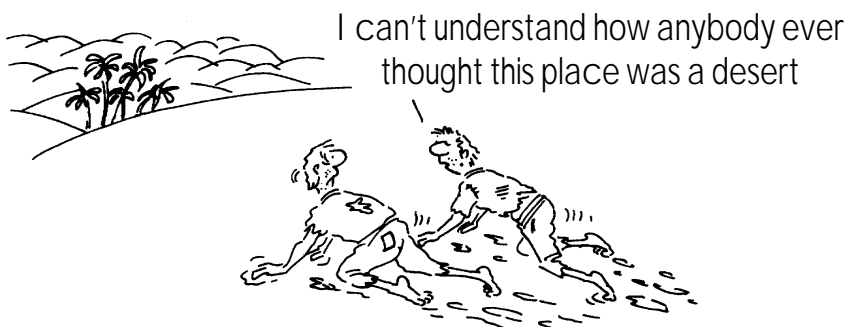
Friday 21 – England vs Brazil, Branksome Railway Hotel, Poole, Dorset. Another venue dictated by work. Before we get to the bad bit..... This Good Beer Guide entry appears rather rough and ready but keeps a good pint of beer – Fullers London Pride and Hampshire Strong's Best Bitter are regulars. The guest beer was Hop Back Thunderstorm – a friend recently wrote to me saying, "don't Hop Back ever brew a bad beer?" Don't think so. Anyway, the pub was well populated for the 7:30 kick-off, with a great atmosphere. At least 30 people took-up the "breakfast and a pint for £5" offer and the joint was rockin'.

After England scored, I spent much of the next half hour simply gazing up at the score in the corner of the screen, wallowing in the beauty of an England 1 - Brazil 0 scoreline. However, this was not to last. My premonitions from the Denmark game became a terrible reality – Brazil had more of the possession than us, despite playing for most of the second half with a man less and the rest is history.

So there you have it. My story ends here. After England's defeat, any remaining enthusiasm I had for the competition was extinguished the following day when Spain (and my fiver) were beaten by South Korea and a visually challenged set of officials.

From a drinking perspective it was disappointing to not come across any World Cup real ale specials – I suspect part of the problem was the Jubilee, which did seem to capture many breweries' attention. The only footie special I came close to was "They Think It's All Over, It Is Now", brewed by Cottage, which was residing in the cellar of The Crown, Axbridge on my last visit there towards the end of May. Perhaps I'll brew one myself for 2006!

Tim Nickolls



A Round with Robin

Following on from the previous article on my drinking habits from c1958 to 1967 (see Pints West no. 54), when I admitted turning my back on real ale, I realise that on consideration it was the brewers who were turning their backs on the beer drinkers.

Almost all of them who owned tied houses were advocating the use of pressurised beer and with the advent of keg beer (Flowers Brewery c1969) it was getting difficult to find the proper stuff. It is true that some pubs maintained the tradition throughout the “Dark Ages of Real Ale” by keeping handpumps, but there was no encouragement for the younger drinkers to drink the stuff. It should also be remembered that lager was being advertised strongly.

Following a move by my employers from Central London to Croydon, I quickly discovered the delights of lunchtime boozing. We had a pub only 50 yards from the office, a Bass Charrington House, fairly traditional, but with no working handpumps – so I drank “Superdraught” which was probably as close to “Victory” beer as

George Orwell could imagine. I never did find out the strength of it but I guess it was about 3.4% and although beer, it was bubbly. Bass was also on draught but this too was keg. If I wanted to get wrecked it was bottles of Gold Label and Worthington White Shield that saved the day.

In the early 1970s I joined a work-based club that was called Landrex – nothing to do with toilet paper, but a club dedicated to exploration of the land. Actually, its main aim appeared to be getting out of Greater London to go camping in rural areas with a preference to pitch as near to a pub as possible. Failing this we were encouraged to go on rambles from a railway station to a pub and back again. Even climbing trips to Harrisons Rocks in Kent were followed by heavy drinking sessions at the King & Barnes pub in Eridge, close to the railway station.

It was Landrex that kept the spirit of real ale drinking to the fore in my case, and compared to the fizzy stuff we were consuming in Croydon, it was a delight to sample some great beers that hadn't

succumbed to keg. Some of these were “Double Dragon” in the Brecon area, Kimberley ales around Nottingham, St Austell ales in Cornwall and Starkeys in Somerset.

Following a plethora of trips to the south west, especially to the areas around Wells and Glastonbury, and a

considerable liking for scrumpy (especially when mixed with Courage Bristol Stout to make the “poor man's black velvet”), I decided to chuck my job in the Civil Service in Croydon and move hereabouts. After a few months of having fun being unemployed, and being over-employed (at Butlins, Minehead – but that could be the subject of another article so I won't go into details here), I got a job in the so-called “desert” of Weston-super-Mare. Why the folks in Bristol thought it was a desert I really don't know, as you could get Gibbs Mew beer in Maxies, Courage on handpump in at least two pubs and Bass on handpump or gravity in two more pubs.

However, I soon moved to Wells for three years where I joined CAMRA, as so few pubs in Wells sold anything other than keg (except the Rose & Crown with Courage beers on gravity, and the Half Moon which was the first pub I can remember which dabbled in small breweries). The main drink in Wells and Glastonbury was cider, but work trips took me to three outstanding pubs, which I would still reckon as being amongst the best. They are The Princess Motto at Barrow Gurney, The Crown Inn at Dinghurst, near Churchill (though now much altered), and The Black Horse at Clapton-in-Gordano, all of which sold their beer on gravity.

This Pints West article finishes in 1977, the year I moved back to Weston-super-Mare! At this time CAMRA in Weston was quite active, and in September 1977 we decided to host the Grand Atlantic Beer Festival. What followed from that will be revealed in the next thrilling installment.

Robin E Wild

Butcombe advert

RCH advert

Weston Whispers (pub/beer news)

Real ale drinkers would have welcomed the Jubilee weekend, regardless of their loyalty to Brenda. The highlight for most would have been the Wetherspoon's festival at **The Dragon**. The general view seems to have been that there were some excellent and indifferent beers produced by breweries jumping on the Jubilee bandwagon. Phoenix Wobbly Bob and Hop Back 15/50 seemed to be among the best-received. A couple of people who visited The Dragon several times over the course of the festival reported that it was, in the main, very good but a few beers were "as cold as lager."

The Jubilee weekend also saw an excellent all-day event at **Weston Cricket Club**. It started with breakfast and footie (England vs Sweden) then a family-orientated afternoon with games, bouncy castles, ice creams, etc, then a disco in the evening. Local dignitaries present included Doug Edgar and the Mayor. Beers were the regulars – Butcombe and Fullers London Pride – supplemented by Brains Reverend James Original Ale.

The Worlebury Jubilee Street Party was an excellently organized affair, much enjoyed by all. On the refreshments front, I had not really expected there to be any real ale available, so was delighted to see Butcombe Bitter on sale, specially at £1 a pint. However, to my huge dismay, there was only a solitary 36-pint polypin, dwarfed by mountains of tins of Fosters, John Smiths, Kronenbourg, etc. This says a lot about the perception of real ale's (lack of) popularity these days. It may be that the Head of Drinks had taken a look at the nearby **Worlebury Golf Club**, where the best-kept pint of Butcombe in town sits alongside no less than four keg bitters. I firmly believe that given the opportunity to have a good pint of real ale, particularly at an event such as a party or festival, most drinkers will do the sensible thing. Evidence? The Butcombe was all gone 45 minutes into the five-hour event. Plenty of fizz left at the end though.

The Queen's Arms, Bleadon had Archer's Jubilee beer. Landlord Chris Smith is trying to compile a history of the pub, which is believed to go back around 150 years as a pub and 350 years as a building. As part of this project he would also like to produce a list of all landlords. If you have any info that you think might be of interest give Chris a ring on 01934 812080 or, better still, pop along and try some of his many real ales, straight from the cask.

Further to our piece on **The White Hart** in the last Pints West, the pub has continued to give local real ale drinkers a few nice surprises. Blackawton Exhibition, Stonehenge Pigswill, and beers from Butcombe,

Wickwar and Wychwood have all been seen recently. There have been occasions, though, when there has not been any real ale available.

Following the article by Laurie Gibney in the last Pints West on the delights of drinking in Nailsea, a few of us headed there recently for an evening's drinking. We began by meeting up with Laurie at **The Mizzymead Club**. We enjoyed an interesting and good quality organic ale called Terra Firma from Everards. Apparently we had just missed Smiles Jubilee offering which apparently was very popular. You will need a member to get you into The Mizzymead and there is a 50p charge for guests. We moved on to **The Moored Spout**, which is covered in detail elsewhere in this magazine. On the night, we had just missed a fast-selling guest called Little Puck from the Thomas Hardy stable, but had a decent pint of Smiles Best. Other beers on offer were Courage Best and Butcombe Bitter. Next up was the **Ring O'Bells**, part of the Unique pub chain. Once again, it appeared that we had visited a pub at the wrong time. We had just missed Adnams Golden Jubilee and the next beer on was something from the excellent Beartown Brewery. Beers available included Fullers London Pride, Marstons Pedigree, Brakspears Special and Shepherd Neame Spitfire. Our party plumped for Pedigree and Spitfire, although we seemed to spend much time eouligising over how much better they both used to be. One or two people suggested that Spitfire was now of lower quality due to the pressure that Shepherd Neame were under to produce the beer at a price Wetherspoon were prepared to pay in return for national distribution. Nothing more than a scurrilous rumour I am sure. Final port of call was the wonderful **Blue Flame**, the kind of venue where you could happily spend many hours. In addition to the usual Bass and Fullers London Pride was Barnstormer from Bath Ales. Tasty, although a degree or two on the warm side. Nevertheless, a good ending to an interesting evening. Four venues all worth a try.

A very pleasant evening was had at **The Windmill, Portishead**. Geoff Churchill has been at the helm for two years and seems to have struck the right balance between food and beer. The lower floor functions as a restaurant, including a children's menu and the quality and range of the menu looked good. The upper floor is the drinking area and offers four regular beers – Bass, Butcombe Bitter, Courage Best and RCH Pitchfork – together with a guest. On the evening of our visit this was the multi award-winning RCH East Street Cream. Geoff seems to be a strong supporter of RCH, as he told us he had Firebox, Double

Header and the RCH Jubilee beer down in the cellar. The Pitchfork was so good that I was not able to drag myself away from it to try anything else. My friends drinking Butcombe and East Street Cream were also impressed. The Portishead area seems to have been something of a real ale "black hole" in recent times, but The Windmill, with its nice sea/estuary views is most definitely worth a look.

Rock Follies, a fairly new music-orientated venue on The Boulevard, sells Butcombe Bitter and a beer from the Highgate Brewery, namely Special Best Bitter (3.8% abv), has been on for some weeks.

Recent visits out of town have included **The Crown, Burnham**, where Fullers London Pride, Bass and Flowers IPA were on. We understand that RCH and Berrow beers often feature, so this pub is worth a visit. The **Penscot Inn, Shipham** recently re-opened after a brief closure of 100 years. Greene King IPA and Speckled Hen are the beers on offer. When we were in the area, the nearby **Miners Arms** proved to be a better bet, with Archers Brunel Bitter – not in the Good Beer Guide. **The Crossways**, on the A38 near Highbridge, is another pub worth seeking out. On our visit there were six real ales, including Cotleigh Barn Owl and Oakhill Yeoman.

Off The Rails has added the excellent Cottage and Moor breweries to their usual roster of ever-changing guest beers (RCH, Branscombe, Moles, Smiles, etc). Although their main focus is on West Country breweries, you do get the odd gem from further afield. Recent examples have been Secret Kingdom Ale from Hadrian and Borders brewery and Indian Summer Ale from the Swale brewery, based in Maidstone, Kent. This beer was voted by the Society of Independent Brewers as their champion beer in 2001.

It would be no exaggeration to say that Tony French's departure from **Off The Rails** was met with a mixture of shock and horror by many local CAMRA members and no doubt other regulars of this favourite local haunt. To many people who only ever visited the pub in the evenings it would be fair to say that Tony was regarded as "Mr. Off The Rails." Tony's departure has not had an adverse effect on the range or quality of beers, but he is sadly missed by many. Our thanks, Tony, for all you gave at Off The Rails.

Do pay **The Whistling Duck in Banwell** a visit – you never know what you might find!

Tim Nickolls

Fags Corner

In the last Pints West, John Armstrong bemoaned the lack of smoke-free air space in which to consume beer.

I recently came across a small booklet called "The Easy Breathing Pubs Directory." This is produced by the Easy Breathing Pub Project, which is co-ordinated by Health Promotion Service Avon. The booklet lists over 200 pubs in the Avon area – split into Bath & North East Somerset, Bristol, South Gloucestershire and North Somerset. Copies can be obtained by ringing 0117 959 5465.

Qualification for entry into the booklet is that the pub "has a no-smoking area at all times unless otherwise stated." The last three words make for some interesting comments against some of the pubs. Several say that they just have a non-smoking restaurant. A laudable initiative as far as I am concerned, as I find it even harder to eat in a smoky atmosphere than to drink and have a chat. However, if you don't feel like eating, I guess the answer is – tough. I suppose a cunning plan would be to buy a bag of crisps and make it last a couple of hours.

Most of my best friends over the years have been smokers, so I am not anti-smokers. However, I do feel it is good that more pubs are recognizing that not everyone wants to choke their way through an evening and go home reeking of smoke. A change of thinking is needed – I know people who don't go to pubs very often, if at all, because of the smoke problem. It

has to be said though that some places in this directory don't seem to have quite got the plot yet. A number of pubs have no-smoking areas only for certain times of the day, usually revolving around lunchtime. Presumably outside of the defined embargo, people are free to smoke in those areas. Do the landlords think that if an area is occupied with smokers all evening, the air in that section will be sweetly fresh the following morning? Take a sniff of those curtains, carpets and seats folks! The Ostrich in Bristol is one such pub with its head in the sand, operating a no-smoking area from 12-4 Mon-Sat and 12-6 on Sundays.

One of my favourite pubs, the Ring O'Bells, Compton Martin has a no-smoking area – the family room. Whilst this suits me down to the ground (having two small children), I know of several ale drinkers who despise children even more than they despise smoking. Should it be only those who want a meal in pubs or those that have children who are entitled to a chance to avoid secondary cancer? Does the Ring O'Bells policy discriminate against those who can't/haven't/won't have children?

Some of us remember the days when Wetherspoon's no-smoking area was at the bar! Thankfully they and a growing number of other pubs are making an effort to give over a part of their pub to the silent majority, albeit some efforts are more credible than others.

Your views to the editor (or me) please!

Tim Nickolls

A spring evening in the City of Bath

On a warm spring evening, I disembarked at Bath station to sample some of its wonderful inns.

First stop was the special **Old Green Tree** in Green Street. This is an unspoiled, traditional pub, with two wood-panelled rooms off the main bar. With the usual warm welcome from the barperson, I sampled the Wickwar BOB and a new one for me, Galahad from Goffs brewery.

Just around the corner, in New Bond Street Place, off New Bond Street, stands the **Volunteer Rifleman**. This pub is even smaller than the Old Green Tree! But what a revelation it was, an oasis in the middle of the city's hustle and bustle. On offer was the local Bellringer from Abbey Ales and Charles Wells Bombar-dier. For anyone who has not visited this charming pub, do go!

The **Salamander** (a Bath Ales pub) on St John Street, near to Queens Square is the next stop. The four on tap were Gem, Rare Hare, SPA Extra and my personal favourite, Barnstormer. This is a more spacious place than the previous two mentioned, but it can still get busy on weekends. There is also a small restaurant that serves a wonderful varied menu. There is another Bath Ales pub, on Upper Bristol Road, below Royal Victoria

Park. (How I wish there was a Bath Ales pub on the Upper Bristol Road in Weston!).

A five-minute walk away is the famous **Star**, on Vineyards Road. The Star needs no introduction, being perhaps the best-known pub in Bath. As always there was a great atmosphere when I entered the bar. There were four ales on, a couple from the local Abbey Brewery, Bellringer and Jubilation (to celebrate the Queen's visit to Bath back in May), Masham's Black Sheep Bitter and the resident Bass.

Before returning to the station, I made a quick trip to the **Bell** on Walcot Street. A superb Bohemian-style pub, that always has an unusual beer. That evening I found a rare brew from Blue Anchor, "Spriggo", which was delicious. The other beer that I tried was Hop Back's 15/50. Live music often features here, which can vary from folk, jazz, rock and calypso. A large garden/courtyard is out the back.

Ten minutes later, I arrived back at the station to catch the 11:00 back to Weston, to learn that it was 16 minutes late (could have had another!). But it was a great tour of some of the city's inns that I will remember, along with some varied and superb ales.

Stuart F Jennings

Bear Inn, Wiveliscombe advert

Dorothy Inn, Weymouth advert

Reed on...

Call Me Lucky!

Got lucky the other weekend. No, not what you're thinking..... the other lucky! On our way to Shepton Mallet recently we decided to call off for lunch at the **Burcott Inn, Wookey**. As I said, my luck was in as we chanced upon the start of their Sausage and Beer Festival running over the Saturday and Sunday on the 22nd and 23rd June. As well as having three decent beers on hand pump in the bar (Teignworthy Old Moggie, Cotleigh Osprey, and Cornish Jack from one of the Cornish brewers whose name escapes me) there were at least another six on stillage out in the back yard.

As it turned out we were the first customers asking about the festival advertised out front (well they'd only been open ten minutes) and the barmaid seemed to be taken by surprise at our early interest. A selection of the beers we sampled were as follows: Church End Vicar's Ruin 4.4%, Beckett's Stoke Ale 4.2%, Hopback Druid's Draught 4.5% and Itchen Valley Wykeham's Glory 4.3%. All were pleasant and some rare around these parts.

I had to drive a little further and there was a busy afternoon ahead and so missed out on the other offerings. Needless to say we did have a sausage or two for lunch (with mash and onion gravy, what else?) but

unfortunately they could not compare with those served at the **Old Green Tree** in Bath city centre. The beer, however, was indeed a treat.

The Porterhouse, London

If you are ever in London around the Covent Garden area seek out a place called The Porterhouse. It's well worth a visit. I'd seen it advertised on occasion in **What's Brewing** so sought it out when looking for a Good Beer Guide establishment to partake in some refreshment at the end of a long afternoon.

The beers available on draught are all award winning ales from the Porterhouse Brewing Company based in Dublin and in effect The Porterhouse here is the UK brewery tap.

Being a rare sunny day in late May it was an opportunity to sit outside the main entrance and quaff a selection of their stouts and porters (no driving today thank heaven, courtesy of Bakers Coaches). I had heard that the interior was very different so before leaving couldn't resist a peek inside. As well as the aforementioned beers on draught there was a huge selection of bottled beers from around the globe, some of which were displayed in countless glass cabinets fixed against the walls all around the place.

It's a multi-level pub broken up nicely into little pockets, so it's easy to find privacy

if needed. The real feature of this establishment however is the use of polished copper tube linked with brass T's and elbow connectors forming handrails, balustrades and bar fittings galore. The theme is also carried through, perhaps unsurprisingly, into the tastefully designed toilets. An award winning interior if ever I saw one and a plumbers delight!

Be warned though about London prices. A half pint of any of the draught beers would buy you a decent pint of cask conditioned in your average West Country local and the bottled beers ain't cheap either, but hey, drink less, bring some Brasso and enjoy the experience!

The Crown Inn at Churchill

Many people's fave pub (mine included) but there is one thing that, for me, often lets it down. Absolutely nothing to do with the excellent beer, nor the food or the pleasant ambience. No, none of these things. It's the soap in the gents toilets..... there never is any! Maybe it's uncool to wash your hands these days, I don't know, but I like to and so do many other people I know including the younger members of my own family. So come on Tim, let's see the soap dispenser replenished daily so I can enjoy my 'nuts' hygienically.

(There was plenty of soap when I visited recently - Ed.)

Steve Reed

Smiles advert

Rotary Club beer festival advert

Island in the sea

NEWS FROM NAILSEA

NEW LANDLADY : It has been all change at the **Moorend Spout** since my report in the last edition of Pints West – in came a new landlady, Bernadette O'Reilly, and out went the loud music which I reported as "slightly louder music than suites my ear". Also out are a less desirable element of customer and pool tables. There has also been a change in the line up of real ales, Bass and Wadworth 6X having made way for Butcombe and Smiles Best on the regular line up together with Courage Best, plus one or two guest beers from the 50 in the Innspired Guest Beer list. On a recent Weston-super-Mare CAMRA visit there was no guest beer because it had been sold too quickly – it was named Little Puck with a strength of 4.1% abv, an ex Ushers occasional beer contract brewed for owners Refresh by the Thomas Hardy Brewery.

Bernadette and her husband John are delighted to have moved to Nailsea. In Bristol they were catering managers at the Cambridge Arms at Redland, The Prince of Wales at Westbury-on-Trym owned by CAMRA members Richard and Fiona Ellis, Shirehampton Golf Club, The Shakespeare at Redland, Horts City Tavern when run by Matt and Sarah, and at the County Cricket Ground where they also ran the bars.

The non-smoking restaurant seating 70 at the Moorend Spout is therefore enjoying a revival, as is the upstairs function room, which can accommodate 110 for a buffet meal. The varied, ever-changing and temptingly interesting menu always includes fresh fish. Other facilities include a car park and garden with plenty of outside seating, butterflies and birds. When the restaurant is open the ante room and adjacent end of the bar is also non-smoking. Well-behaved and supervised children are welcome, except at the bar servery and must leave the bar area after 9 p.m. If children misbehave they might just be shown the cellars, which used to be the local jail and are frequented by two ghosts, one of which could be "hanging" Judge Jeffries who visited the jail.

The Moorend Spout is at Union Street, Nailsea, and supports duos and solo artistes who entertain with popular songs on Sunday nights, five darts teams, Bristol Channel Scuba Divers meetings (Bernadette and John are instructors), Rotary and Inner Wheel meetings. A major fund raising initiative in aid of the Bristol Children's Hospital deserves your support on the Friday 13th September – Bob Anderson will play exhibition darts matches against those who are successful in play-offs taking place before then – phone 01275 790206 for your

chance to play against a professional. Remember "Drink Don't Drive", catch the 354 or 654 First Bus to the other end of Union Street!

(The following comes with a "health warning". We believed it true at the time of writing but the situation may have changed in the mean time – rather than no mention at all, we go with the original so readers have an idea of what's going on, and we will update readers when we know further details - Ed.)

NEW MICROBREWERY : Look out this summer for two new beers on sale in Nailsea and District, both from a new microbrewery, the **Tickenham Farm Brewery**, using the brew kit from Lundy Island. Tony Fey is a name linked to the venture, he who is also landlord of The Old Barn at Wraxall, a favourite of many CAMRA members with a number of gravity dispensed beers. The two new bitter beers should be **Tickenham Tipple** at 4% abv, a light flowery bitter, and **Old Farmer Durston** at 4% abv, which will be straw coloured in the summer and a darker colour in the winter. Old Farmer Durston is named as a tribute to the Durston family who have farmed at Wellhouse Farm, Tickenham for over 200 years, and in whose farm buildings the brewery will be situated. Tickenham lies between Nailsea and Clevedon on the B3130, and The Old Barn at Wraxall lies on the same road on the Wraxall side of Nailsea.

Laurie Gibney

Bunch of Grapes, Denmark Street, Bristol advert

Pythons can strangle your beer's taste!

Sweeping changes in pub ownership in the last decade or so have created a number of large pub chains, most of which are now owned by non-brewers. Meanwhile, much investment has gone into cellar cooling systems for all types of beer. One consequence of this is that "chill haze" has become an issue for small producers of real ale.

Cellar cooling systems have become a standard part of a pub's periodic refit. In principle, this is very desirable; no beer benefits from being kept and served too warm. However, different types of beer need to be kept and served at different temperatures; the recommended range of cellar temperature for lagers (8-10 degrees C) is significantly lower than that for ales (11-13 degrees C), while each ale will have an optimum range of temperature to show off its flavour to best advantage.

The current fashion is to route all the beer pipes running from cellar to bar through a contraption known as a "python", which passes all the beers through a cooler; in many cases, each one then goes through a further "flash" cooler just underneath its pump. In theory, the temperature of each beer can be controlled by the licensee; unfortunately, not all licensees are equally conscientious, and not all pythons are equally controllable.

The most obvious consequence is that real ale is often served too cold, and has to be allowed to warm up considerably before its taste can be properly appreciated; another less fortunate one is that it can also develop what is known as a "chill haze". This is where proteins present in

the beer become visible, making it appear "cloudy", although it is still perfectly drinkable. Because so many of us drink "with our eyes", pints are often taken back in the mistaken belief that the beer is "off", leading landlords in their turn to ask the brewer what is wrong with his beer. This can be bad news for a small brewer who depends on occasional sales in many of his outlets; he cannot really spare the time for frequent visits to sort out complaints like these, which are really due to the licensee's inattention to detail.

Bigger brewers, especially the well known national producers, do not seem to suffer so much from chill haze as smaller ones. This may be because their beers have less residual protein in them, because much of it is removed at the brewery. Certainly some microbrewers are changing their brewing process by chilling the beer at the brewery, which removes much of the protein before it is put into barrels. Care is needed though, as real ale must have enough live yeast left in it to be capable of a secondary fermentation in the pub cellar. If there isn't enough secondary fermentation, the beer will not develop its flavour fully.

So how about it, pub owners – could some of your licensees benefit from more training, and your pubs from more thoughtful design of pythons so that real ales aren't chilled as much as the lagers? And customers – does your cloudy pint still taste OK if you close your eyes and drink it?

Norman Spalding

Cask Marque

Readers may have noticed that a number of pubs these days boast a plaque announcing that they have achieved Cask Marque accreditation. This is a commendable scheme started three or four years ago by some smaller and medium-sized brewers to improve the quality of real ale, with general support from CAMRA.

To take part, a publican must either be sponsored, or pay his own sponsorship; the cost involved means no-one is going to enter into it lightly. A rigorous initial inspection is made by trained and experienced beer professionals, followed by unannounced spot checks to ensure that quality is maintained. If a publican doesn't satisfy the criteria, no plaque is awarded; instead, consultancy is offered, to help him pass the test second time round.

Unfortunately, when Cask Marque started the criteria used by its inspectors included a maximum beer temperature, but no minimum. This led to some very cold pints being given the seal of approval, although the taste of real ale is unquestionably affected by being served too cold. CAMRA made representations about this, and fortunately Cask Marque agreed. They have now amended their guidance to inspectors, so very cold beer should be a thing of the past in these pubs. Please let us know if you find it is still a problem.

In principle, Cask Marque is perhaps one of the best things to happen to real ale quality for years; an independent accreditation scheme for real ale, run by some of the country's most well respected brewers. CAMRA wishes it every success.

Norman Spalding

All things bright and beautiful

I recently "celebrated" a significant birthday – one of those with a nought on the end – and had the problem of supplying drinks, including real ale, for over a hundred people.

The problem was that I could not get access to the venue early enough to set up barrels in time for the beer to "drop" ready for drinking. My reputation as a Beer Festival Bar Manager was on the line.

Thankfully, John at the Hare on the Hill, Kingsdown came to the rescue by reminding me that Bath Ales (in common with all our local breweries) will deliver barrels of their

real ales "bright", that is ready to drink on the same day, or indeed immediately after tapping.

The process involves the brewer carefully decanting the beer (I ordered a mixture of nine and four and a half gallon casks) into clean barrels leaving the sediment behind. Because this is done and the beer delivered on the same day it will keep its condition and stay cool provided some very basic advice from the brewery is followed. The other advantage is that you don't have to worry about people bumping

into or knocking the casks; in fact they can be tilted to get the very last drop of beer out, so nothing gets wasted.

The party was a success, largely due to the excellence of the real ale. I can therefore personally recommend this as a solution to getting hold of a largish quantity of real ale without having to worry about something going wrong. If organising an event I suggest you talk to a local brewery to ensure that it will be "all bright on the night"

Steve O'Shea

Somerset micro chalks up twenty years of craft brewing

Despite the fact that Berrow Brewery chalked up twenty years of craft brewing in May 2002, it's very much business as usual for this genuine microbrewery.

The five-barrel plant located on the Somerset coast between Burnham-on-Sea and Brea has been producing Berrow Brewery Best Bitter (4Bs) and Topsy Turvy since 1982. 4Bs is a 3.9% ABV pale-brown session bitter whilst Topsy Turvy is a 6% straw-coloured strong ale for which the term "dangerously drinkable" is truly an apt description.

In recent years Porter has been added to the range at 4.6% ABV. Seasonal ales such as Carnivale at 4.6% ABV, which is brewed for the local carnival season in November, and Christmas Ale at 5% ABV are also available. Although the brewery have not gone out of their way to celebrate twenty years of craft brewing, they have brewed a

Jubilee Ale at 4.7% ABV in recognition of the Queen's golden jubilee.

Even in Somerset, unfortunately, these beers may be hard to find due to the stiff competition from the bigger brewers and the increasing number of outlets tied to pub companies, but they are well worth tracking down at local free houses and beer festivals. Off sales can also be purchased direct from the brewery in various quantities from two pints upwards and are very popular with tourists during the holiday season.

James Johnstone, a professionally trained brewer and currently a brewing consultant, ably assisted by his wife Andrea, run the brewery. James and Andrea work well as a team, with Andrea dealing with the admin and paperwork, occasionally helping out with the brewing and deliveries when James is away on business and last, but not least, providing a great deal of enthusiasm.

Looking back over the past twenty years, the only thing James would change if he were starting all over again would be to have a local pub to guarantee a regular outlet for

his beer.

With regard to the activities of CAMRA during this time, of which he is a member, he recognises and appreciates the positive influence of the organisation with respect to small brewers. However, he did observe that the organisation has sometimes focused on relatively trivial issues to the detriment of the more important ones and that the message the organisation puts out is sometimes at odds with its perceived image.

So, well done to James and Andrea at Berrow Brewery for twenty years of quality real ale and proving that the microbrewery dream is still alive. Who knows what the future may bring but, hopefully, Berrow beers will feature in it for many years to come.

The future as far as Berrow Brewery is concerned should now be made somewhat easier with the introduction of progressive duty on beer, provided the pubs and wholesalers don't just look for bigger discounts in return!

Dave Graham

Robin Hood, St Michael's Hill advert

Annexe Inn, Bishopston advert

Club of the Year

The Bristol & District branch of CAMRA, the Campaign for Real Ale, are pleased to announce that the Winscombe Club (in Winscombe) is our Club Of The Year for 2002. The presentation of the certificate was made by Bristol & District CAMRA branch chairman Richard Brooks at the Winscombe Club on Wednesday 17 July.

It's great to find somewhere like this proving that the word 'club' doesn't automatically mean no real ale. We think they're doing a splendid job serving good quality real ale at bargain prices and hope more clubs follow their example.

Barman Simon Stabbins says the Club has had a focus on real ales stemming from the early 1970s when the chairman of the club was a chap named Dennis Jacobs. He was apparently a brewer in Nailsea and the Club's real ale at the time was Jacob's Best. (Do any readers remember this beer?)

Hancock's was then their standard real ale for a long time. Wickwar BOB has now

been on for about ten years, which was the same time that three real ales were introduced.

They have had over 800 different real ales over the ten years and Simon claims to have all the pumpclips!

They also shift large amounts of Thatchers cider – at the incredible price of 95p!

Non-members can gain entry to the Club on presentation of a valid CAMRA membership card or a copy of the current CAMRA Good Beer Guide.

So, congratulations to all responsible at the Club, including John Radley, bar committee chairman; Susan Stisted, bar manager; and Simon Stabbins, barman and real ale enthusiast.

There are approximately 30,000 licensed clubs in Britain. The Winscombe Club will now be put forward for the national Club Of The Year competition, which was last won by Somer's Sports & Social Club, based in Halesowen.

RB / TN

The Wadworth experience

In the Weston section of the last edition of Pints West it was mentioned that someone's colleagues had made a visit to "a certain brewery in Devizes" (Wadworth), paid six quid for the privilege, and not been offered so much as a thimble of beer.

It must be pointed out that this is not at all the normal state of affairs. It would appear it was a one-off, completely atypical experience, all the more mysterious because it was supposedly on a Saturday when Wadworth host their visits weekday evenings.

Jonathan Pollock, public relations manager for Wadworth, informs us what the visits are really like:

"The tours commence at 7:00 p.m. with a visit to the Stables to see our shire horses, followed by a cooperage demonstration by Alastair Simms. The party will then go to the Training Cellar where you will be offered a beer to sample whilst being given a short presentation about Wadworth and Company Limited and our products. The tour party will then move up to the Brewhouse and will be shown malt, the hop store, mash tuns, coppers, steam engine, fermenting and the yeast room. The party will be guided 100 yards to the Black Swan where you will be able to exchange the vouchers we will have issued to you for further liquid refreshment. We will also provide a good snack meal. There will be no charge for your visit – only the cost of your transport arrangements."

Rhona Murdoch, manager of the Victoria in Westbury-on-Trym, also relates the true nature of trips to Wadworth. In a letter to us she states:

"I have personally organised and

attended several Wadworth tours and have never once been asked by the brewery to pay for a tour. On most occasions I have had to pay for transport to get there and I am willing to bet that this is where the £6 mentioned went. As for not being offered a "thimble of beer", I would like to mention that the reason I always supply customers with transportation is due to the masses of free beer available. For instance, on my last visit to Wadworth, on arrival we were treated to a couple of pints in the sampling bar (some even sneaked in a third!) whilst the history of Wadworth was explained, after which we happily trundled around the brewery where we were encouraged to chew on malted barley and taste the yeast. We met Harry the dray horse and learnt about the forgotten art of barrel making. To round off the evening we popped into the Crown, conveniently located right next door. Here the ale flowed freely once more whilst home-made soup and 6X sausages were served. Content and just a little tipsy, but no lighter of pocket, we jumped on the bus to wind our merry way back to the Victoria. Those that were unable to attend, after witnessing our giddy return, immediately booked places on the next trip to Wadworth. They booked a year in advance. Our visit last year was no better or any worse than previous tours. Of the other trips to Wadworth that friends and customers have attended all reported the same wonderful, free experience."

We are delighted to hear that people's experiences of Wadworth visits are so positive and enjoyable, and are glad to put the record straight.

SP

First award for Nursery

Keynsham's Nursery Brewery has scooped its first award by winning Beer of the Festival at the recent Accrington Beer Festival for its 5.2% Old Mother Hubbard, a great achievement for a brewery than has been up and running for less than a year.

The beer is described thus: "A well crafted, dark brown, old ale style beer. Complex and well balanced with roast malt and fruit. Coffee, liquorice, black cherry, blackcurrant and clove flavours balance the satisfying dry bitterness."

Where can this excellent beer be found? Well, although rarely seen in the Bristol area unfortunately (come on publicans and pub companies, support the local brewers) this full flavoured beer can be found on the shelves of Somerfield supermarket in bottle-conditioned form, at the Old Bank in Keynsham's High Street and, if you're prepared to travel that extra mile, Gullivers in Gothersgad, Copenhagen.

In September, look out for their 4.8% Little Jack Horner which is a golden, refreshing beer flavoured with plums from Compton Basset.

Phil Brooks



Pub news

The **Portcullis** in Clifton Village (the landlady rang me to say so) has increased its range of real ales to five, the latest joining the ranks being Butcombe Gold (complementing the Butcombe Bitter, Wadworth 6X, Courage Best and Bass).

In a completely different part of Clifton (near the Downs) the **Beaufort Arms** is selling three draught ciders alongside its real ales: Taunton Traditional, Thatchers Dry and Cheddar Valley, if my memory serves me correctly. Well it came as news to me, though not to the locals as it's been doing so for ages now. (I must get out more!)

And just around the corner in York Street, the **Port of Call** is doing a nice line in real ales with some excellent changing guests – well worth checking out. It has a patio garden too for those that didn't know.

SP

Save Brakspear's Brewery

One of the UK's best-loved breweries is under threat of closure. The Brakspear's Brewery of Henley-on-Thames in Oxfordshire could close following a "strategic review of operations" by a team of "Management Consultants".

The "problem" appears to be the fact that the brewery site, situated in the heart of Henley, is worth a fortune. No doubt, if sold to a property developer, it would make Brakspear's a huge amount of money.

Brakspear's have been brewing their ales in Henley for 223 years. Their beers are full of flavour and have won many awards. The brewery uses a unique double fermentation process, involving large "dropping vessels" that help give a wonderful richness of character and flavour to the beers.

Highly regarded beer writers and experts claim that the Henley brewed ales are among the very best to be found in the world – which also partly results from the commitment to using only the finest ingredients and the uniqueness of the local water which has been perfectly matched over the years to the beers.

The brewery has in recent years, invested considerable sums of money in the brewery plant. Beer production is at an all time high. In addition, the company is very profitable. Last year, an increased turnover saw operating profits rise by 8% and the dividend to shareholders up by 10%.

You may have tried the splendid

Brakspear's Bitter (3.4%) recently in Bristol. It has been available in the Prince of Wales in Westbury-on-Trym and the Kellaway in Horfield. It has proved to be very popular in both pubs.

If I am in the area of Brakspear's tied estate, I will visit one of their pubs to enjoy the brewery's beers because I know they are good beers. I am unlikely to visit a Brakspear's pub in future if the beer sold in the pub is just another national brand – or even some regional brands. Equally, if Brakspear's close the brewery and contract out the brewing to some other brewery, the beers will not be the same and so, even if Brakspear's pubs still sell Brakspear's beers – but they are brewed elsewhere – I am still likely to pass the pubs by.

Brakspears must realise why people drink the beers. It is because of where they are brewed. It is because the beers brewed on the Henley site are exceptional beers.

If you believe in the future of brewing at Henley, please visit the web site at savebrakspear.com where you can add your comments to the many already posted. You could even write to the brewery management at Brakspear and Sons, The Brewery, New Street, Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire, RG9 2BU.

One of Britain's best-loved and most important breweries is at risk. Please help us to save it.

Pete Bridle

Fuller Flavours at the Cambridge

The Cambridge Arms in Coldharbour Road, Redland was recently the venue for a tutored beer tasting. John Keeling, the Brewing Director at Fuller's who own the Cambridge, gave a very interesting presentation detailing some of the history of this fine West London brewery and its beers.

The Fuller, Smith and Turner's Griffin Brewery has been situated in Chiswick for centuries. It can be seen when driving into West London on the Great West Road (A4) towards Hammersmith. The brewery is steeped in history. It is a brewery where the writer Alexander Pope had a summerhouse, the remains of which are still visible. Dick Turpin regularly passed by on his dastardly route to wreak havoc on carriages heading west.

So, onto the beers. John gave a detailed talk about most of the beers in the Fuller's range. The draft beers range from the standard ale "Chiswick Bitter" which is fine session ale with an ABV of 3.4%. The most famous of the Fuller's beers is London Pride, a well-balanced ale and the best seller at 4.1%. The robust ESB is a magnificent beer, full of flavour with a rich hoppiness in the aftertaste. This beer, with a strength of 5.5% is to be savoured – too many of them and you may find yourself clinging to the wall just like the wisteria that clings to the brickwork of the brewery!

All these beers have won CAMRA Champion Beer of the Year awards – some on several occasions.

Fuller's also brew a range of seasonal beers such as Red Fox, Jack Frost, Summer Ale and the organic Honey Dew. Additionally, many of these beers appear in bottled form. The bottle-conditioned ale 1845 Celebration Ale is another very full flavoured beer at 6.3%, which has won CAMRA awards.

Everyone enjoyed the presentation, beer samples and the "goodie bag" that was handed out at the end. Thanks John!

So, have you visited the Cambridge recently? It has undergone a major refurbishment – smart but fairly radical perhaps. I have already heard many views on the new look pub – people will comment when one of their locals has such a make-over. What to you think? Why not drop a letter or email to Pints West? Whatever your views, on all my recent visits, I have found the beers to be in A1 condition. The new(ish) licensee who until recently ran a Brains pub, certainly seems to be taking the trouble to look after the beers!

A welcome initiative from the brewery is the introduction of customer comment forms which can be found in their pubs. These invite you to feed back your comments, good or bad, regarding your pub visit, the quality of the beer, service, etc.

As well as the new look interior, the pub of course, still has its splendid beer garden – a fine place to enjoy these great beers on a sunny day. Why not pay it a visit soon?

Pete Bridle

Local Beers in a Local Pub

The Duke of Cambridge

Reopened in August 2001 by Martin Gibson, the Duke of Cambridge, in Lower Ashley Road, Easton, after a slow and at times tricky period, has rightly become a feature amongst the real ale pubs of Bristol.

Selling a wide range of real ale in consistently good condition and at sensible prices, with a landlord who is openly enthusiastic about his beers, it clearly has got a lot going for it.

With a history of holding mini-beer festivals at his previous pubs, Martin decided it was time for the Duke to hold its own festival.

Over the weekend of Friday 14th and Saturday 15th June, Martin pre-empted CAMRA's own local campaign of 'Local Beers in Local Pubs' by holding a festival largely dedicated to local breweries from within a 25-mile radius of Bristol.

All selling at £1.80 a pint – and local – were Abbey Ales Bellringer, Bath Ales SPA, Butcombe Bitter, Nursery Georgie Porgie, Oakhill Best, RCH Pitchfork, Smiles Best, Uley Old Spot and Wickwar Station Porter, plus a few others not so local.

I can vouch for the Friday session, all the beers I tried were in excellent condition and

the wide range of beers from light bitters to dark heavy stouts gave enough choice for all tastes. Fourteen ales to select from, with Bellringer the first to sell out, quickly followed by Station Porter then Pitchfork.

Altogether a successful festival, so look out for Martin's next festival and pop along and enjoy quality ales at sensible prices.

Ray Holmes

Real treat for Thornbury

It's probably high time **Thornbury** had a good **real ale festival**. Well, come Saturday 19th October you'll be able to pop along to **Christ the King Social Club** in Castle Street for an evening's entertainment of jazz, hot grub and – at just £1.50 a pint – a wide selection of real ales. Opening is 8 p.m. to 11:30 p.m. and entrance is £2, with proceeds going to Christ the King Parish Building Fund. It might only be a small affair but it should be a grand event. Talking of Thornbury, what are the best pubs for real ale in the area? Do let us know.

Prize crossword

Phil Brooks

Across

4. Name the brewery at Plymouth College of Further Education (sounds familiar?) (6,4)
 7. What kind of Elliott pub can be found in East St, Bedminster? (7)
 8. Brewed to 3.7% ABV this quaffing beer is brewed by Teme Valley brewery of Worcestershire (4)
 9. Bristol city centre pub that has recently been acquired by Wickwar brewery (5,4)
 11. Situated in Station Rd, Shirehampton, this pub is only two minutes' walk from Shirehampton railway station (12)
 13. Brewed to 4% ABV by Wickwar brewery of South Gloucestershire, this amber coloured bitter has a malty, lasting finish (5,3)
 15. Named after Samuel Arthur Brain, the founder of Cardiff's Brains brewery, what is the name of their 4.2% ABV bitter that is affectionally known as Skull Attack? (1,1)
 16. What is the name of the 5% ABV lager brewed by Icen of Norfolk? (3)
 17. What is the colour of the widow from Dark Horse brewery at 4.4% ABV or the Knight from Goff's brewery at 5.3% ABV? (5)
 18. You can't get a quart out of this pot (4)
 21. What is the 5% ABV, mid-brown in colour and highly aromatic beer from Spinnaker brewery of Sussex? (6)
 22. Good Beer Guide listed pub in Alfred Place, Kingsdown (4)

Down

1. See 10
 2. See 16
 3. Beer of the Festival at this year's Bristol Beer Festival (8,6)
 4. What is the 4% ABV beer brewed by Stonehenge brewery of Netheravon? (8)
 5. At OG 1044 and 4.2% ABV what is the dark amber beer brewed by Nursery brewery of Keynsham (5,5,4)
 6. Situated on Bristol's Gloucester Rd, this pub has recently been acquired by Bath Ales (10)
 10.1. Britain's most common pub name (3,4)
 12. At an ABV of 3.4% what is the name of the mild brewed by Bartrams brewery of Suffolk? (5)
 14. At 4.1% ABV this house is brewed by Shardlow brewery of Leicestershire (4)

Bag O'Nails advert

Crossword grid

- 16.2. North Somerset village that has recently successfully campaigned to stop one of its pubs (the Miners Rest) from being redeveloped into a private house (4,6)
 19. Name the 4% ABV medium-bodied beer from Gales brewery of Hampshire (1,1)
 20. At OG 1040 and 4% ABV what is the bitter brewed by Burton Bridge brewery of Staffordshire? (1,1)

Send your solution, to the editor (address on back page) by 30 September 2002. The first correct entry drawn at random after that date wins an 18-pint box of Smiles Best. The winner must be prepared to collect their prize from the Smiles Brewery Tap. Please supply a phone number.

The Star, Kingswood

Landlady Wendy Legg took over at the Star two years ago, a pub that has always been a focal point of the local community.

At the helm of a Greene King managed house selling the full range of Greene King beers including County, Wendy is taking full advantage of the guest ale policy of the company to increase the range of real ales.

Recent guest beers have included Bass, Old Peculier, Blacksheep, Broadside, Graduate, Tiger and Tanners Jack. The reaction of customers, both old and new, has been very favourable. Quality is good, winning for Wendy the community pub best cellar award in 2001.

In addition to the changing ales, regular pub games feature strongly – Monday is darts night, Wednesday pool. The pub is home to two football teams. For those who wish to test their grey matter, Tuesday night is the well established quiz night.

Piped music to suit all ages and tastes is always in the background! First and foremost a locals' pub catering for drinkers (no meals, just rolls), the Star is a welcome addition to Kingswood's real ale pubs.

The Star is located on Hanham Road at the junction of Moravian Road and Douglas Road. There is a small car park at the side and for when the sun shines there are outside drinking areas at the front and back of the pub.

Ray Holmes

What to do in Prague

Here in England the availability of Czech beers such as Pilsner Urquell, Budvar and Staropramen is fairly widespread. However, what may not be apparent to beer drinkers in the UK is that the Czech Republic has some 60 or so breweries and very few of these supply their beers outside of the local areas where they are brewed, let alone export abroad.

So it is a welcome thought that when in Prague you can walk into a bar and drink a variety of some of the more unusual Czech

beers in convivial surroundings. In the northern Prague suburb of Holesovice, just along from the first City Brewery of Prague, which was closed by Bass (who owned Staropramen) some years ago, and, also near the football club Lokomotiv Prague, is an enterprise called **Pivní Galerie**.

This is a combination of a bar and an off-licence, but the preferred term is "exhibition", because essentially, that is what the owners are trying to achieve. The word Pivní derives from the Czech word Pivo, which in English

means beer, and one should not need any help with the second word, hence the name Beer Gallery.

Pivní Galerie was opened last year by Petr Vanek and Olga Vankova and is a celebration of the art of Czech brewing with an avowed aim of making the products from some of the country's small and independent breweries better known to Czechs, and to foreign visitors alike. It is unique in that nowhere else can there be found such a wide selection of Czech Beer in one place.

All of the beers available in Pivní Galerie originate from a small selection of independent breweries; a wide selection of bottled beers is supplemented by one or two draught beers. The available beers are listed on a menu and in total number approximately 90 different beers from 30 or so breweries, and the selection changes weekly. All of the many types of beer that are currently brewed in the Czech Republic can be sampled, from light to dark beers, lagered beer, special beers, and they vary in strength from 4% to 10% ABV.

The beers are displayed on shelves and you select the beers of your choice from the menu which are then cooled in a refrigerator to the correct temperature, an important feature for Czech beer drinkers. All bottles are half a litre and served with a third of a litre glass in which you pour your selected beer. Of course, you may also take bottles away with you, and you can buy glasses and other items as well. The bar seats up to about twenty people and there is a friendly welcome for all. The walls are adorned with various artefacts from independent Czech breweries which adds greatly to the ambience.

There has never been a better time to visit the Czech Republic, there being some very competitive air fares available. And, after taking in the sights of Prague one can sit back and sample the delights of different Czech beers.

Pivní Galerie is situated at U pruhonu 9, and Tram 14 (approximately 15 minutes from the centre of Prague) will get you to within a few yards. Opening times are 10a.m. to 8p.m. weekdays and 10a.m. to 1p.m. Saturdays.

Ian Jakeway

Random Shot advert

Hope & Anchor advert

Belgium for beginners!

Articles on drinking in Belgium are not uncommon in Pints West, but I thought I would add something different by giving the perspective of one who has only recently discovered the joys of Belgian beer.

I write having returned from my second visit, where I had the pleasure of accompanying a relative veteran of drinking in Belgium, Vince Murray. We were based in the charming medieval town of Ghent, but also took the train out to Bruges, Liege, Antwerp and Landen.

First, some basic reflections on drinking in Belgian bars. Besides your passport, the most important item you can take with you is the **CAMRA Guide to Belgium, Holland & Luxembourg**, written in wonderfully acerbic style by Tim Webb, whose information is always spot on, allowing for the sort of disagreements you will always get when you gather a group of people together to discuss the relevant qualities of beer.

As in England, you will not find a great range of beers in every bar and it is necessary to seek out the best places, varying from traditional brown cafés such as **Brugs Beertje** (Little Bruges Bear) to smart modern establishments such as the **Trollekelder** in Ghent.

When entering, find a table and be seated, you can peruse the beer menu whilst you are waiting to be served. Most bars will run a tab for you, but some expect payment after each round. Belgian beer ranges enormously in style and alcohol content, from 2.5% fruit beers to massively flavoured 12% Trappist beers. (Trappist means the beer is either brewed by an order of Trappist monks or on their holy ground). A good range in a bar would be 50 beers or above, of which six or so may be on draught, the rest being bottled.

Belgian beer is generally served in 25cl or 33cl measures, and you can expect to have each beer served in its own distinctive glass. Expect to pay from 2 to 4.5 Euros for your beer. Confusingly for one used to British beer, pricing is not based on gravity and a 4% fruit beer may be more expensive than an 11% monster! Usually bottled beers will be brought to you partially poured. Care may be needed adding all of the beer as many beers will have a heavy sediment, similar to our own bottle-conditioned beers.

Frequently you get nibbles with each beer, with nuts, pretzels and cheese being common. Most bars will also serve a menu of reasonably priced food, ranging from platters of sausages and cheese to pasta, omelettes and steaks.

It's easy to be wary of sampling the highest gravity brews, but many must be tried as they can represent some of the absolute classics. As at home, start off with lower gravity beers and work upwards. I'd suggest starting with a fruit beer or a staple brew such as Straffe Hendrick or De

Koninck, which tend to be around 5%. Leave the Lambic beers (meaning produced by wild fermentation) such as any Cantillon beer until you get a taste for Belgian beer, as these can be startlingly dry and sour

for the unwary. Don't expect dark beers to be necessarily stronger than golden beers either, for example Tripel which is light coloured, is usually stronger than Dubbel, which is dark.

One of the pleasures of visiting Flanders, and the Flemish speaking areas of Belgium in general, is that the British are still popular guests, due perhaps to our close historical association with Belgium. Most people will speak some English. Sadly we did not receive such a warm welcome in the French speaking Liege area, where in our experience you often need to make an effort to speak French, however token, to elicit a civil response.

We stayed at the **Hotel Eden** in Zuidstationstraat, a comfortable family run hotel, which was happily in the next street to the splendid **Trappistenhuis**, which is run by the knowledgeable Johan (who writes on beer for Belgian magazines) and the always helpful Sophia. The beer list exceeds 150 and features, as the name suggests, an excellent range of Trappist beers including the mighty Westveletern Abt 12, a 12% dark, wonderfully balanced beer.

Our other favourite haunt in Ghent was **Waterhuis ann de Bierkant** (pictured), located next to one of Ghent's many water sides, which had an interesting list of draught beers including Witte Lambic, a spiced wheat beer, and the excellent Saison 1900, as well as a good range of bottles. Critically, it also possessed a TV, allowing us to watch England versus Argentina in enthusiastic company, including an ex-pat Brit. The locals were so pleased for us they bought us a beer at the final whistle! Here we also found the strangest toilet ever seen, the cubicle in the gents needing to be visited to be believed, and judging by William Malik's earlier article, it probably has the same equipment as the ladies!

Also visited in Ghent was the **Hop Duvel**, a traditional Belgian café, sharing the

Photo

same name as the nearby specialist off-license which we used to stock up at before our return. Of a more modern and trendy type of place we also visited **A Capella**, **De Trolle Kelder** and **Prelude**, all proving worthy of a visit. A word of caution to visitors to Ghent, the city appears to be practically a cash-point free zone!

In **Bruges** the first stop was **Dickies bar**, then two old favourites, the **Brugs Beertje** run by the incomparably efficient Daisy, and the nearby **De Brugse Bierkaai** (Bruges brewpub), which proved to be a venue for an unlikely Irish evening! It's worth taking your CAMRA card to Belgium, as your second drink in the Bierkaai is free when you show your card!

In **Antwerp** we had dinner at the **Camargue** followed by a pleasant couple of hours in **Kulminator**, which carries a remarkable range of aged beers. Interestingly, the foreign beers listed here include Thomas Hardy Ale and Courage Imperial Russian stout at 2.50 Euros!

The bars visited in **Liege** have already been covered in Vince Murray's earlier articles – suffice to say the excellent range of beers surpassed the quality of service we received.

A real find was at **Landen**, a provincial town on the Liege-Ghent railway line. We alighted and visited the very fine **Stille Genieter**, a five-minute walk into town, where we found a good beer list and refreshingly economic prices.

Space and time precludes me from mentioning all the particular favourite beers of mine, but if I had to name a few I would pick, in no particular order, Liefmans Kriek, Orval, Straffe Hendrick, Westveletrn 12, Hercule, Barbar, La Chouffe, all the Rocheforts, Postel, Gulden Draak – the list is endless! These and the splendid hospitality of the Flemish people are the reasons why I will definitely be visiting Belgium again!

Phil Cummings

Knickerbocker Glory! - A German Odyssey

FOR several years now Tom Perera – an American gentleman resident in Germany – has been advertising his “Knickerbocker Bier Tours” in *What’s Brewing*, the monthly magazine for all CAMRA members. This promises you flights and two nights’ accommodation plus visits to five breweries and your food and drink on an “all inclusive” basis – all for £235 each.

To commemorate two 40th and a 42nd birthday, a group of six of us booked a tour for February this year. Tom asked for the money up front via an “International Money transfer” – an alien concept to all of us – but once we got our heads around it that was fine. What did surprise us was that we were sent no tickets, receipts or the like and were just emailed a booking number to show at the airport. We set off on a wing and a prayer, but our prayers were answered and we later discovered that it was all part of the laid back way Tom does things!

worth drinking – and onto the flight. Buzz certainly don’t mess about, and after a short delay at security, and a bizarre incident involving Clive and his nail scissors that meant he caught the flight with five minutes to spare, boarding and take off were done with impressive efficiency.

Our only instructions on arrival at Dusseldorf were to “look for the man in the Knickerbocker Hat” (Tom and his amazing vagueness again). We therefore assumed that the hat would be something strikingly unmistakable rather than a rather inconspicuous baseball cap! It took us about 15 minutes to spot Tom and it was over 30 minutes before the last of the 22 tourists did so. Had he said look for the “rotund chap with the big grey beard” we would surely have done much better! Anyway we were finally on our way to Dinslaken at around 7:40pm local time, and from that moment on Tom was in his element and everything ran smoothly.

were all on the house as was a splendid slap-up meal of traditional German pork, dumplings and vegetables which went down very well with the whole group (twenty men and ten ladies). Tom was a most genial host and provided much background information on the biers and their brewers. We eschewed the chance to wander around the town and just settled into a good session, finally crossing back to the hotel at around 3am (I think!).

Breakfast (ham, cheese and bread, etc.) was taken at about 9am and we wandered around town trying to clear fuzzy heads. It was then back aboard the coach for the marathon test of visiting four breweries in a day – hell or what?

First up was the Walsumer Brauhaus in Walsum-Duisburg about 15 minutes’ drive away. This is an extremely impressive house brewery, set up in 1995 in an impressive building and enormous surrounding beer garden. They brew two main biers, a “blonde bier” with distinctive citrus, and peppery flavours and a darker maltier brew (both paid for by Tom again). Occasional seasonal biers are also brewed too. It was very quiet at the time we were there but judging by the facilities and sheer size of the place it must get very busy at times. An excellent start.

Next we drove to Duisburg to visit two more brewpubs. First came Brauhaus Schacht 4/8 (pictured) – a very impressive conversion of an old bank in the town centre, something like an up-market Wetherspoon’s. We sampled the three biers on offer here, which were most palatable, and once again Tom paid as he did for the enormous “eat all you want” hot and cold buffet. This really was an impressive spread and we did our best to give ourselves acute indigestion. How many servings did Simon have? The pub sells an impressive range of brewery mementos too.

After several hours we took the short walk to the scarily named “Webster’s Brauhaus” which has absolutely no connection or resemblance to the British “brewery” of that name (Dave, being from the North these days, was of course disappointed by this!). We were due to listen to a seminar from the brewer, but he had been taken sick – but Tom came to the rescue again by stepping into his shoes and running it himself! This took place in the brewery cellar whilst sipping cool bier straight from the tank. The bier here was amongst our personal favourites of the trip.

It was now early evening and we headed over the Rhine to a small village called Issum to visit the Diebels brewery. This is the biggest brewer of Alt Bier, a brown top-fermented brew that is hugely popular in this

Photo

Our flight out was from Stansted Airport at 16:45 on Friday afternoon, flying with “Buzz” the low cost KLM subsidiary. We therefore decided to make the most of the Friday off by spending lunchtime in London. After cutting through swathes of red tape and misinformation I managed to secure return tickets from Bristol to the airport, stopping in London for three and a half hours for a very reasonable £28 each. Once in London we headed for the excellent Jerusalem Tavern in Faringdon – owned by the superb St Peters brewery. Unfortunately they had a particularly splendid range of their stronger beers on that day and we probably imbibed more than was wise given the day we had ahead. Then it was on to Stansted – where there is definitely no beer

Dinslaken is a pleasant, moderate sized town in the industrial area around the Rhine on the far Western edge of Germany near to the Dutch border. Our hotel was clean and tidy and served our purpose, as we were to see little of our rooms all weekend (one tip is to take a bath towel as the showers were superbly powerful but the towels provided were little bigger than face flannels!). Somehow Clive ended up in a different hotel ten minutes’ walk away on his own – he seemed to be fated that way all weekend!

About 90 seconds after entering our rooms we were across the road in Tom’s local, the excellent Holtbrugge Bierhaus a traditional German bar that sells a couple of rare biers as well as Diebels Alt. The first few biers and a local speciality schnapps

Swan reopens

The Swan With Two Necks in Little Ann Street, St Judes has finally reopened more than a year after it closed. During its closure thieves and vandals broke in and removed lead and tiles from the roof and most of the floor boards from inside, leaving the building in a very sorry state and with about two feet of water in the cellar.

New owners Val and Leroy have put an awful lot of work into restoring the pub to its former glory, much of which included making the structure watertight. The public area is still the same one room with the bar in the same place as before for those who remember it. A new back-of-bar fitting has been installed with room for four casks on a stillage and varnished floorboards replace the previous tiles.

Since they reopened on June 10th the beers available have been Bass, served on gravity from behind the bar, Butcombe Bitter, and Three Blind Mice or Georgie Porgie from Nursery on hand pump. As trade builds up they hope to offer more choice with at least five pumps available. Food is not currently on offer but that will change in the next month or so when the kitchen is finished.

Opening times are 11 a.m. to 11 p.m. Monday to Saturday and noon to 10:30 p.m. on Sunday.

Pete Tanner

Photo

part of Germany. This brewery has maintained its traditions whilst embracing a very modern marketing approach. We were treated to the Alt bier plus two others including a lovely dark porter-style bottled bier called Plato. We were shown around part of the brewery and shown videos of their adverts (decidedly non-politically correct ones) and entertained by tour guide Roland, who was born for the job. A somewhat alarming development is that Diebels have captured a very big share of the young drinkers' market by producing bottles of Altbier mixed with Coke – none of us had the nerve to try it in front of Tom! Just imagine Butcombe & Coke or Pitchfork & Fanta! Another, lighter meal was provided, courtesy of Tom, and then Roland presented us with cards entitling us to seven – yes, seven! – more free biers before we left... after four breweries in a day!

There is an enormous drinking area on site, which has the feel of an old fashioned bierhaus – that is until 9:30pm when it suddenly bursts into life with loud pop music and a seething mass of flesh. It was then that Tom announced we were leaving, much to the disappointment of the bachelors in our group, Richard and Phil notably, especially as we hadn't come close to finishing the freebies (takeaways sorted that anyway). Many T-shirts and sweatshirts were bought to thank them for their hospitality. Amazingly the brewery give all of their staff 300 litres of free beer per year – guaranteed to engender loyalty and make them very popular with their friends too!

A 30-minute run took us back to the hotel and the Holtbrugge Bierhaus, where some of us remained until the early hours again. Sunday breakfast was followed by the coach journey to Essen for the final brewery, the Essen Borbecker Braurei which is housed in a collection of old brick buildings. This was a popular and very busy

place and it was just as well Tom had booked our table. They have a jazz band most Sundays and we were expecting to see that, so were surprised when it turned out to be a German band doing covers of old 1960s and 1970s songs! This brewery produces several biers including "Dampf" (steam bier) and served us with a great meal – my bratwurst was superb. Tom was still paying and we couldn't believe it when he apologised that the budget wouldn't stretch to the last couple of biers – we had had superb value and were happy to pay up.

All too soon it was time to return to the airport for our 3:45 flight home. The bier in the airport was surprisingly good and our flight was bang on time too. For £235 this was brilliant value for money and a very relaxing weekend was had by all. The tour is very intensive but never rushed, and it is difficult to spend money at times – we still have most of our Euros ready for next time. We recommend the tour to you.

Visit Tom's website at www.knickerbockersbiertours.de
Alternatively phone him on 0049 2064 58474 or email Thomas_Perera@yahoo.com

Vince Murray

Adnams advert

DIARY



Diary of the Bristol & District branch of CAMRA.

See inside pages for the Weston-super-Mare sub-branch diary and contacts.

Wednesday, 28th July: Pub of the year runners up trip, depart 1:15pm? (to be confirmed).

Saturday, 3rd August: Bristol pubs by train. Train leaves Temple Meads station at 11:55am.

Thursday, 8th August: Beer festival thank-you trip to GBBF. Depart 10am from the Cornubia.

Wednesday, 14th August: Committee meeting, Cornubia, 8:00pm.

Wednesday, 21st August: Trip to pubs in North Somerset. Depart from the Cornubia 6:45pm.

Saturday, 24th August: Pub crawl of Bath with Bath & Borders branch of CAMRA. Start at the Ram 12 noon.

Wednesday, 28th August: Branch meeting at the Naval Volunteer, 8:00pm.

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




**Great British Beer Festival,
Olympia, London
6th-10th August 2002**

Tue 6th 5pm - 10:30pm £6
Wed 7th 11:30am - 3pm £2
Wed 7th 5pm - 10:30pm £6
Thu 8th 12noon - 10:30pm £6
Fri 9th 12noon - 10:30pm £6
Sat 10th 11am - 7pm £5


Advance ticket hotline
0870 730 7500
www.gbbf.org

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- Suggestions for future entries for the CAMRA GOOD BEER GUIDE**, and any comments on existing entries, can be made to our GBG Coordinator, Richard Walters, care of the editor (above).
- FURTHER INFORMATION** on all aspects of CAMRA can be had from Ray Holmes on (0117) 9605357 (h).
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