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PINTS WEST

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

Help us celebrate the Great British Pub

**Did you know that over twenty pubs close every month in Britain?
And that of these, the majority are rural community pubs?**

THE VARIETY of different pubs to choose from in Britain is unique and something we should all be very proud of. But we are gradually losing them — at the rate of over twenty a month, with rural community pubs most at risk.

It's not just the quaint country pubs, but also the town centre community pubs which are feeling the pressure.

It is important that with so many pubs closing we encourage both regular and infrequent pub-goers to visit their pubs. Your local pub needs your support.

Recent market research commissioned by CAMRA, the Campaign for Real Ale, shows that over 80 per cent of people prefer community and local pubs to town themed bars. We need to celebrate all pubs, but especially those that offer the local community a place to socialise and those that are based in more rural locations.

True, some areas such as central Bristol and the Whiteladies Road "Strip" have seen an increase in the numbers of drinking establishments, with a plethora of large cafe-bars or "super-pubs" springing up, but these tend to be concentrated in a few

specific areas and do not compensate for — or perhaps they contribute to — the greater loss of smaller, often more traditional pubs.

Use it or lose it is the message, and to help promote this, CAMRA, with the support of a number of breweries and pub companies, is launching a new initiative, **National Pubs Week**, on 22nd February to encourage everybody to visit and show support for their local pub throughout the week — and in the weeks that follow.

The aim of National Pubs Week is simple — to encourage more people to visit pubs more often. Our research shows that not only are an astonishing twenty pubs closing every month, but over a quarter of adults never visit a pub. If this trend continues then Britain's unique pubs will disappear very quickly.

The slogan is: "There's a pub for everyone", and we seek to highlight the enormous

variety of pubs in the UK.

Inside we delve into the question of what is a pub, and what makes a good pub. But whatever a pub is for you, go out and support it — and drink real ale in it — during National Pubs Week and beyond.



Calling all West Country CAMRA Members!

Come to the CAMRA Members' Weekend including National AGM 2003

In April 2003 the CAMRA Members' Weekend including the National AGM is being held in Exeter.

This is the first year that it has been called a members' weekend and this is exactly what it should be called as, although the weekend is used to form CAMRA policy, the event is open to all CAMRA members and consists of far more than just the formal requirements of an AGM.

For this year and in the future the format is changing as part of an ongoing review, hopefully giving many more members the opportunity to provide valid input to the Campaign as a whole.

It is also a very good opportunity for members to socialize with many activities planned for the weekend.

The event is being held at the University of Exeter, which has the advantage of the conference hall, members' bar and accommodation all being on one site. The campus is only ten or fifteen minutes' walk from the City Centre and a similar distance from Exeter St. David's Railway Station. Accommodation is available on the University Campus.

The weekend starts on Friday 11th April with social activities, giving members the opportunity to sample a large range of the real ales available in Devon, Cornwall and Somerset at the members' bar. This is open from 4:00 p.m. and enables members from all over the country to socialize with each other and to share ideas. At about 5:30 p.m. there are pre-arranged social trips for members who pre-book. The trips, each of which can cater for about fifty people, are to:

- **Tuckers Maltings and Teignworthy Brewery** – the opportunity to see a traditional floor maltings in operation followed by a trip around one of our local microbreweries which operates within the maltings building and obviously uses the product from next door.

- **O'Hanlon's and Exe Valley Breweries** – two more microbreweries from the local area around Exeter, one of which has relocated from London in the last couple of years and the other being one of the longer established Devon breweries still in production.

- **Green Valley and Gray's Cider Producers** – two of the better known cider makers local to Exeter.

After the social trips you can return to the members' bar which remains open until 12:30 a.m.

On Saturday 12th April the formal business commences with reports and adoption of accounts. This is then followed by the initial motions for debate and the guest speaker who is Roger Ryman, the Head Brewer at St. Austell Brewery. Leading up to lunch are the first of the Policy Discussion Groups which allow members to consider and discuss issues in a more informal forum.

After lunch and further socializing in the members' bar there are further discussion groups. These groups give more members the opportunity to provide very valid input to issues which can lead to recommendations for feed back to the entire audience later in the weekend. Workshops are then provided for experi-

enced members of the Campaign to share their expertise with others.

As on the Friday the members' bar is then open until 12:30 a.m. Also, for members wishing a change of scenery, there are suggested pub crawls for the evening and these include:

- Exeter, close to the university and city centre, including a visit to the Great Western Hotel (Exeter & East Devon CAMRA Pub of the Year 2002 and fourteen real ales on at weekends).

- Exeter, based around the historic quay on the Exe which, for the brave, includes a walk to the Double Locks along an unlit canal footpath.

- Topsham, which includes the famous Bridge Inn (National Inventory Pub with eight to ten real ales on gravity).

- Newton Abbot, which includes the Dartmouth Inn (South Devon CAMRA Pub of the Year 2002) and the famous Cider Bar for those who prefer apple and pear based alcoholic beverages.

Sunday 13th April starts with recommendations from the Policy Discussion Groups for ratification by the entire audience and this is followed by the remaining motions for debate. The Chairman then closes the formal business when again the members' bar opens until 4:00 p.m.

The programme of events given above is provisional, especially with regards to the formal business of the weekend, and is subject to change depending on the number of motions and ideas for discussion submitted.

Non-members of CAMRA will be able to enter the members' bar only by means of a temporary membership covering them for the weekend. This is an opportunity to attract more full members in due course if not at the weekend.

From a local perspective it would be good to see as many members from the West Country as possible attend the weekend, and if you have never been to an AGM before then come along to see what it is all about and have your say.

All members have the right to attend and provide their input to the discussions and motions, all of which could have an impact on the policy and operation of the Campaign.

It is also a good opportunity to show the whole of CAMRA what the West Country has to offer and is very much a social event in addition to the formal business of the weekend.

Please come along, and if you are willing to help please let me know. For more details go to the web site

www.southdevoncamra.com or you may address any general questions to me, Ian Packham, at **ian@southdevoncamra.com** (or ring me on **01364 654242**) or specific questions regarding registration or accommodation to Mick Roberts at **mick@southdevoncamra.com** or Liz Roberts at **liz@southdevoncamra.com**.

Hopefully we'll see you in Exeter in April.

Ian Packham
Chairman, Members Weekend & AGM 2003 Organising Committee

Bristol Beer Festival



The CAMRA Bristol Beer Festival has been a sell-out success for the last five years. February/March 2003 sees the sixth annual Bristol Beer and Cider Festival making a welcome return to the Council House, College Green, in Bristol city centre.

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

The Festival will be open to the public from Thursday 27th February to Saturday 1st March at the following times:

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

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

Entry for all sessions is by advance ticket which are on sale from the following Bristol outlets (if not already sold out):

Bridge Inn, Passage Street
Cornubia, Temple Street
Bag O'Nails, Hotwells
Hare on the Hill, Kingsdown
Wellington, Horfield

Tickets are selling fast, particularly for certain sessions, so you are advised not to delay if you don't want to miss out.

You can visit our web site at www.camrabristol.org.uk for up-to-date ticket information and, nearer the time, the beer list.

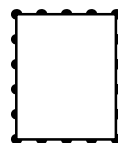
You are also advised to check out the adverts of the Bag O'Nails and the Bunch of Grapes elsewhere in this issue (and in the Festival programme).

Postcard from a pub ... or a bar?

Dear all,

Having a great Christmas break in Austria ... the local draught Weißbier is very acceptable. Not a lot of snow, so doing more drinking and eating in bars (avoided the 'English pub') than skiing. Weißbier consumption leading to philosophical discussion most evenings - what makes a pub different to a bar?

Love Steve and Lesly



*Pints West readers
 Bristol and District
 And further afield*

Well, we're back in Bristol now and still haven't got an answer. Given that CAMRA is launching a new initiative — **National Pubs Week** — on 22 February 2003, it seems appropriate to put the question to a wider audience (you, dear reader!).

National Pubs Week is intended to persuade us that if we take the great British pub for granted, there may not be that much left. But what exactly makes a pub a pub (rather than a bar) ... and what makes those 'English pub' establishments overseas so un-publike? You're probably reading this in a pub, so look around, consider some of our Weißbier-induced thoughts below, discuss with your fellow drinker, and see if you can answer the question.

We started off thinking that maybe a pub is a particular sort of building, or a place with a certain atmosphere. Pubs sell draught beer (as well as other drinks). A pub is (or should be?) a drinking place that may also sell some food (rather than a restaurant that may also sell beer — usually in bottles) ... but don't most of those things apply to bars too?

Brown bars in The Netherlands, or the beer bars in Belgium seem a bit more pub-like than the open-fronted bars you find in France, Italy or Spain. Maybe it's the indoor nature required in colder countries, where you generally sit inside a pub, rather than in hot countries, where you sit outside the bar. Even on skiing holidays, we tend to sit outside during the day because of the sunshine, but inside (and usually in a cellar) at night. But the 'English pub' in Saalbach (a huge place, from what we could see from the outside) was an inside-only place, as is the one in Lund in Sweden (although I think they can open the frontage to let the warm June air in). So maybe size (small) matters

in the pub's case ... but we have some very large pubs in the UK now: are JD Wetherspoons or Hogsheads pubs or not?

What about the décor? A lot of the pubs we go to have a lot of wood — panelled walls, floors, furniture. But then so do the brown and beer bars of the low countries (and lots of the German, Austrian city and alpine bars). A lot of our pubs have carpet and soft furnishings, and both styles can make comfortable and pleasant places to go for a drink (as long as the carpet isn't too sticky!). The comfort factor might be important: comfort in terms of feeling relaxed, happy, enjoying yourself with people you like to be around. Admittedly over-consumption of any alcohol can make you feel like that about any place, any people, but a good pub atmosphere ought to make you feel like that before you've had a drink at all. Oops, now I've started talking about what makes a 'good' pub ... but then who'd want to go to a bad one?!

We've gone through a lot of possible characteristics but I'm not sure we're any closer to the answer. Of National Pubs Week, CAMRA Head of Campaigns Mike Benner says "the variety of different pubs to choose from in Britain is unique ... this campaign will be very positive and promote the message that there's a pub for everyone" — and maybe that's the conclusion we have to come to: a pub means something different to all of us and we like different things in a pub. So go out there and support them, and take as many of your friends with you as possible, not only in National Pubs Week, but every week! If you have some firm ideas about what makes a (good) pub, or you'd like to tell us what makes your local the place you like to be, write your answers on a postcard please and send to the Editor.

Lesly Huxley

Tell us what you know Pub News

WE recently asked readers of Pints West if they could tell us what they considered to be the best pubs for real ale in one particular area, Thornbury. There was a great response and we published people's thoughts in our letters page in the last issue. The general consensus of opinion was that the Wheatsheaf stood out as a great place to enjoy the delights of good real ale.

We posed the question because the area covered by the local CAMRA branch and Pints West is large (there are a lot of pubs out there!), the active membership, though healthy, is not unlimited, and try as we might we cannot keep abreast of everything going on in all pubs in the region, especially in the towns and villages more distant from Bristol.

So this is where you come in. As with Thornbury, we would like to know what you, the readers, rate as the best real ale pubs in certain areas in case we're missing any gems.

We did enquire last issue about Cheddar, but got no response. I'm sure this can be put down simply to the fact that nobody delivered any copies of Pints West to any pubs in Cheddar, rather than there being no good real ale pubs there.

Not to be deterred, we'd like to extend the list of places, so let's say Yatton, Yate, Backwell, Worle, Chew Magna and Blagdon for starters. And we'll try Cheddar again too. So if you think any of the pubs in these areas are real ale gems, do tell us which and why.

By way of an example, and to show why we need your feedback, on our return from a trip to Glastonbury Brewery recently, we decided to stop off at a pub we weren't particularly familiar with, the Waldegrave Arms in Chewton Mendip. It was a fortunate stop, as it turns out we stumbled upon a freehouse selling a range of four real ales in excellent condition, which have included Butcombe Bitter and Gold, Badger Best and Tanglefoot, and others. But for our chance visit we may have continued to overlook this very pleasant, friendly pub.

There is also something else you can tell us. Do you know of a pub that isn't getting copies of Pints West that would like to? We cannot possibly deliver to all pubs in the region, there being far too many for our band of volunteers to visit, but if there is a pub out there which is particularly keen to receive copies, please let us know and we'll do our best to supply.

SP

Wickwar gets another pub

WICKWAR BREWERY has just increased its pub estate to three with the acquisition of the Old Castle Green in Gloucester Lane, Old Market, Bristol.

This joins the ranks of the White Lion in the city centre and the Princess of Wales in Bedminster.

Wickwar boss, Ray Penny said in his announcement: "As from Wednesday, February 5th 2003, the doors will open on a brand new era for the Old Castle Green. You'll be able to come and try all of your Wickwar favourites, and there will be guest beers every week." This is welcome news as there had been doubts as to whether the pub was going to be selling real ale at all in the future.

And you'll get value for money too. Ray went on to say, "At least one Wickwar beer will be offered at just £1.20 a pint, and that's on a regular basis, not just a promotion. And there will be discounts available on other Wickwar beers to card-carrying CAMRA members."

Food will be available at the pub – early breakfast, lunchtime, and early evening. Ray says, "There will be no juke box, no fruit machines, just good beer, good food, and

good friends."

Apparently, the Old Castle Green was originally known as the Plume of Feathers, and Ray has plans for it to revert to its original name soon.

But whatever its name, it certainly contributes to what looks like an exciting revival of the area for real ale lovers. Add this to the newly reopened Gin Palace selling beers from Bath Ales, and the Swan With Two Necks which reopened a little while back, and you've definitely got enough good attractions to draw you to the area, to sample these and the numerous other pubs nearby.

SP

● The **White Bear** on St Michael's Hill, Kingsdown has applied for longer opening hours. The new manager wants to be open until 2:00 a.m. six days a week and will commence towards the end of February if he is successful. So you'll have plenty of time to savour a nice drop of their Smiles Best.

● I might have been a bit premature in mentioning **BJ's Liquor Emporium** in the last issue. Work did start on the building in central Bristol but seems to have ground to a halt. Another pub that has been closed for a while now is the **Station Master** in Warmley High Street. It used to be a lunchtime regular for me when I worked in the area but recently suffered a suspected arson attack whilst it was unoccupied.

● The **Palace Hotel**, better known as the **Gin Palace**, in Old Market is now under new management. It has been taken on by Rab in addition to his other pub, the **Bridge Inn** in Passage Street, and sells a range of Bath Ales.

● No new Wetherspoons pubs opened locally this quarter, but I will mention their latest venture in Bristol. It is the **Lloyds V Shed** by the docks and is one of their music and video screen bars. It does, however, have up to three real ales on (although I have only ever seen one at a time and I have heard reports of none being on despite the presence of pump clips to the contrary). It makes it the second bar in an area that is now all pubs and clubs to make the effort to sell any real ale. The other one is of course the bar upstairs in the Watershed Arts and Media Centre.

Don't forget the Waterfront Tavern just across the Pero bridge, selling Bath Ales' beers. And the nearby Arnolfini selling Wadworth's beers. Ed.

Pete Tanner

Bear Inn, Wiveliscombe advert

News from Smiles

SMILES seem to have enjoyed a good festive season, with trading figures well ahead of last year. Sales of Holly Hops proved successful both in the local trade and with wholesalers across the country.

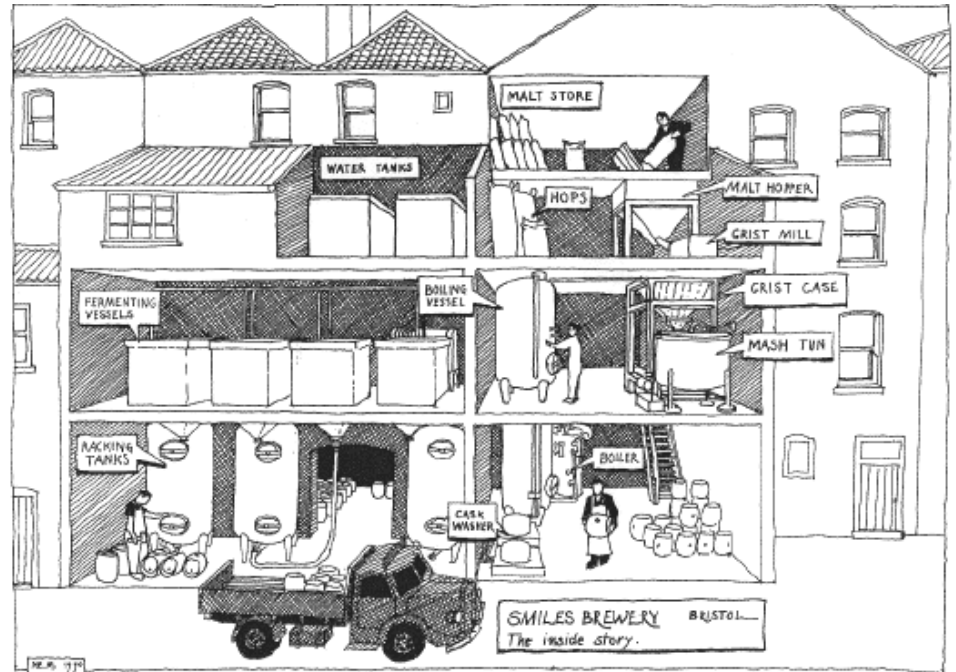
The 2003 Seasonal Calendar is now agreed with a couple of new additions. January and February have seen Old Tosser at 4.3% abv on sale, this year also available in selected Punch Pub Co. outlets, certain Pubmaster pubs, and during Wetherspoon real ale festivals too. This will be followed by March Hare and April Fuel.

Golden Brew at 3.8% abv will be available in August and September with the return of Freedom Ale abv 4.5% in October to celebrate the Freedom of the City of Bristol being bestowed on the Royal Gloucestershire, Berkshire and Wiltshire Regiment on October the 12th, 2002. In November Imperial Porter at 4.7% abv will be re-introduced.

Full information will be posted on the web site – www.smiles.co.uk – throughout the year.

Smiles are also testing Bristol IPA in packaged form (500/660 mls). There has been keen interest from a number of supermarkets, and there is the possibility of introducing a bottle-conditioned version for the real connoisseur. This would allegedly resemble the old favourite, Worthington White Shield, that was so popular for many years.

It was with some sadness that Innspired de-listed Smiles Best in the pub estate. This has been taken up by CAMRA with an exchange of correspondence. It is understood that several licensees are fighting to



have it back and the Brewery is also in discussions with Innspired.

Catherine "Cat" Gully returned to run the Brewery Tap albeit for a short period of time, but sadly she is already off to pastures new. The pub is now under the stewardship of Rohan Shadbolt, who is an Aussie married to a Bristol girl.

Many regular Brewery Tap and Highbury Vaults drinkers will know of Sydney Taylor. Syd reached his 80th birthday in January and was presented with an inscribed pewter tankard by Smiles plus a

pint of Smiles Best for every year of his life to savour in his own good time. He has been a great friend of Smiles over the years and the Company wishes him a very happy birthday and many more of them.

Brewery tours are beating all previous records. In 2002 over two thousand real ale enthusiasts passed through the Brewery under the stewardship of Tony Haynes. A special draw is held each tour with the winner receiving a special tour tee-shirt. Tours can be arranged through Jane on 01275 375894.

Richard Brooks

Boxing clever

NINE editions of Pints West ago, back in Autumn 2000, we reported on an initiative by Smiles where they had taken a couple of bits of existing technology and stuck them together to put a new twist on the idea of a beer box. So how are things going?

Most of us are familiar with the idea of a beer box. Basically, a double lined polythene bag in a cardboard box is filled with beer. It's effectively a bigger version of the more common wine box. A number of our local breweries can and do supply beers this way, usually sold direct to the public for home consumption.

What Smiles did then was to supply it with a clever bit of tubing that allows it to be connected directly to an ordinary beer line. By way of the simple connector, it means that the box can be put into a cellar and the beer served through a hand pump as normal.

There are several potential advantages of using a beer box in this way, particularly for

the smaller venue. The beer can be ordered in smaller quantities – an 18-pint box contains half the amount of liquid of a standard nine-gallon cask. The size, shape and weight of the box means it can be positioned where a cask might not fit. Because air doesn't mix with the beer it will also stay fresh for longer, benefiting venues with smaller turnover. As the beer can be stored in the cellar and served through a normal hand pump the temperature and quality should hopefully be the same as the other ales.

Smiles have reported that this idea – because of these added benefits of smaller quantity, longer lasting freshness, correct temperature and ease of handling – is growing quickly in popularity.

Some venues that have taken on this idea include various sports and social clubs (I'm told that Filton golf club is one such example serving up a perfect pint of Best). One or

two venues have started with boxes but have now moved on to casks as the trade has picked up. It's a great way to "test the water". If a venue is currently keg-only, unsure whether it can sell enough of a real ale, or has limited cellar space, why not take the plunge with a small beer box and see how trade goes?

If Pints West readers like the sound of this, perhaps they might try to persuade their local landlord, club manager, etc., to either add a real ale or expand the existing range by use of this simple method.

The beers available in these boxes throughout the year are Best and Original, although they can do any of their range of beers this way when pre-ordered.

Any venue interested in the beer-box-to-hand-pump idea can get in touch with Smiles by calling either Tony Vile on 0778 977 0314 or Andy Higgins on 0783 159 9105.

Unique and Voyager Cask Ale Club

REGULAR readers may recall that Pints West contributors, and CAMRA members in general, are not too enamoured of most of the pub owning companies (pubcos).

We feel that since they began to dominate the retailing of draught beer in the 1990s, these chains of pubs with no brewery have raised prices and restricted choice even further than their predecessors (the national brewers who also owned pubs) did.

Imagine our surprise and pleasure, then, when the existence of the Unique and Voyager Cask Ale Club was brought to our attention. This is a joint venture between the Society of Independent Brewers (SIBA) and

two pubcos, the Unique Pub Company and Voyager.

A look at the programme of guest beers on offer early in 2002 for Southern England shows beers from microbreweries including Ballards, Blanchfields, Cotleigh, Cropton, Daleside, Dent, Exe Valley, Goffs, Hambleton, Haggards, Hampshire, Hop Back, Ossett, Quay, Ringwood, Tring, Vale and Wickwar. A wide variety of styles, strengths and flavours was available, and it would be a very particular drinker who could not find something to their taste on the list.

One pub in Bristol which participates in the scheme is the Port of Call in Clifton, near the Downs. When a group of CAMRA members visited in October, it was selling four or five different real ales, and all the ones we sampled were in excellent condition. Congratulations to all concerned, and we hope to hear about other pubcos giving small brewers' products a better chance.

Pints West would be pleased to hear about other pubs participating in the scheme, and about similar schemes operated by other pubcos in our area.

Norman Spalding

Nursery stops brewing

AFTER brewing in Keynsham for just over a year, Nursery Brewery has closed.

The closure is due to the ending of the business partnership of Malcolm Shipp and Colin Brook.

Demand for the brewery's beers had increased steadily and the brewery had already outgrown its original site and had rented another industrial unit.

In the long term Malcolm Shipp plans to reopen the Nursery Brewery at a site near Calne, and until then he has arranged for Three Blind Mice and Old Mother Hubbard to be contract brewed by Hobden's Brewery.

Colin also wishes to open a brewery, under a new name, and is planning to use the old Nursery site in Keynsham. Former brewer Steve Cheesewright is currently working as manager of the Old Bank in Keynsham, which is running as a free house but no longer sells Nursery beers, and hopes to return to brewing at Colin's new brewery when it is ready to start production.

Phil Brooks, Norman Spalding

Hope & Anchor advert

Annexe Inn advert

Bell, Kingsdown advert

The Belgian beer lover's bible

... don't go without it

A review of the **Good Beer Guide to Belgium and Holland (4th edition)** written by Tim Webb and published by CAMRA books

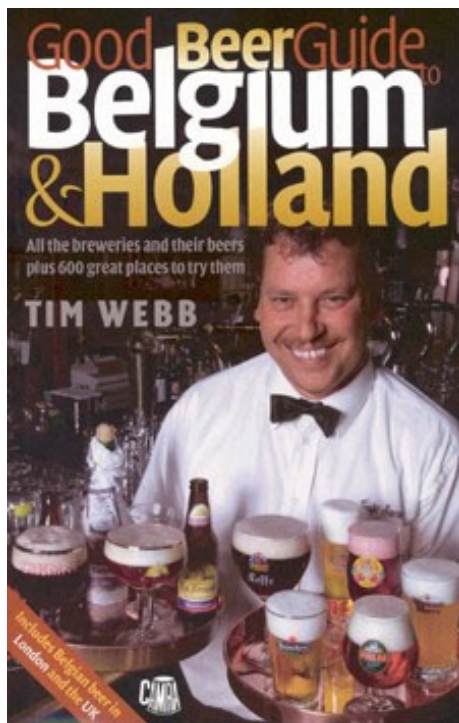
ANY Pints West reader who has visited Belgium or Holland without taking the last edition (1998) of Tim Webb's guide has almost certainly missed out on visiting some superb beer cafes and bars.

Maybe you were waiting for the new edition – well it's out now and it's bigger and even better.

As with the previous one it is so much more than a beer guide. Indeed you reach page 32 before the serious beer talk even begins. Before that are informative and quite detailed sections on the countries themselves; how to get there; basic tourist advice; how to get around once there; food and drink; beer tourism and advice on accommodation.

All this after a wonderfully witty, but withering, introduction. In this Tim attacks not only the big multinational breweries (such as Interbrew) who are seemingly intent on buying and closing many of the smaller independents, but many of the smaller breweries themselves for the way they are attempting to tackle the problem. The gist is that many are trying to emulate the big boys (by dumbing down ingredients, etc.) rather than maintain and promote their own excellence. Tim feels that their future lies in the worldwide niche market for superior products rather than in mass production for local consumption and he's probably right.

Once the book moves onto beer itself, it starts with "Beer Tourism" which is about beer museums and brewers who encourage tourist visits to their breweries. It then moves on to "How to make a beer" which is very informative about the actual process, broken into seven stages ending with the wonderfully observant "Putting the label on"



which gives a great insight into the importance of marketing and the fact that most people buy with their eyes.

It ends with: "The saddest part of the whole beer selling exercise for the committed professional brewer is that the majority of people who sell or drink beer are uneducated buffoons, with the sense and sensibility of battery hens". Say what you really think Tim! The chapter then concludes with a very humorous (but with a serious message) section called "How to ruin a beer".

Next up is an extremely informative and useful section on all of the beer styles of Belgium and Holland – and there are plenty of them.

We are then into the comprehensive breakdown of all Belgian and Dutch breweries and their regular beers. As before, there is a paragraph or more introducing each brewery, then notes about each beer. Extra helpful, and different to British beer guides, is the fact that Tim grades each beer, and is not afraid to criticise ones that he doesn't like.

I have visited Belgium eight or nine times in the last four years and found that I usually (but not always) agree with him. This can be very helpful when choosing beers in a café offering several hundred or more to pick from.

One change is that Tim has moved from a system of rating beers with between one and five stars, to a new one with eight different categories ranging from "world classic" to "beer with problems". I think I preferred the old system and not just because I had tracked down and tried 32 of the 40 "5-star" beers!

Next we get the actual recommendations for places to drink, broken down first by province then by town or village. Tim's general rule for possible inclusion is that an outlet should sell at least 40 beers, be a house brewer, or be of some other outstanding importance.

Each town or village receives a short introduction detailing its history, how to get there and, in some cases, places to stay.

The cafes also get a description, details of opening hours, food availability and serving times and the number and type of beers on offer.

The book finishes up with its usual section on Beer Warehouses where you can buy as much beer as your car or rucksack will hold, and two new sections – one on beer importers (useful to landlords wanting to sell Belgian and Dutch beers over here) and another on British pubs offering a good choice of the beers – an excellent idea.

This section is by no means exhaustive and Tim would welcome recommendations for future editions via his website at www.belgianstyle.com. The usual and very helpful index of place names and separate index of beer names complete the book.

To summarise – if you like beer then you should not contemplate heading for the Low Countries without this book. I feel that it has sufficient informative tourist information to make buying other guides unnecessary. Furthermore its mixture of detailed subject knowledge, educated insight into the industry and its behaviour, very clever and incisive humour and downright irreverence at times all serve to make it a damn good read – whether or not you are planning a trip. Not something you would say about many guidebooks.

Vince Murray

The Good Beer Guide To Belgium and Holland is available for £11.99 to non-members and £9.99 to CAMRA members. By phone on 01727 867201, fax 01727 867670 or email camra@camra.org.co.uk, as well as via Tim's own website.

Euro-beer advert

Gloucester Road crawl . . . part 2

FOLLOWING ON from the last edition of Pints West, a good number of local CAMRA members embarked on the delights of phase two of our crawl up the A38 in North Bristol.

We started at **The Golden Lion** near to Horfield prison. This street corner pub is on the left side of the Gloucester Road as you travel north. There was a trend in the mid to late nineties to rebrand pubs with silly names, themes and décor. The Golden Lion was one such pub to be subjected to this treatment, with the result that a local Gloucester Road pub which for over one hundred years had the perfectly good name of The Golden Lion changed to Finnegan's Wake. We're pleased to learn however that it has now reverted to its original name, though while a golden lion statue adorns the exterior of the pub, so still does the Finnegan's Wake signage.

On the night of our visit, the real ales on offer were Greene King Old Speckled Hen and Courage Best, which were both in decent condition. The pub interior still has some remnants of its Irish themeing. It is quite large and is divided into several sections and offers quite a bit of entertainment, including table football, pool, darts, a juke box and the biggest jenga I have seen.

Moving a little way up the road, we crossed over and visited **The Fox** next. A big banner outside advises that the pub is under new management. The pub features two separate bars – quite rare to find this now, and long may it continue! Upon our arrival, the real ales, Butcombe Bitter and Draught Bass, ran out when we put our order in. It was very pleasing to see that the bar staff went to great trouble to change both beers. Although this took a little time, the beers lines went through a thorough clean-

ing. The result was good quality and fresh tasting ales. Well worth the wait. All reports on the beer quality have been positive since the new management have been in place. Also, service was with a smile, which certainly makes a visit to a pub a better experience.

The main bar features a jukebox, a dartboard and pool table. Also note the collection of mirrors. If you want to get away from all this, nip into the quiet lounge bar where you can enjoy your pint and have a conversation with little distraction. This pub found particular favour with the Pints West editor who would be happy to use this pub more often if he lived locally.

Out onto the Gloucester Road again and still heading away from the City we next came upon **The John Cabot**, formerly known as The Royal Oak. This pub claims to have the largest beer garden in Horfield. As it was dark and wintertime, we decided to take their word for it. Inside the pub we found a lounge and a bar. Yet another jukebox featured plus a pool table. Real ales on offer were Courage Best, Bass, and it was pleasing to see a guest ale – Good Kings' Censlas from the Hampshire Brewery which weighed in at 5% abv – very tasty. There was an attempt a few years ago to turn part of the pub into a restaurant. I really do not want to visit a pub and be asked as soon as I walk in the door if I will be eating tonight! Thankfully, that did not last and the Cabot is now a suburban local.

Crossing the road again, we wandered into **The Victoria**. This was the smallest pub on this section of our crawl – a real "drinking" bar. Only one room, a fairly traditional pub, warm and cosy with old leaded stained glass windows. It does have a TV, and on the night of our visit it was

featuring a music channel aimed at the slightly older generation – during our brief sojourn we witnessed Led Zeppelin, The Who, Black Sabbath (yeah, with Ozzy Osborne), AC/DC, The Rolling Stones – you get the picture. However, while this was all entertaining, it wasn't very loud, so you could enjoy the Fuller's London Pride, Courage Best (still gets everywhere!) and Old Speckled Hen and still have a conversation.

The last pub of the night we visited was **The Wellington**. This pub has changed a lot in recent times. It must now be one of the most popular real ale pubs in Bristol – something that is all the more amazing given that it sold fairly modest amounts until recently. Bath Ales, who did a good refurbishment in their style, acquired the pub. They also appointed Paul and Dee who had recently taken The Lamplighters in Shirehampton into the CAMRA Good Beer Guide. The Wellie is now a busy pub. In the last six months the sale of real ale has increased three-fold, reaching an average of almost 3,000 pints per week (close to 20 kilderkins). They also support a guest beer.

The main factors for this increase is the quality of the product, giving confidence to the staff that they are selling award-winning ales in top condition. Add to this a workforce who enjoy working together to create a friendly and welcoming atmosphere and an ambience free from loud music, fruit machines, etc., which has helped to build on a new clientele who appreciate fine ale and good conversation. There is also a no-smoking area. This shows what can be achieved with good real ale and enthusiastic staff.

A very enjoyable crawl – it was rewarding to find good quality ale in some very pleasant pubs.

Pete Bridle

Bag O'Nails advert

Try to find the Hidden Brewery

GARY LUMBER, formerly the head brewer of Oakhill Brewery and creator of many fine beers, has decided to go it alone with his own brewery.

At the time of writing a launch date had not yet been set, but the first brew has been going well and should be hitting the pubs around the beginning of February.

The brewery is being called "The Hidden Brewery" because of its location – lost out in the sticks somewhere in Wiltshire.

Watch this space and the local press for the latest developments. For further information feel free to contact Gary at The Hidden Brewery on 01722 716440 or email him at gary.lumber@lineone.net.

Cider Sisters

HAPPY New Year, Pints Westers!

Our first column of 2003 takes a slightly different tack. Much as we love nothing better than a good cider pub, we know not everyone is lucky enough to have one on their doorstep. So this time we thought we'd tackle the burgeoning bottled cider market (not the stuff enjoyed by 14-year-olds in bus shelters across the land... though we all have to start somewhere).

Recently we've been happy to see good quality bottled ciders popping up all over the shop, and we hope we can encourage those hard-core real alers amongst you who wouldn't be tempted in a pub to take the plunge and enjoy one in the privacy of your own home.

In fact, there's so many appearing on the market these days (YES!) that we had to narrow the field for the purposes of this column... so we decided to go organic, and here's as far as we got (consider it a work in progress):

○ Dunkertons Organic Black Fox, 500ml, 7% abv

A light, crisp cider with a delicacy that belies its considerable strength. It smells delicious and would go very well with food (something even we'd have to admit could not be said of all ciders). Subtle and highly recommended.

○ Luscombe Organic Devon Cider, 740ml, 4.8% abv

An intensely fruity cider – reminiscent of baked apples but with a sharp, dry edge. A perfect summer drink, but don't let that stop you trying it now.

○ Aspalls Organic Suffolk Cyder, 500ml, 7% abv

If you like apple juice you'll love this. It's got a good fizz, the most well rounded one we tried, with rich honeyed fruit and a sweet, inviting smell.

○ Marks and Spencer Organic Cider, 500ml, 6.6% abv

Even M&S are getting in on the act with a newly released bottle we're trying for the first time. A well balanced and smooth taste which we reckon would appeal to the non-believer (more so maybe than something like the Luscombe). Slips down a treat.

Keeping on the theme, we also tried an organic bottled perry from Dunkertons (500ml, 7.5% abv) which is distinctively pear-y and delicious, a personal family favourite. This much neglected drink deserves a wider audience and the Dunkertons variety is the bizz. Soft and sweet without being sickly, it's rich but has a clean aftertaste.



This list is by no means exhaustive but we hope that it's wet your whistle. Just in case you still need convincing... try this and we defy you not to enjoy it. Over the winter we've offered it to many self professed cider haters only to see them come begging for more:

McLuckie's Mulled Cider

- 1 litre of good quality cider (the better the ingredients the better the end result)
- The juice of a lime
- A few slices of fresh ginger
- A good slug of ginger cordial (if you can get it... Rochester ginger drink is very good)
- 2-3 dessertspoons of sugar
- Spice bag (for mulled cider if you can get it... if not mulled wine spice will do, or failing that a few cloves and a cinnamon stick)
- A wine glass (ish) of brandy.

Put all the ingredients except the brandy into a pan (be careful when adding the sugar... depending on the type of cider it can have an explosive effect, so softly softly) and heat gently without boiling for about 15 minutes. All the quantities given are approximate, and will again vary according to the sweet/sharpness of the cider. Throw in the remains of the squeezed lime while heating for extra flavour. When the cider is hot and tasting well balanced, pour in the brandy. Taste again (just 'cos you can) and make any final adjustments before turning off the heat. Dive in!

That's all for now – we hope you'll give 'em a try. See you in the Spring with tales of our latest travels, until then we must finish with an apology.

In the last edition of PW we sang the praises of the Monkey House cider house (no apology for that), but we mistakenly placed it in Herefordshire when in fact it is in Defford, Worcestershire. Let's just say we crossed the county border several times over that particular weekend and geography was the last thing on our minds.

Cheers, Freya & Erica McLuckie

Members matter

ARE you reading this copy of Pints West in your favourite local pub drinking a pint of real ale? Are you a member of CAMRA?

If the answer to these questions is yes then congratulations! You are a member of what has been described as the most successful consumer group in Europe.

If the answer to the first question is yes but you are not a member then can I ask you to continue to read the rest of my short piece?

Every year when I am manning the membership stand at the Bristol Beer Festival I hear the following reasons why someone is not a member.

"I only drink brand X in my local pub and I haven't got the time to go off on all the trips and campaigns that I hear about in the press and on the radio."

Or, "I buy the Good Beer Guide every year and support the independent breweries whenever I can".

Whilst I can commend both replies I would like to add the following reasons as to why you should be a member of CAMRA.

If it wasn't for CAMRA your local would almost certainly not be selling any real ale, just bland keg "beer" and the campaigns that you read about would not happen as there would be no real ale to stand up for.

The Good Beer Guide (and most beer festivals) would not happen without the hard work of many local members and if CAMRA did not exist there would be no independent breweries to support. When you join the 66,000 or so members, you will be adding your backing to all the activities even if you do not become active within the branch.

Bristol & District branch has well over 1,000 members with perhaps 80 or so attending meetings over the course of a year, but many more who give feedback to the committee and other active members.

Indeed if everyone turned up for the monthly meeting we would have great difficulty finding a pub with a big enough function room to accommodate them – perhaps the Colston Hall or the Hippodrome would be suitable!

Oh, and finally, if it wasn't for CAMRA there would not be a Pints West for you to enjoy with your pint – so go on, fill in the application form on the back page.

Pete Tanner

STOP PRESS

A new venture, the Bristol Brewing Company, has just started brewing at Filton. They are doing two beers, Brunel and Cabot.



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)

TOO MUCH CIDER ?

Dear Steve,

I have just read issue 56 of your excellent newsletter. Though not particularly a cider fan, the article by the Cider Sisters caught my attention. They must have consumed a fair amount the day they visited the Monkey House, because they have placed it in the wrong county! It is in Worcestershire on the A4104 between Upton On Severn and Pershore.

From Bristol leave M5 at junction 8, M50 at junction 1, then north on A38 for 3 miles, turning right on A4104 towards Pershore. It is about half a mile on the left hand side following a 90 degree right hand bend in the road. The grid reference is 150/904425.

There is nothing by way of any sign to indicate its existence, and is probably best visited in daylight for a first visit. Opening hours are not over generous, and probably a weekend lunchtime is a good time.

Tewkesbury CAMRA will be making a visit next spring and I will give you an update at that time.

Colin Parker.
By email.

Freya McLuckie, one of the Cider Sisters, replies: Oops! I guess that weekend the Herefordshire/Worcestershire boundaries became somewhat blurred! Apologies for that... will try to pay greater attention to detail in future, but I offer no guarantees!



PINTS WEST IN PRAGUE

Dear Steve,

I'm glad to see Pints West 56 here in Derby; it's been a few months since I was in the Bristol area so it provides a useful reminder that another visit is due. As always a good read, and I see that someone had written about a visit to Russia, which is an excellent broadening of horizons for us all.

I was in Prague a couple of weeks back and was astounded to be greeted by the owner of Pivní Galerie with a broad grin because someone had picked up on the Pints West article I wrote for issue 55 ("What to do in Prague") and visited him! As I'm sure you will agree, it's good to see that things like this work and are well worth the effort if people follow up what is written.

If you know anyone who is about to visit Prague then they should know that last August's floods have had quite an impact on transport around the city and that my directions (by tram) to Pivní Galerie look like being redundant until about May. Essentially there is no Metro system around the centre and tram services have been altered to replace the Metro.

The revised directions are Tram X-B (every two to four minutes) to Denlnická, which is the exact same route but one block short from the street/tram stop where Pivní Galerie is situated. Journey time is still approximately 35 minutes and opening times the same as before. Please give this information to anyone who enquires about the Pivní Galerie article in the near future.

Ian Jakeway,
Derby.



TAKE MY TATTY ESTABLISHMENT

Dear Mr. Plumridge,

After reading the report by John Crowhurst and friend Martin ("Bristol: An Outsider's View") in issue no. 56, I feel it deserves a reply in your readers' letters section.

So it appears I run a tatty karaoke infested bar, or at least that is the view of the writers. I suggest before they start criticizing anything and everything that isn't to their own blinkered taste they look

a bit further. Take my tatty establishment, obviously the night they visited we were extremely busy as we usually are due to our prices:- prices per pint... Courage Best £1.30, Director's £1.65, Tavern £1.10, John Smith's Smooth £1.40, Fosters £1.45, Kron (1664) £1.75, Guinness £1.75, Blackthorn £1.45, Thatchers/Cheddar Valley £1.20, named spirits, Gordon's/Beefeater, Bacardi, Ct. Morgans, Smirnoff, etc. £1.00 per 25ml shot, respectable wines £1.20 per 125ml glass, plus many more savings.

As you can see we appreciate our customers and try and keep our prices affordable to their pockets. I also feel I should mention in the last year our customers have helped us raise the following:- over £250 for the poppy day appeal, over £200 for R.N.L.I. and over £950 for St. Peter's Hospice. I'm sure you will agree not a bad feat for a tatty establishment. With regards to decor, if they had looked, they might have noticed the ten full sets of framed old cigarette card collections in mint condition, the framed posters (all old and very collectable) ranging from Johnny Walker through to P. & O. luxury liners along with the collection of over 50 mounted plates and railway signs, etc.

Finally, to the Pints West management team, I hope and I am sure your members and advertisers pray, that these two misfits have not been paid for this misleading article.

The Landlord,
(no name supplied)
The Long Bar,
70 Old Market Street,
Bristol.

P.S. Remember we are cheap and cheerful except the sexy landlord (try us).

The offending piece was an unsolicited letter accompanied by a report describing a personal and very extensive tour of pubs of Bristol, Bath and surrounding areas. I should have employed the red pen and edited out their comment about the Long Bar being "tatty inside and heaving with karaoke" and do apologise for not doing so. But I do not apologise for editing out almost half of the above letter despite insistence that I should not (i.e. all the streams of abuse). I'm more than happy to publish all the positive points made above though. The last two editions of Pints West have actually included letters from another reader (Craig Weadon) in which the Long Bar has been described very favourably. Tatty or not, I quite liked the Long Bar when I visited recently.

As for payment, absolutely nobody is ever paid so much as a penny for anything that goes into Pints West - not the editor (always out of pocket), not any contributor, not any letter writer. Ed.



PINTS WEST MAKES ME MAUDLIN

Dear Steve,

I note from the address label on the envelope containing the latest copy of Pints West, i.e. issue number 56, that my subscription stumbled to a halt with issue number 55. This means that, theoretically, I could now take a firm hold of my unpaid-for-delivery copy and run! – theoretically because, in practice, I couldn't possibly summon up the unreasonable amount of energy which is required in order to run...

So, with my subscription now right down to the sediment, as it were, and my thirst for Pints West as yet unabated, I am now ordering a refill in the form of the next four issues of your refreshingly full-bodied and satisfying periodical. I'm enclosing a cheque for £2.50, the extra 50p being to meet the cost of issue 56 which, as you will now be fully aware as a result of my already tediously extended explanation, I have not paid for – or, if you will, for which I have not paid. You may well be justified in thinking that this is quite a genuinely generous gesture on my part. I have in fact noticed that after a few strong issues of Pints West I *do* tend to get a bit maudlin. As well as pedantic. And long winded.

Many thanks. Looking forward to the next round in January (or February).

Good health,
Maurice Tasnier
Weston-super-Mare.
P.S. – And forgetful.

Pints West is of course free if people manage to find one in a pub before they are all snatched up. But readers can take out a subscription at 50p an issue (£2 for a year's supply) which used to – but no longer quite – covers the cost of envelope and postage (any extra comes out of my own generous pocket). If people want to be added to the mailing list, see the back page for details.

*Do remember to give your name and address though. I recently received a cheque for £2 from a **Mr M S Mitchell**. There was nothing written on the back of the cheque nor any accompanying letter in the envelope. I can only assume it was intended for a Pints West subscription, but obviously cannot honour it unless the person contacts me again. (I have not cashed the cheque.)*

COURAGE SITE REDEVELOPMENT

Dear Steve,

Concerning the redevelopment of the former Courage brewery, the good news is that there will be a micro-brewery on the site, but how big or viable we don't

yet know for sure.

I attended the Bristol City Council Development Control Committee meeting on 18 November and was given the opportunity to make a statement regarding the redevelopment of the Courage brewery site.

I think that it's a cracking development, with a host of good design features, *but* it's not a cracking interpretation of the historic value and context of the site. The design approved by the Committee is good, but, I fear, is a missed opportunity for the Council to get behind the City of Culture 2008 Bid.

The indications are that the proposed micro-brewery might only be able to brew five or six barrels a week, i.e. it would be a small brew-pub not a micro-brewery. Such an operation wouldn't service a country pub let alone a major city centre flagship venue. If that really is the case the future for brewing on the site is indeed bleak, as brew-pubs are notoriously short-lived enterprises. Even a five or six barrel brewery brewing throughout the week would only be viable if the rent is realistic and transport costs for delivery are not excessive.

It was the first time I had attended a Development Control Committee meeting. Whilst the Committee undoubtedly made a sensible decision overall, I was appalled at the emphasis placed on architecture and the built environment and at the minimal emphasis and shallow consideration given to cultural issues. From my perspective the whole procedure was focused on the buildings, and very little attention (lip service at best) was placed on the cultural, human interest and historic context of the site, aspects that will be crucially important to the Bristolians who will live, work and play in the area when the construction phase is complete.

I am concerned that the Council Planning Officers, who have clearly done an otherwise excellent job in evaluating all the diverse aspects of the redevelopment, have severely misrepresented the historic context and value of the Courage brewery site. Beer was one of the key commodities exported from Bristol in Medieval times, when Bristol was Britain's second city, either as a tradable item in its own right, or as ships' stores. Documents in the City Records Office clearly show that beer has been brewed at the Courage brewery site since 1567. This means 432 years of continuous brewing activity on the same site until Scottish and Newcastle closed the brewery in 1999. Not a mere 300 years as stated in the Council's report, despite the fact that the results of the recent research of the Council's archives by Mark Steeds had been provided to them, well in advance of their report. This makes the Courage brewery site the oldest

known site in Britain for continuous brewing activity. What other industrial heritage site in Bristol, or indeed in Britain, can boast such a pedigree? (In olden days, the safest form of liquid intake for city dwellers and sailors was beer, and it formed a staple part of the diet. The reason for this was that the brewing process sterilizes the water, and if the beer itself became contaminated it was unpalatable, either way protecting the consumer.)

The councillors' comments on the historic and cultural value of the site were at best indifferent with the exception of Liberal Democrat Councillor, Rosalie Brown, who made a valiant but unsuccessful plea for the developer to be required to allocate funds to the conservation and display of artefacts that are likely to be found in the waterlogged ground of the riverside parts of the site.

However, I remain hopeful that common sense will prevail, and the developers, and the entrepreneurs who will occupy the development, will recognise and be sympathetic to the huge historic value of the site – and will interpret that history to their advantage, to exploit it as a honey pot to attract and provide enjoyment for all the people who I hope will flock to make use of the many facilities that it will provide. Not least of which should be an interpretation of the brewing and associated industries history of the site to complement the contemporary micro-brewery which the developers and Council hope will occupy part of the site in the old Fermentation Building.

Finally, it's a pity that the Council and Harbour authorities didn't recognise the importance of providing a ferry landing for occupants and visitors to the development site. The attraction of using a ferry to commute, or to visit venues on the Floating Harbour, pales into insignificance if you have to cross a wind and rain swept bridge to get to it. Now that there will be a waterside open space, where previously was the blank wall of the Compressor building, I am sure there will be demand for occupants and visitors to be able to embark and disembark from it. Hopefully this omission will be recognised and rectified in due course.

Best regards,
Chris Chubb
The Plain,
Hawkesbury Upton.



WATERING HOLES IN THE DESERT

News from Weston-super-Mare

WsM Diary

Non-members welcome at all events

Wednesday 19 February – Beer and skittles evening at The White Hart, Palmer Row. 8.30 start.

Thursday 27 February to Saturday 1 March – Bristol Beer Festival, Council House, College Green.

Wednesday 5 March – Minibus outing – visits to existing and potential Good Beer Guide rural pubs. Tickets £6. Minibus leaves Off The Rails at 7.30.

Wednesday 19 March – Banwell crawl. Bus from Alexander Parade at 7.35, Borough Arms 7.40. Bus back leaves Banwell at 10.50. We will be visiting The Whistling Duck, The Brewers Arms and The Bell.

Friday 11 April to Sunday 13 April – CAMRA Members' Weekend and National AGM, Exeter University. A party will be going from Weston. Enquiries to contacts below.

Wednesday 16 April – Congresbury crawl. Bus X1 leaves Alexander Parade at 7.35, Worle 7.45. Buses back at 10.10 and 11.35. We will be visiting The Plough, The Old Inn and at least one other.

Wednesday 21 May – Two-pub town social. 8.30 The Balmoral, Walliscote Road. 9.45 Off The Rails.

Contacts

Tim Nickolls - 01934 628996 (eves)

Rich Neale - 01934 429808 (eves)

Seasonal Ales Crawl

EVERY December the Weston CAMRA group embarks on a crawl of town pubs that are offering a Christmas or winter beer. Last year's event was disappointing, as only two pubs had a seasonal beer on offer. No pub answered our plea in the last Pints West to let us know if they were going to be stocking something seasonal, so the omens were not good. However, some research around town earlier in the day provided the grounding for a pretty good evening.

We began, as is now a tradition, at **The Regency** in Lower Church Road, where a strongish beer (4.8%) called Merry Maltings from the Oakhill brewery was on offer, much enjoyed by most present. We then made the two-minute journey to **The Cabot**, where a few more people joined our party. This pub has not been visited as part of a CAMRA evening for a while, but it has begun stocking a guest beer and it has had some good reports. On the night, Charles Wells winter beer – Naked Gold – was on offer. The Cabot is becoming renowned for its bizarre method of dispense, which someone described as looking like an upside-down coffee percolator (this must be seen – pay a visit). Despite this, beer quality was good.

Another short walk to **The London Inn** in the High Street. Smiles ales are always available here, benefiting from being served straight from the cask. Happily they had acquired some Holly Hops, Smiles' Christmas beer, 5% in strength, and it does taste very alcoholic. It was suitably flat, being served straight from the cask, and warming on a cold winter's evening. What's more it only cost a very appealing £1.70 a pint and the accompanying Smiles Original was only £1.50 – one of the town's best real ale bargains.

Next up was **The White Hart**, tucked away in Palmer Row. We knew that The White Hart had been stocking a variety of Christmas beers since the start of the month and we were delighted to see two beers on when we walked in. These were Old King Legless from Scotland's Harviestoun brewery and from about 500 miles south of this, Robin's Revenge from Gales of Portsmouth. Those of us that plumped for the Harviestoun beer were rewarded with an excellent beer, but we lost the opportunity to sample the Robin's Revenge which our colleagues finished off. Quite a few people revisited The White Hart for subsequent tastings of the Old King Legless, which was a very tasty brew.

As our stamina began to be well tested, we headed to **The Dragon** – a sure banker for a good selection of Christmas beers or so we thought. Much to our amazement/horror there was nothing in sight! Given the number of seasonal beers available in The Dragon during the preceding three weeks, it seemed bizarre that nothing should be on offer. Admittedly, the likes of RCH East Street Cream in top form helped to ease our dismay, but it was a disappointing visit nevertheless.

A similar story at **Off The Rails**. One of the team had been in the day before and was told that a Christmas beer would be on, but this proved to be wrong. However, Off The Rails is always a good place to end the evening and The Branscombe Vale Drayman's Bitter was in very good condition.

All in all, a very good evening. Six pubs visited in the space of three hours – four of which had a seasonal beer on offer.

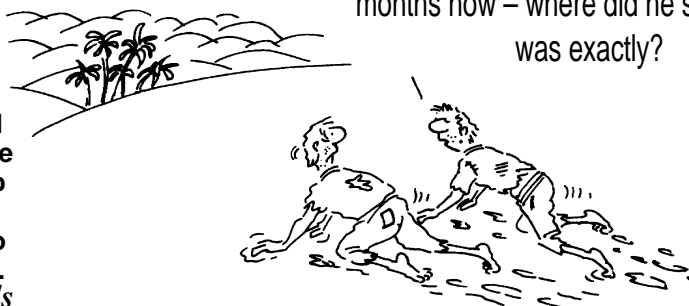
Tim Nickolls

Correction

In the last edition of Pints West I recommended that people pay a visit to a pub called The White Hart, which I said was in Street. In fact this pub is in Cross, just off the A38 near Axbridge. My apologies to Alison Share and anyone else who drove around Street looking for The White Hart.

Tim Nickolls

We've been wandering around in circles for months now – where did he say that pub was exactly?



Weston Whispers (pub/ beer news)

FOR our November social we visited **Weston Cricket Club** on Devonshire Road. This is a venue well worth checking out. We had Fullers London Pride (which some said was the best they had had for ages) and Butcombe Bitter which was also very good. Prices were attractive too at £1.60 for the Butcombe and £1.80 for the Pride. The club also has occasional guest beers. Strictly speaking it is for members and guests, but anyone who feels like popping in to sample their beers will get a warm welcome.

The same evening we went to the nearby **Ancaster**. This is an ex-Ushers pub which still stocks some old Ushers beers that are now brewed at the Thomas Hardy Brewery in Dorchester. On the night of our visit the beers were "Ushers" Best, Bishop's Tipple (an ex-Gibbs Mew beer) and a mystery IPA – brewers not known by the barman. Some of our party who live in the area had not visited the pub for years and were pleasantly surprised by the beer quality.

Those of you who avoid the January sales at all costs will have missed out on **Off The Rails'** contribution – Christmas Cottage from the Cottage brewery (one of the nicest Xmas beers I had this year) for a measly £1!

Tim Nickolls

Better Times in Banwell

IT SEEMS things have changed since the last edition of Pints West. Following on from reports in the last issue which mentioned The Bell and The Whistling Duck, there are now new tenants in both establishments.

Keen to maintain interest in their respective pubs first Peter and Ruth took up the challenge of the Whistling Duck back in early autumn and asked their locals what beers they would like to see brought in. The result has seen a rare showing of two regular Adnams beers represented in the form of Best bitter (replacing Youngs Special) and Broadside. The perennial WSM favourite draught Bass and Greene King Abbot Ale complete the line up. The owners' management (Pubmaster) have apparently agreed in principle to a one-off beer festival later on in the year (possibly to tie in with the Banwell Carnival) so watch this space.

The pub is again up and running so give it a try. Apparently one or two regulars have even defected from the nearby Coach House (see below).

More recently The Bell has received new incumbents, father and son partnership Bob and Rob Warehem. They have only been in situ since the beginning

of December and are looking to recover the local following nurtured by the lamented Rob Donnington. I don't believe this is a free house because they have a tie to Enterprise, however the beers on offer during a recent visit included Butcombe Bitter, Flowers Original, Greene King Old Speckled Hen and IPA. They also aim to keep the music tradition going and are fully booked on alternate weeks with a variety of bands.

Just down the road at Locking Village the recent optimism for The Coach House Inn appears to be in tatters. Unconfirmed reports around the village suggest, having over a short period of time banned a large proportion of local regulars, the tenants have apparently upped and left over the festive period. Hmmm.....

You may remember that this pub was awarded Cask Marque accreditation back during the summer and my opinion on that? Ho Ho Ho!

Footnote: Just in case you were wondering, I am a local..... but have never been a regular.

Steve Reed

Wickwar BOB advert

Butcombe advert

A Round with Robin continued ... part 4

A happy New Year to readers of this column, and hopefully you'll imbibe some good ale in 2003.

As I said in the last issue, on joining the Chalice Morris Men, one thing I was hoping for was the chance to visit pubs both locally and nationally that perhaps I'd never get the opportunity otherwise to visit. I was not to be disappointed. I will not bore you with all the delightful pubs (and some awful ones too) as many have changed and got worse (or better). I will restrict myself to those visited in the late 1970s and early 1980s which are still worth a visit (whilst writing this I am *not* consulting my Good Beer Guide to see if they're in it – you can do that!).

Of course not every visit to pubs was with the Morris. With other acquaintances in the early 1980s I was a frequent visitor to the **Major from Glengarry** when Howard was the landlord there, and the beers were always in good condition. Other pubs I regularly frequented in the “desert of Weston-super-Mare” were the **Criterion** and the **Raglan** both in Upper Church Road; the **Claremont Vaults**; the **Royal Pier** (always good Bass and a full size billiard table), and the **Captain's Cabin**. All these pubs had at least one real ale (and still do) and some like the Captain's Cabin often had three or four. Others like the **Claremont Vaults** only had one, but once when visiting

with Regan Callow, having been told there had been a change of tenant, we were offered a free pint as the manager thought we were from CAMRA. Regretfully we had to turn it down, as of course a representative from CAMRA would not have accepted bribery. The beer as I recall was Hancocks.

I had also taken up going to folk festivals, especially the Durham Festival in early August and the Wadebridge Festival in late August. The beers were vastly different of course, but those that stick in the mind were Cameron's Strongarm and Vaux Best Bitter in Durham, and the St. Austell beers in Cornwall.

With the Morris the best regularly visited pubs in Somerset worth a mention were the **Black Horse** at Clapton-in-Gordano, the **Puriton Inn** near junction 23 of the M5, the **Strawberry Special** at Draycott, and the **King William** at Catcott. The last named was capable of having beers that were a surprise, but always had Royal Oak and Bridport Bitter. Other occasional pubs in Somerset worth a visit were the **Star Inn** at Wells, the **Rifleman's Arms** and the **George & Pilgrims** in Glastonbury, and of course the **Royal Clarence Hotel** in Burnham-on-Sea. The hotel started to brew their own ales (RCH) just about the same time as the Chalice Morris had stopped using the Highbridge Hotel as its after practice venue. Sometimes the “Clarence

Bitter” was excellent, more often it wasn't, but even great breweries have to start somewhere, and when they had established PG Steam it became one of my favourite beers. In 1985 they produced a “one-off beer” to celebrate the 300th celebration of the Monmouth Rebellion battle at Weston-zoyland, which they called Pitchfork. Fortunately so many people liked it and they hadn't lost the recipe, so it is with us still today.

Another couple of pubs well noted in the early 1980s were the **Malt & Hops** in Broad Street, Bristol (for its choice of real ales) and the **Prince's Motto** in Barrow Gurney which I haven't visited for a long while but then it was a bit like the **Blue Flame** at Nailsea, in that it seemed to be lost in a time warp. Also justifiably popular amongst CAMRA members was the **White Hart** at Wrington that normally had four ales on from the barrel, and also served really good food. Its huge log fire in winter was another attraction, and a simple garden without playground suited me in summer.

I apologise if this issue has appeared like a catalogue for a beer festival. I have to admit to having other interests, but I'm sure you won't believe me. This takes us to about 1985, and there is more to come if you can bear it.

Robin E Wild

Adnams Brewery advert

Moles advert

A Weston Week by Dr John

THE five-day Wetherspoon Halloween Beer Festival at the Dragon in Meadow Street was good enough to try for a London postcode as there they had the privilege of two extra days. The Spitfire flew away and the Directors Bitter left after the first day. Their replacements might have been a bit more local as some of the incomers had not travelled too well. Noticeably absent were near neighbours such as Butcombe and Exmoor, along with bottle-conditioned beers. The lack of Directors posed a problem for the "Burger, Chips and Pint for £2.99" offer but there were better things to spend your money on. What you got for your three quid was uncertain as the £1.39 Festival price confused the cutting-edge technology tills and sometimes came out at £1.60. A matter easily redressed by the "Try B4 U Buy" offer if you were not too thirsty and did not mind bothering Dracula, who was in residence until the Saturday.

Up to 30 great real beers were promised and at least 23 appeared. Only the Wednesday had a full house, locally represented for the day by RCH Pitchfork and East Street Cream. The day was also marked by Mauldons Broomstick Bitter flying in from Suffolk as befits a light ABV 4% with a bewitchingly rounded flavour and long aftertaste. Lincolnshire contributed Bateman Salem Porter, suitably dark and flavoursome over the three days it was on trial. Scotland sent Caledonian Trick or Treat, probably by Virgin as it looked a bit pale, but a good drink over three days at ABV 4.5%. Some guy had put a pleasingly dark Coach House Gunpowder Strong Mild in the cellar ready for six days later but it only lasted three. The group Hop Back Summer Lightning was not on the tasting list but spent another autumn day in Weston. Like the Directors, the standard Theakston Best Bitter only had the courage to compete for one day but it must have been getting on, as it was a bit watery. After a couple of days off, it came back to try again.

By the second day, All Hallow's E'en, the drinkers had thus frightened off the three standards. The Irish ghosted over with D'Arcy's Dublin Red ABV 4.2% Irish Ale, whose initial air of bitterness soon reeled down to a catholic finish that left nothing to lament. Banks & Taylor's Bedfordshire attempt to compete with a scary red did not come off but their Phantom Thirst was a nice light 4.5% ABV with a strong aftertaste. Hampshire contributed Ringwood Huffkin Autumn Ale, a full-bodied ABV 4.4% session bitter with a rounded flavour. Not set out in the tasting notes, as the final new arrival Badger dug out their Golden Glory with a fruity, flavoursome 4.5% ABV and a distinctive bite in the aftertaste. All the new Thursday beers lasted two days so All Saints' Day still offered seven miracle brews against Wednesday's nine.

The usual big Saturday crowd had rain, fireworks, Theakston Best Bitter and seven new arrivals to enjoy. Highgate B Fuggled was a deceptive 6.0% ABV that went down like any hoppy traditional bitter. An unscheduled arrival was the Cottage Somerset & Dorset Ale, steaming in with enough water to get over Masbury Summit. Smiles Looming Lantern was signalled as a pale ale but was a bit too sudsy for that to come through. Thwaites contributed a cloudy Daniel's Hammer, a spring beer that turned out to be a well-flavoured easy autumn drink. The other side of the country provided Camerons Cauldron at a pleasant summery 4.4% ABV. The group exclusive Hop Back Hop Bat winged in at ABV 4.0% but was not much competition. Equally, Highwood Tom Wood's Lincolnshire Longwool put in a somewhat sheepish cloudy and sudsy appearance that made filling the glass something only toucan do.

By the Sunday finish, the rain had not gone away but the Festival atmosphere had, with only two new late arrivals to keep seven of the Saturday beers company. The Longwool had been replaced by Wadworth Malt 'n' Hops, a seasonal beer with the same problem of fizzily filling the glass, none of which detracted from its full palate and strong finish. Last but not least was Titanic Lifeboat Ale which, at 4.0% ABV, went down a treat as a fruity traditional bitter with no sweetness and a strong aftertaste.

The day after the Festival, the Isambard Kingdom Brunel in Portsmouth still had a fine selection on, although the prices had gone up. Of the foregoing, there were Trick or Treat, Looming Lantern, Dublin Red, Daniel's Hammer, Huffkin, Gunpowder, Camerons Cauldron and the standards. The only new one from the Festival list was a Somerset beer that was regrettably not seen in Weston, Oakhill Black Magic Stout, smooth, dark, very drinkable, imperceptibly bitter and with little aftertaste. An unlisted Hook Norton Steaming On was a full-bodied 4.4% ABV traditional bitter with a hint of sweetness and a strong finish. The day finished in the Off the Rails with a sharp, clear Doom Bar Bitter with a perfect head and a nice bite. The 7th day was one of rest as the Tetley's Imperial at the Conservative Club was doing a quiet man act and did not want to come out, leaving only the one with the red triangle on it.

Of the thirty Festival beers offered, the unlucky thirteen sadly missed were Phoenix Navy ABV 3.8%, Cains Formidable Ale, Brains Reverend James, Hook Norton Steam Ale, York Centurion's Ghost Ale, Orkney Red MacGregor, Hall & Woodhouse Golden Glory ABV 4.5%, Oakham White Dwarf Wheat Beer, Hampshire Bewitched ABV 5.0%, Nethergate Umbel Magna, Hanby Spooky Doo ABV 4.7%, Ryburn Stabbers and Harviestoun Gremlin.

A report on the Wrington Vale Rotary Club Beer Festival

DESPITE its name this beer festival was held at Winscombe Cricket Club (at the end of last September) and your correspondent and Regan Callow attended for the evening session on the Saturday.

According to the bar staff it had been well attended on the Friday evening, not so well attended on Saturday lunchtime, and when we were there, there were only about 80 punters passing through. This was a shame as there were some fine beers, all of course on gravity, and though all priced at £2 a pint, the cricket club bar had two real ales at £1.80 a pint, of which Butcombe Gold was one.

There were 23 beers offered on the programme, but actually only 22 sold as the Berrow Topsy Turvey had not dropped. None of the beers were "bright". RCH brewery had taken the opportunity of using the festival to launch a new bitter beer, Steam Harvest, a golden fruity beer brewed with a single malt and weighing in at 4.8%, making it stronger than Pitchfork, but weaker than Double Header. It was very tasty, similar to PG Steam, but fruitier.

Most Somerset and Wiltshire breweries were represented, and also beers from Devon (Branscombe Vale, O'Hanlons), Hampshire (Ringwood, Triple fff) and from other parts of the UK including Scotland. My favourite beers – I tasted all of them as we were positively encouraged to have a taster for nothing – tended towards the summery golden bitters, as it was a warm evening, after a sunny day.

Pride of place must go to the Pooh Beer, brewed by Church End at Atherstone in Warwickshire, which was brewed with honey, but far superior to other honey beers I've tried. Other beers, which were excellently performing that evening, were Radgie Gadgie from Mordue in Tyne & Wear, Timothy Taylor's Landlord, and the new RCH Steam Harvest. It has to be said also that some beers which are excellent anyway are even better straight from the barrel, e.g. Hop Back Summer Lightning, Moor Merlin's Magic and Ringwood Old Thumper.

Robin E Wild

Enter The Dragon

A profile of Weston's largest real ale selling pub

THE J.D. WETHERSPOON pub chain continues to trigger much debate within the Campaign for Real Ale and among pub-goers in general. To some people they are cold, impersonal, format pubs with no soul, an inconsistent real ale offer and an apparent revolving door policy with their staffing – both at management and bar staff level. To others they are something of a saviour – the biggest friend that real ale has amongst the all-powerful pub groups, offering real ale drinkers a level of choice, quality and value unequalled in many of the areas where they spring-up.

It would be fair to say that the vast majority of CAMRA members in Weston fall into the latter category, and judging by the numbers of people going through the doors of The Dragon Inn on Meadow Street on a daily basis, this would appear to be the view of the wider population. I felt it would be interesting to find out more about the operation and Lucy Williams, manager of The Dragon, was good enough to give up some time to answer my questions.

Those who feel that it is not possible to have a genuine relationship between customers and management in a Wether-

spoons due to their size (as opposed to the more personal environment of a traditional neighbourhood or village pub), may be interested to know that Lucy was half an hour late for our meeting due to attending the funeral of one of her regulars and the wake was held in The Dragon.

Career

I began by asking Lucy about her career prior to arriving at The Dragon. Lucy said that she had first worked in a pub (The Plough at Pilning) when she was 15 and she quickly became interested in all elements of running a pub.

She achieved a Higher National Diploma in Leisure and Business Management and in 1996 applied to work for Greene King. They apparently regarded her as being too young (20), but Wetherspoons took a different view feeling that she had the “dynamism” they were looking for.

After training, Lucy held managerial posts at various Wetherspoons in the Bristol/Gloucestershire area. These included managing the Lord John in Stroud when it opened on her 22nd birthday. A memorable “highlight” was being sent to manage The

Regal in Gloucester in the run-up to Christmas – something of a challenge, given that this pub is 7,000 square feet in size (about three times the size of The Dragon) and has 36 staff!

Lucy moved to The Dragon in September 2000. I asked Lucy to give a picture of the size of the operation at The Dragon and what a typical day is like. Lucy said that she has three shift managers, two kitchen managers and seventeen other staff.

A typical day begins with letting the cleaners in at eight o'clock. The two hours before opening time are spent receiving deliveries, setting-up the office and bar, checking the kitchen and cellar, and then letting in the staff just before the ten o'clock opening time.

She ensures that the staff know what beers are on (when festivals are on, staff are given detailed information on the types of beers on sale). Once the pub is open there are the obvious jobs such as taking orders for food and drinks, as well as dealing with any maintenance problems that crop up and ensuring that Health and Safety legislation is always complied with.

Checks

I noticed a poster on the wall in Lucy's office headed “*Manager's End Of Night Checklist.*” The list included: “Has cellar been done? All barrels racked and tapped? Have you done six line checks for the day?” All obvious stuff perhaps, but it was interesting to hear the importance that Lucy says is placed on this critical checklist and that any handover between duty managers incorporates a run-through of what has to be done – particularly on the ale-keeping side.

People are often confused over the exact policy Wetherspoons adopts with regard to stocking real ales. Lucy clarified that she is currently required to stock Theakston's Best Bitter, Shepherd Neame Spitfire, Scottish Courage Directors and Greene King Abbot Ale. Anything else is down to the manager. Guest ales are usually sourced through East-West Ales, although Lucy occasionally deals directly with local breweries.

I suspect that I am not alone in having wondered how many pints of real ale The Dragon sells in a week. Lucy produced sales figures from a typical week, which revealed 2,890 pints! This sounded fantastic to me and my pleasure at hearing such a healthy figure was enhanced by hearing that sales of keg bitter (including the dreaded John Smiths Smooth) were 1,300, with lager at 2,000. This means that real ale out-sells keg by more than two to one and 44 per cent more real ale is sold than lager.

If this level of performance could be achieved nationally, most of the problems for real ale brewers (and drinkers) would disappear at a stroke. It should also be remembered that whilst real ale is given decent promotion within the Wetherspoons network, the rival products – John Smiths Smooth, Fosters, etc. – enjoy the support of far greater national promotions and marketing.

All regular users of The Dragon would agree that the pub offers an excellent range of beers and is clearly a strong supporter of local breweries. On one occasion back in November no less than seven of the real ales on offer were from Somerset breweries – three from Cottage, two from RCH and one each from Exmoor and Butcombe.

Lucy has also organised festivals over-

Smiles advert

and-above the national Wetherspoons events. This is not the case across the Wetherspoons estate and some of the Bristol pubs can offer a very limited choice of beers.

I asked Lucy why she was clearly so keen on offering a wide choice of ales. Lucy's response was that from the start of training in Wetherspoons there is a great emphasis placed on the importance of real ale to the company, her customers clearly enjoy sampling different beers, and she greatly enjoys the cellar management side of the job.

With regard to the perception of the constant changing of managers in Wetherspoons pubs, Lucy pointed out that the company's estate is continually expanding and new posts are advertised to all existing staff. It is inevitable that some people will be looking for new opportunities. However, there are no forced transfers and Lucy has recently bought a house in the Weston area and has no plans to move elsewhere – news that will be received with relief by most regulars.

Visits

Tim Martin, founder and head of the company, makes about three unannounced visits to The Dragon each year. Mr. Martin makes a point of finding out the name of each member of staff, speaking to each personally and thanking everyone for their efforts.

A cynic's view would be that he has clearly read the latest Management Theory manuals. However, sales figures suggest that he has developed an approach to business that is customer-focused and, by extension, extremely successful.

An area where local CAMRA members have had cause to complain in the past is in waiting times at the bar. Lucy is well aware of this as being a problem and does not want customers to have to grumble about service.

Constant staff turnover seems to be the problem, which suggests that either pay or staff conditions are the root of the problem. Lucy defended her company in this area, quoting local competitors that offer an inferior package for their staff. Her view is that too many people apply for the jobs with no real appreciation of the hard work involved.

Whatever the reasons, this is clearly a national issue for Wetherspoons which needs tackling if they are to continue to ward off competition from smaller pubs who seem to be more able to offer a permanent friendly face who customers can build a relationship with – this may sound old-fashioned but it is still the cornerstone of a successful pub (or at least a *good* successful pub).

I concluded my interview with Lucy by asking her two predictable questions – the best and worst aspects of her job. Lucy says that the best parts are receiving feedback from satisfied customers and seeing people

she has trained move onwards and upwards within the company. The worst aspect is the staff turnover issue. Lucy gets frustrated by the constant changes in staff which means a lot of time is wasted in training people. This problem also hinders Lucy in achieving her ambitions of fully exploiting the potential of The Dragon and creating the kind of community feel which she experienced back at The Plough in Pilning.

Rival

The owner of a small, rival pub chain recently suggested that Wetherspoons were bad news for drinkers and breweries, through their squeezing of suppliers (including breweries) and their domination of local areas at the expense of traditional locals. Whether or not this individual uses supermarkets is not known. However, if Wetherspoons were to close The Dragon, would surrounding pubs pile in to fill the gap and offer all the great beers from Somerset breweries and further-afield that The Dragon provides? The answer is clearly no. Many people that choose to run pubs either have little interest in real ale or little know-how in how to keep and serve it in excellent condition.

The Dragon, like most pubs, has its faults but most real ale drinkers in Weston would be horrified at the prospect of living without it.

Tim Nickolls

Wadworth JCB advert

Hop Back Brewery and Coronation advert

Island in the sea

By your Nailsea correspondent
Laurie Gibney

The Ring of Bells

KEVIN MILDON has been licensee at the Ring of Bells in St. Mary's Grove, Nailsea for almost nine years, holds a twenty-year tenancy from one of the better pubcos, the Unique Pub Co. Ltd., and belongs to their "Cask Ale Club" which is operated in association with the Society of Independent Brewers (SIBA). Bristol born and bred, Kevin moved to Nailsea twelve years ago and was then an air conditioning salesman, and since becoming the licensee of the Ring of Bells has doubled the barrellage.

Courage Best Bitter (4.0%) at £2.10p per pint is the most popular cask ale selling approximately 700 pints each week, sixty percent of the cask sales. Thirty-six other mostly well known cask ales are regularly available to Unique licensees and those account for a further 300 pints per week at the Ring of Bells. On tap at the time of my visit were Shepherd Neame Spitfire (4.5%) and Smiles Best (4.1%), both at £2.30p.

Cask Ale Club ales from SIBA members account for a further 150 pints per week. These vary each month but the October offering at the Ring of Bells included Moor

Withy (3.8%), Arkells 3B (4.0%), Hogs Back T.E.A. (4.2%), Stonehenge Bodyline (4.3%), Highwood Old Timber (4.5%) and Springhead Gardeners Tap (5.0%). Casks are sold within two or three days helping to assure, with Kevin's cellarman'ship, quality ales.

Catering is in the capable charge of Kevin's wife Diane who is assisted by long serving local ladies Lynne and Val, and for the last six months by Stuart, a young, recently qualified college chef. Food is served in the bar between 12 noon and 2 p.m. seven days a week and between 6 and 9 p.m. on Monday to Saturday evenings. Tables may be reserved in the non-smoking "restaurant" area of the bar by telephoning 01275 790009. There is an extensive standard menu with starters averaging £3.25 and main courses £6.50, plus a daily chalkboard menu, which recently included parsnip & bacon soup and pork steak with apple & cider sauce. There are always fresh fish specials on Fridays and Saturdays. Diane's team also has a function menu catering for up to 150 in the function room,

which is convertible to a skittles alley. The Mildon's son Robin (15) has shown some interest in entering the trade as a chef, but their daughter Rebecca (13) has not yet been bitten by the pub bug!

The Ring of Bells is home to the Nailsea Folk Club which attracts top national and international artistes. It is one of the best folk clubs in the country and we are lucky to have them, says Kevin. Forty customers play in petanque (French boules) teams in summer leagues, some at national competition standard. The Ring of Bells is also home to seven skittles teams, a first division league table skittles team, a quiz team in a local league, and three Thursday league darts teams.

For families there is a mega-adventure playground, and patio and barbecue area behind the pub. Plans exist to build a family room with new loos including baby changing facilities and a new toilet for the disabled. The plans include remodelling the kitchen, cellar and bar servery, and re-upholstering seating in the bar.

Laurie Gibney

Bunch of Grapes advert

Island in the Channel

YOUR Nailsea scribe and his family went for a week during October to another "Island in the Sea" – the island of Jersey.

Accompanied by his son Tony who joined CAMRA at the Great British Beer Festival last August, and armed with a copy of the Jersey page from the CAMRA Good Beer Guide and a bus timetable, they set forth to do a little real ale research and see the island.

Beware, any real ale fan who follows in their footsteps – the bus times change early in August and at the same time the French firm Connex took over the service, there was only one route to Gorey with a half hourly service, and most had frequencies of between one and two hours.

Most of the real ales are supplied by the "International Breweries" listed in the Good Beer Guide but there are limited supplies available of ales brewed in Jersey and Guernsey. Our hotel, The Queens in St. Helier, had no real ale, and we pitied those who had booked an all-inclusive package. In St. Helier and near the bus station is the CAMRA stronghold, the Lamplighter which we visited a couple of times to enjoy Bass and Theakston's Old Peculier, but our favourite watering hole in St. Helier was the Original Wine Bar in Bath Street where we enjoyed the local Jimmy's Bitter and Ringwood ales among others. We also visited the Dog & Sausage with its Somerset and Dorset Railway artefacts and the Prince of Wales with lovely woodwork, both of which had Bass and were near the central market, but both were rather smoky, and the Prince of Wales was not open on Sunday evening. We also found Jimmy's Bitter at the Town House, Jersey's answer to a Wetherspoon's in St. Helier.

On trips out of St. Helier, a lunchtime visit was made to the lovely setting of the Moulin de Lecq in an old mill building on the North coast at Grève de Lecq, where a sandwich was washed down with Bass and Guernsey Sunbeam. Our evening meal that

day was enjoyed at the very busy Old Smugglers Inn at St. Brelades, accompanied again by Guernsey Sunbeam and Bass.

After a fascinating visit to La Hougue Bie – no, not a pub but an ancient burial mound, etc. – we caught the number 1 bus to visit the Seymour Inn at Grouville for more Jimmy's Bitter and Guernsey Sunbeam, plus a recommendation to go on to the Ruellan's Village Inn, one bus stop from the terminus at Gorey, but as they had only Bass we caught the same bus back to a Scottish Courage pub at Grouville where we enjoyed Courage Directors.

At St. Peter, near Jersey Airport, is the Star and Topsy Toad Brewery which was established in 1992 by Steve and Sarah Skinner as Jersey's only brew pub, and the most southerly one in the UK. In 1997 the Skinners moved to found the Skinners Brewery in Cornwall and sold out to the Jersey Brewery, which ceased brewing real ale itself, concentrating on its nitro keg Pilsner Gold. The Topsy Toad Brewery together with its "sister", the Guernsey Brewery, now provide the only local real ale in the Channel Islands.

The Topsy Toad Brewery brews the award-winning Jimmy's Bitter (4.2%), a flagship premium bitter, and Topsy Toad Ale (3.8%), a session bitter. What sounded to me like my type of ale, a dark Horny Toad at 5%, was not available until after we left the island.

During our visit there we met Patrick Dean, the Head Brewer who hails originally from the North West and North Wales and is keen to ship to the mainland, but as transport costs are so prohibitive he needs visiting enthusiasts such as CAMRA members to arrange with him in advance (tel 01534 484944) to "pop a cask into their boot" for festivals, etc. If visiting Jersey, Topsy Toad ales are available at the Five Oaks, Harvest Barn, Windmill, Le Hocq, Seymour, Britannia, Town House, Original Wine Bar and the Star.

Laurie Gibney

Island news

SAD NEWS for lovers of Smiles Best like myself is that it is no longer available at the **Moorend Spout**. Despite customer demand, pub company owners *unInnspired* have de-listed Smiles Best because their wholesaler Carlsberg-Tetley Cardiff Depot have insufficient demand to stock it.

On my last visit the pump vacated by Smiles Best had John Smith's Cask on it. If you abhor this loss of a distinctive local ale then please join others in protesting to Stephany Boverter, Marketing Department, Innspired Pubs & Taverns, Wiltshire Drive, Trowbridge, Wilts BA14 OTT, or email on marketing@innspired.co.uk.

What's Brewing, CAMRA's national newspaper, recently reported that the new **Tickenham Farm Brewery** should have its first brews in the bars by Christmas. This has been delayed about a month or so, but keep an eye out at the **Old Barn, Wraxall** and at Bath Ales pubs for something new.

For Christmas the Old Barn had an Old Barn Landlord's (Lady's) Choice, brewed by an associated brewery. It was a tasty bitter, ABV 4.5%, at £1.85 per pint and although it was not brewed at the new Tickenham Farm Brewery it was similar to their planned Old Farmer Durston.

Other ales available at the Old Barn over Christmas included Bass, Bath Ales Gem and Barnstormer, and Moles Bitter.

Pints West and CAMRA leaflets are now available in Nailsea area from the Blue Flame, Courtyard Wine Bar, Mizzymeade Social Club, Moorend Spout, Old Barn, Ring of Bells, and the Star at Tickenham.

Laurie Gibney



Is this a wind-up ?

Seen in "Opening Times", newsletter of Stockport and South Manchester CAMRA...

"Hogshead Revolution."

It looks like the end of the road for the Hogshead chain as multi-beer freehouse style operations. Owners Laurel Pub Co. have unveiled their new look for the chain which is to be rolled out across the chain's entire 111 outlets in the next year. The pubs are to be renamed Hog's Heads and the old Hogshead barrel will be disappearing from pub frontages to be replaced by Harry Hog, "a figure which symbolises the new emphasis on personality-led service". This will be supplied by "Hoggers", front of bar staff on duty from 9 p.m. Thursday, Friday and Saturday offering table service and who will earn commission by selling "shooters and platters". The Hoggers will also be encouraged to interact with "guests" (that's

customers) by, for example, playing table football and connect four.

Other design changes include the introduction of more sofas and chairs plus "additional vertical drinking stations". Walls will become a "backdrop for the offer" – photographs will feature "fun or stupid images such as clowns" to reinforce the feel-good atmosphere. Plasma screens will show videos selected by a focus group composed of target audience members. Harry the Hog, shown moonwalking and flipping, will be projected from the front of the pub. "He provides a bit of personality and provides us with a language," says Karen Forrester, the architect of the new look pubs. "You couldn't make it up."

With thanks to John Clark, Opening Times editor.

Record sales for Abbey Ales

ABBEY ALES BREWERY, based in Camden Row in Bath, has reported record sales having enjoyed its best Christmas trading since starting up in 1997.

Managing director, Alan Morgan said, "Along with many other small brewers, and indeed some larger retailers, we had a very quiet November but at Christmas we could not have sold another drop. After completing our orders, we barely had a pint left in the brewery!"

Twelfth Night, the Christmas offering from Abbey Ales, was a beer brewed to 5% abv and stronger and darker than the brewery's golden, hoppy Bellringer, their one year-round brew.

"We try to do a selection of occasional ales throughout the year and Twelfth Night, a classic winter warmer, is one of the most popular we brew," said Alan.

Internet shoppers have also contributed towards the company's growing success. Alan claimed that sales of their Bellringer in a take-home box doubled over Christmas, in

part due to the brewery's newly redesigned website at www.abbeyales.co.uk.

"Our beer in a box has always proved popular with drinkers in Bath and Bristol, not just at Christmas but throughout the year, however selling it from our website nationally has really increased our sales."

Alan went on to say, "These excellent figures have put us back on target for the year and I am particularly pleased that this past year we sold more take-home boxes, and indeed Abbey Ales branded merchandise, not just to our local trade but also nationally via the redesigned website."

"Like many small brewers, Abbey Ales has seen the market place diminish, mainly to pub group acquisitions where landlords have lost their choice of guest beers, so the internet was one obvious route for the brewery to replace sales."

Sometime this year they hope to increase sales further by introducing Bellringer in a bottle to satisfy a constant request for the beer from the North American market. Something to look out for on the home front too I would say.

Ten reasons to try a glass of real cask ale

1. There are literally thousands of different flavours.
 2. It's made from fresh, natural ingredients.
 3. You can be sure of buying British.
 4. It's refreshing and cool (not warm!) on a hot summer's day.
 5. It goes well with food – try real cask ale instead of wine for a change.
 6. It's excellent value for money because unlike other drinks you're not having to pay for the brand's huge advertising costs.
 7. It's a rich source of vitamins and has genuine health benefits when drunk in moderation.
 8. Despite what you might hear, beer is not fattening when drunk in moderation.
 9. By buying locally brewed beer, you are supporting local jobs and the local economy.
- And most importantly...
10. It tastes great!

SP

Star Inn, Bath advert

Abbey Ales Bellringer advert

Burton Ale – the K.O. Punch?

LONGER-TERM readers may remember that Pints West expressed concern for the future of the former Champion Beer Of Britain, Ind Coope Burton Ale, when Punch Taverns bought the former Allied pub estate several years ago.

We printed these concerns and wrote to Punch at that time. We were assured that Punch wished to provide the products that its regular customers wanted and would seek to retain Burton Ale in its range.

Until recently all seemed relatively well, with most of the former Allied pubs still selling the beer. However, at least three of the pubs have recently withdrawn Burton Ale. I have spoken to two of the landlords involved – those of the Railway Tavern at Fishponds and the Highwayman at Kingswood.

The Railway Tavern has its work cut out, being located only 50 yards from the Wetherspoon (Van Dyke) superpub with its enormous price advantage over normal pubs – created by JDW's great buying power. It has therefore had to partially re-invent itself as "RTs" with neon lighting, loudish music and big TV screens. Despite this, the landlord had retained his ability to sell three real ales in great condition – Burton, Bass

and Tetley's. Quite why Punch think selling Bass at around 50p per pint more than the Van Dyke is a good idea is totally beyond me though!

We were therefore disappointed to hear on a recent visit that Burton was being taken off and not replaced due to "unacceptable wastage levels" on orders of Punch. It was the landlord's personal favourite and he too was disappointed. We always made a point of calling into this pub as well as the Van Dyke, purely to enjoy the Burton. Sadly we now feel far less inclined to do so – with the best will in the world Tetley's (an uninspiring beer even in top condition) or overpriced Bass just do not seem worth the effort. A range of Burton and Tetley's might have stood more chance – assuming Bass drinkers might switch to the Burton rather than go next door. On the whole though we could understand the landlord's predicament and attach no blame to him.

Never mind we thought – there's still the Highwayman. Not so – we called in mid December and asked for Burton, only to be told, "it's gone for good – it didn't sell."

We were aghast at this as the previous long-standing landlord (who left last year) always boasted that he "sold four or five

pints of Burton for one of the other beers". The pub seemed as busy as ever, so why such a change? Perhaps it has to do with the fact that Tetley's has been heavily reduced to £1.40 per pint and promoted strongly (also in the Railway), whilst Burton was around £2.05 per pint. The result is a range of Bass and Tetley's (sound familiar?). This pub also has a nearby Wetherspoon – the Colliers in Kingswood High Street, with a far greater range (including massively cheaper Bass) and much lower prices. We used to walk the extra half-mile to enjoy the Burton, but will not be bothering again.

Am I alone in suspecting that this whole situation has been engineered by Punch's accountants to justify dropping Burton Ale, and that Tetley's will soon revert to normal pricing? It surely can be no coincidence that all three pubs experience a sudden drop in demand for the same product.

As far as I know the only regular outlet in Bristol now for this great beer is the Ratepayers Arms at Filton Recreation Centre – which thankfully has no connection to Punch Taverns. I suggest you try it whilst you still can. If anyone knows of other outlets, please contact us as I am sure we'll give them a mention in the next issue.

Vince Murray

Survey shows strong consumer support for licensing hours reform

RESULTS of a major survey, of public views on pub opening hours shows that the majority of adults in England and Wales support the Government's plans to reform outdated liquor licensing laws by introducing more flexible opening hours for pubs.

The survey, commissioned by CAMRA and conducted in December 2002, shows that 75 per cent of adults believe a pub should be able to open when the publican pleases, providing the local community is protected from excessive noise and nuisance. 60 per cent of adults believe there would be less disorder in town centres if pub closing times varied, and 67 per cent think adults should be treated as adults and should have the opportunity to drink in pubs at any time they choose.

Mike Benner, Head of Campaigns and Communications at CAMRA said, "We carried out this survey to get a true picture of public opinion on Government plans to reform licensing law in light of the concern expressed in many parts of the media about possible increases in disorder and problem drinking if pubs are allowed to open longer hours. It's clear that the majority of adults do

not have these concerns and are supportive of reform."

The results also reveal that people aged over 45 are generally more in favour of longer pub opening hours than those aged between 16 and 24.

Mike Benner said, "The results show that the majority of adults support longer hours, but it's interesting that older people are more supportive than younger adults. I think this indicates that, while many older people currently feel alienated from town centres late at night, they believe reform will help reduce binge drinking and disorder and make late night pub-going a reality for all age groups. At present older people don't have as many options which meet their needs as so many pubs target younger drinkers."

Men are generally more in favour of longer pub opening hours than women, with 89 per cent of men thinking a pub should be able to open when the landlord pleases, as long as the community is protected from excessive noise or nuisance, and 63 per cent of women agreeing.

Mike Benner said, "It's clear that

women are less in favour of longer opening hours than men. I think this may be because women use pubs less than men at the moment, but this is changing fast.

"I think people are starting to take on board the likely outcome that reduced binge drinking due to phased closing times in town centres will benefit everyone through a more relaxed approach to enjoying alcohol.

"It's important that people who have concerns about the impact of longer hours on local communities are aware that the Government's plans will give residents, as well as the police, the right to object to longer opening hours for pubs where it will have a detrimental effect on the lives of people who live close by. It's quite likely that most pubs will simply open for an extra hour or two at weekends. Some larger town centre pubs and bars may open throughout the night, but it is very likely that they'll close at different times thereby reducing disorder and stresses on public services."

Research by the Publican Newspaper showed that only one per cent of licensees would wish to open 24 hours – most just want an extra hour at weekends.

News from Bath Ales

CONGRATULATIONS from Bristol CAMRA to Bath Ales' Director, Richard Dempster who was runner-up in the Evening Post and Jury's Business Person of the Year awards.

The winners were chosen from the twelve local business people who had previously won the Business Person of the Month award. He was presented with the award at a Gala evening on 16 October 2002.

The brewery had another record-breaking Christmas and New Year holiday. They have now taken on a third brewer and were working around the clock six days a week during November and December, to try and meet demand for their beers, both from pubs and from the public as they had record sales of both boxes and the convenient micro casks.

Everyone seemed to want to get hold of some of the brewery's award winning rum porter, Festivity. This resulted in it becoming difficult to find. However, if you didn't manage to try some there is no need to worry, as production will continue for a couple more months. You will also see Bath Ales represented at the CAMRA Bristol Beer Festival at the Council House at the

end of February.

Not surprisingly the Bath Ales pubs have experienced their best ever sales over the holiday period. Paul and Dee at the Wellington Hotel, Gloucester Road, Horfield generously hosted the branch's excellent Christmas social. They have been selling well over 200 gallons of Gem a week as well as large amounts of SPA, Barnstormer, Festivity and guest beers. The residents of Hotwells are happy to welcome popular landlord Cyril back to the Merchants Arms and are once again facing the challenge of his fiendish Thursday night quizzes.

The historic Palace Hotel in Old Market – known to generations of Bristolians as the 'Gin Palace' – has been taken on by real ale enthusiast Rab from the CAMRA Good Beer Guide listed Bridge Inn. The Palace really deserves the overused description 'unique'. It's very difficult to describe all its unusual features, which include a steeply sloping bar floor and extravagant 'barley sugar' columns. It's worth a visit just to experience the architecture. But there is of course the added bonus of a range of real ales including Gem and Barnstormer.

Bath Ales directors are always keen to spread the real ale message. The brewery

has recently sponsored beer to allow students to experience the real thing at the University of the West of England Freshers' Fair, and they have also hosted beer-tasting sessions for Bristol wine merchants.

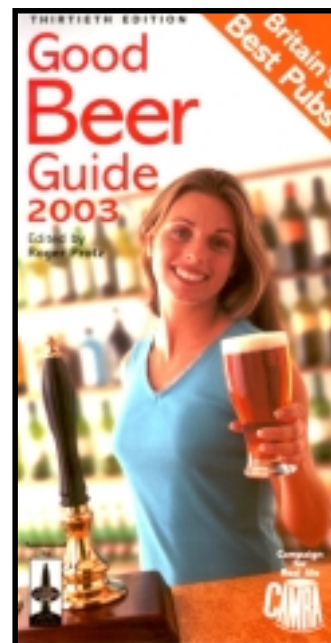
Tours of the brewery, located at Webbs Heath between Bath and Bristol, are available most weekdays and can be booked by contacting Alison at the brewery (0117 952 7580).

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

Bath Ales brewery and pubs advert

The Good Beer Guide 2003



The Good Beer Guide offers:

○The best pubs in England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland, the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man that serve cask-conditioned real ale in tip-top condition.

○Full details of beer, food, entertainment, family facilities, history and architecture for the pub entries.

○The unique Breweries section that lists all the breweries – micro, regional and national – that produce cask beer, with tasting notes compiled by CAMRA-trained tasting teams. There's also information about beers suitable for vegetarians and vegans, as well as the growing number of organic beers. The Guide lists new breweries, closed breweries, mergers and takeovers, and keeps track of the new, powerful pub groups.

Plus:

○Terry Jones of Monty Python on why CAMRA and the Good Beer Guide play a vital role in Britain today.

○Internationally-acclaimed beer expert Michael Jackson on how craft brewers in Britain and the United States have brought flavour and character back to beer.

○Award-winning writer Jeff Evans on the campaign to save our country pubs.

And much more...

○CAMRA's listing of pubs of special importance that must be saved for the nation.

○The top prize-winning beers of the year.

○Beer festivals to visit throughout the country.

The Good Beer Guide is available from all good book shops, or you can order direct from CAMRA on 01727 867201 or check the web page at www.camra.org.uk.

It is priced at £12.99, or just £9 for CAMRA members.

Prize crossword - win stuff !

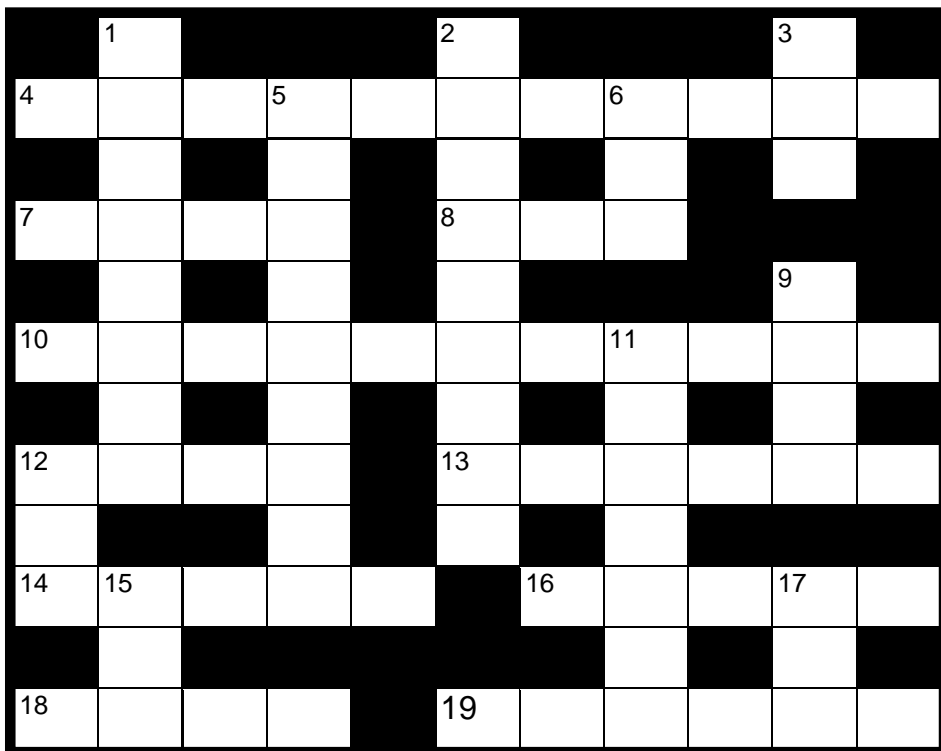
by Phil Brooks

Across

4. Brewery in Stokesley, North Yorkshire or the man that discovered Australia. (7,4)
 7. See 19.
 8. A building with a bar and one or more public rooms licensed for the sale and consumption of alcoholic drinks. (3)
 10. From Kington in Herefordshire, this brewery produces Brewhouse Bitter at 3.8% ABV and Early Riser at 4% ABV. (4,7)
 12. First beer, brewed to 4.3% ABV, from Fyfe brewery of Kirkcaldy. (4)
 13. Name the pale tawny beer with a dry hoppy finish brewed to 3.8% ABV by Arundel brewery of West Sussex. (6)
 14. Bath-based brewery that brews the amber/gold Bellringer at 4.2% ABV. (5)
 16. What is the 3.8% golden brown ale with a dry bitter finish brewed by Orkney brewery? (5)
 18. From Exmoor brewery of Wiveliscombe, this pale brown beer weighs in at 5.2% ABV. (4)
 19,7. Based in the Hebrides, this brewery makes the golden/amber Young Pretender at 4% ABV and the tawny/reddish Red Cuillin at 4.2% ABV. (4,2,4)

Down

1. What is the 6% ABV beer brewed by Sarah Hughes brewery of Sedgley? (4,4)
 2. Nickname of the pub on the junction of West Street and Old Market Street in Bristol that now sells beers from Bath Ales. (3,6)
 3. Affectionate name for Brand Oak Bitter brewed by Wickwar to 4% ABV. (3)
 5. Good Beer Guide listed pub in Seymour Road, Bishopston. (3,6)
 6. Brewed to 4.2% ABV, what is the multi-flavoured beer from Chalk Hill brewery of Norwich? (1,1,1)
 9. See 12D.
 11. A festivity when much drinking takes place. (7)



12,9. What is the full-bodied 4.7% ABV beer from Inveralmond brewery of Perth, Scotland? It is also the Gaelic title for the Stone of Destiny. (3,4)

15. From Banks & Taylor of Shefford, this old Winter seasonal weighs in at a mighty 7% ABV. (3)

17. What sort of warrior do Pitfield brewery of London brew to 4.5% ABV. (3)

Send your solution to the editor (address on back page) by 1st April 2003. The first correct entry drawn at random after that date wins a copy of the new edition

of the Good Beer Guide to Belgium & Holland by Tim Webb, and a cuddly CAMRA teddy!

Last issue's answers:

Across: 1 Abbot. 6 Ale. 8 Lucifer. 9 Stud. 10 CHB. 13 Den. 14 Iceberg. 18 Swindon. 19 Sun. 20 Lamplighters. 21 Blue Flame. Down: 2 Battersea. 3 Old. 4 TU. 5 Ric. 6 Arc. 7 ESB. 11 Windmill. 12 Keynsham. 15 Easter. 16 Genesis. 17 Tipple. The winner was **Stephen Wharton** of Hayes, Middlesex who received an 18-pint box of Smiles Best.

RCH advert

Dorothy Inn, Weymouth advert

Introducing two new breweries – Hobden's and Glastonbury

Craft breweries tend to pop up in all sorts of unlikely places, but I don't think we've ever visited one before in a pig-ery!

This is where we found Chas Hobden, of **Hobden's** brewery, which is on a farm near Longbridge Deverill, in Wiltshire.

We were given the warmest of welcomes for this *al fresco* brewery visit, as the brewing kit is squeezed into several small rooms and all the barrels are outside.

"Anything with a tap in it you've got to drink before you go," we were told by our host.

Although Hobden's is a relatively new brewery, Chas, like many small brewers, has a fine pedigree, having been in the brewing industry for many years, and these days he does consulting work for others as well as brewing a wonderful range of beers.

We were able to taste a delicious 4.5% mild, bitters of varying strengths and flavours, and then when the weather deteriorated we escaped from the rain into a

small room adjacent to the brewery, which was found to contain a barrel of 6% beer!

By way of a contrast is **Glastonbury** brewery, another new enterprise that is located on an industrial estate at Somerton in Somerset.

Brewer Gregg Nicholls produces very interesting beers; on our visit we sampled Hedgemonkey, a 4.2% brew packed with flavour.

As always we were left to ponder why it is that craft brewers can consistently produce wonderfully different and flavoursome beers, when many well-known national beers are by contrast so dull and insipid (but by no means all it should be noted!).

As yet, outlets for Glastonbury and Hobden's beers are limited, but they can occasionally be found in Bristol at the Bag O'Nails in St. Georges Road, and the Cornubia in Temple Street, and both breweries will be well represented at the forthcoming Bristol Beer Festival.

Phil Cummings

Wet elbows

IN the last few years there has been a trend away from supplying beer mats in pubs. These little mats used to sit there on the table happily soaking up the drips and spills, and gently advertising their brewery's local beers.

I don't know where beer mats started, but they do seem to be fairly unique to the UK and Ireland. In Belgium and France, and in the US, you get these little 'doilies' made of tissue paper instead. But here in the UK we have had proper beer mats for decades, made of that specially absorbent type of cardboard. They proclaim the delights of the brewery or beer, or occasionally the latest special offer, or sometimes the ingenious mats combine together like large jigsaw pieces. Cheap advertising, you may think, right under the noses (literally) of your target audience, combining with the usefulness of keeping the spills off your elbows and off the floor. Even an accountant can't fault that. Can they?

But as I said, in recent years, beer mats largely seem to be disappearing. Beer mat flipping competitions are now a diminishing memory. Those beer mat collections of your student days are becoming a thing of the past. Does anyone actually know why?

All is not lost, however. A few breweries, notably normally the smaller ones, still

happily supply beer mats for their pubs. For those that don't, CAMRA produces beer mats as part of its "Ask if it's Cask" and "National Pubs Week" campaigns, and can provide a supply of these to any interested pubs.

Bar towels have also largely disappeared. Again, this is a fairly recent phenomenon. This has a similar effect on your elbows when standing at the bar. In this case, however, I believe that I have some idea as to why they are so infrequent. They are being replaced by those plastic bar-top drip trays. I believe that a few years ago, some less scrupulous sellers of these drip trays were spreading rumours and misinformation that the 'old-fashioned' cloth bar towels would soon be outlawed by a new EU regulation, supposedly on hygiene grounds. It would therefore be appropriate for the bar manager to replace them with the new useless plastic thingies instead. It turns out that the rumours were false, and yet the salesmen seem to have succeeded in their sales pitches. Perhaps this same rumour is what has threatened the beer mats.

So again, the loss of bar towels is also a sad loss for our elbows on wet bars, even if we are less sad to see the demise of those football-supporter's shorts made from bar towels.

Conor O'Neill

Champion winter beers

OLD GROWLER from Nethergate Brewery in Suffolk has been named as the Supreme National Champion Winter Beer of Britain 2003 by a panel of judges at CAMRA's national winter celebration of beer. The beer also won in 1997.

The 5% ABV porter is described in the 2003 edition of the Good Beer Guide as a "complex and satisfying porter, smooth and distinctive. Sweetness, roast malt and fruit feature in the palate, with bitter chocolate lingering. The finish is powerfully hoppy."

The silver prize went to Horndean-based Gales with their superb Festival, and the Bronze award went to Wentworth brewery from Rotherham for their Oat Meal Stout.

Locally, the RCH Brewery based in West Huish near Weston-super-Mare, gained Bronze in the Stouts & Porters category for their beautiful, in nature if not name, Old Slug Porter – yet another in a long string of deserved awards for their beers over the years.

A panel of CAMRA experts and beer writers at the National Winter Ales Festival, which was held in Burton, Staffordshire in January, judged the competition. At the announcement of the winners, Mike Benner, Head of CAMRA's Campaigns and Communications said, "This year's awards have proved yet again that Britain's small brewers are leading the way in producing tasty and distinctive beers which stand out from the crowd."

The winners in full were:

Overall winners

Supreme Champion – Nethergate Old Growler

Silver – Gale's Festival Mild

Bronze – Wentworth Oatmeal Stout

Old Ales & Strong Milds category

Gold – Gale's Festival Mild

Silver – Sarah Hughes Dark Ruby Mild

Bronze – Woodforde's Norfolk Nog

Stouts & Porters category

Gold – Nethergate Old Growler

Silver – Wentworth Oatmeal Stout

Bronze – RCH Old Slug Porter

Barley Wines category

Gold – Woodforde's Headcracker

Silver – Harvey's Christmas Ale

Bronze – Robinson's Old Tom

Belgium - it's just not very British!

ON yet another highly enjoyable jaunt to Belgium (see previous articles) last November, my wife and I spent a very pleasant weekend in the medieval city of Ghent.

I have previously gone into some detail about both Ghent and Belgium in general, so won't risk boring you with repetition. We did however have three experiences that struck us as being highly unlikely to occur back in Britain.

The first surprise came when we saw just how integrated public transport can possibly be. I would never claim that Ghent's bus and tram network is easy to understand, but the extra effort it took was well rewarded. We purchased a "ten travel ticket" for 7.5 euros (about a fiver), which we thought just gave us ten single tram journeys. However when we put the ticket in the franking machine on board the second tram no money was deducted. This happened repeatedly until we realised that each use of the ticket gave unlimited travel for one hour – not bad for 50p!

Later on the first night we found ourselves in an area without tramlines. We worked out a bus route back to our hotel and were pleasantly surprised to find that our passes worked in the machines on the bus too.

However this was well and truly beaten by our amazement the following day when we boarded a bus in Bruges, about 40 miles away, and optimistically put the passes into the machine. You guessed it – it worked there too!

I dare say it would have worked anywhere in Belgium. So for our mere fiver we had unrestricted access to buses and trams in both cities for ten hours actual travelling – my idea of a bargain and a sensible transport system designed to attract more people out of their cars. Any chance it might catch on here?

On the Saturday evening we made the excellent *Trappistenhuis* in Brabantdam our final point of call after a good pub crawl (via tram and bus of course). I had been there twice before and met the owners, Johann and Sophia, on one occasion.

We reintroduced ourselves and Johann spent over an hour chatting to us and recommending some of his favourite beers. He was just completing his sixth consecutive 14-hour shift (it was about 1:30 a.m.) and looked absolutely dog tired. I explained that although our hotel was only about half a mile away, my wife suffers from a condition that makes walking very painful at times. I asked if he could call us a taxi in 20 minutes, after one final drink. This he did, only for it to turn up about two minutes later, just as he poured our drinks! He sent the driver away saying to come back at the booked time, but after 40 minutes he had not returned.

We resolved to walk home, but were amazed when Johann suddenly appeared in his coat and absolutely insisted on driving us back to our hotel personally. He seemed genuinely embarrassed by the taxi driver's behaviour and determined to right the situation. This was surely way above and beyond the call of duty and customer service of a kind that I have never experienced before – can you imagine a British landlord doing that after a 14-hour shift – and for two virtual strangers from another country?

If you find yourselves in Ghent you should not leave without paying this bar a visit (closed Sundays) – walking away from the centre it is at the very end of Brabantdam – about a five-minute walk.

Our third experience ranks as one of the most bizarre of our lives. We had heard about a bit of an odd bar, with bicycles hanging from the ceiling, in Ghent. A quick glance at the newly published new edition of Tim Webb's "Beer Guide to Belgium & Holland" confirmed the whereabouts of the *Velootje* to be 2 Kalversteeg, not far from the castle.

Tim himself was unable to find words describe this "bar". It is down an alley and shows no real outward sign of being a bar at all – indeed I went there alone at first and bottled out at the last minute, convinced I was entering a private residence of some sort.

The main doors are blocked off with old bicycles and assorted junk, leaving just a small side door. This leads into an old cloth curtain hanging loosely over the entrance (the point that my bottle failed).

Undeterred I went back with my wife the next night. This time the curtain was pulled back and some of the strangest music I've ever heard was playing inside – best described as medieval with German vocals I think. Thinking, "it's now or never" – in we plunged.

Inside the scene defies adequate description – small, dark and extremely cluttered to start with. A man who looked half Max Wall and half Baldrick appeared from the shadows and said, "Welcome – you have found my strange pub"

– our Englishness must have been obvious! Looking around all we could see was junk, including literally hundreds of old bicycle frames, mostly hanging from above. Ornaments, pictures and candelabras were scattered everywhere and candles were the only source of light. The place was not exactly clean and not for the faint-hearted in any way.

The owner was very friendly and helped us locate the end of a bench under all the clutter. He then produced a reasonable beer list from which we chose a *Frambozen* and the rarely seen *Zatte Bie*. There were about ten other people dotted around the various dark corners of the bar – and most seemed to be British! We just sipped our beer and looked around in amazement at our surroundings – seeing something different and more odd with each look. The spectacularly awful music just added to the fun. My beer was warm – a real no-no in Belgium – but it didn't seem to matter at all.

There cannot be another bar like it anywhere in the world, certainly not in Britain where the environmental health people would shut it on sight.

No visitor to Ghent should depart without seeing this place once (I think it opens most nights from 8:30 onwards) if just to dispel the old rubbish about Belgians being "boring" once and for all.

Vince Murray

Cornubia advert

Eighteen years and still crawling strong

THE first week of December is special for a group of cask ale devotees and their friends who first met as regulars at the **Old Castle Green** in Gloucester Lane, Old Market during the eighties.

In 1985 these regulars decided to pledge one evening in the run up to Christmas to a crawl. The mission statement was simple. Good quality real ale was essential to a route of ten or a dozen pubs that could be visited during a four-hour period ending back in our local.

The original years enjoyed routes along the Stapleton Road where good beer, although dominated by Bass, was plentiful. But gradually things changed including our local. We are now based at the Cornubia in Temple Street.

By the time the 2002 crawl reached the planning stage a level of sophistication had been reached through nearly two decades of lessons learned that the route planner was expected to build into the agenda. The original mission statement remained plus a degree of precision timing had been added so anyone who wanted to join us could rely on us being where we said we would be.

So here is the story of the 18th consecutive **Old Castle Green Christmas Pub Crawl** that took place on Monday 2nd December 2002.

Start point was the **Bunch of Grapes** in Denmark Street at 7.07. Landlord Colin provided his usual excellent beer range. Bath Ales SPA proved a popular choice but Butts Barbus Barbus led some astray onto a stronger brew. At 7.34 it was time to stroll across the City Centre to the **White Lion**. As we passed the bronze statue of Edmund Burke I am sure he tried to pull his feet off his plinth to join us but remembered his civic duty and eased back into place.

Entering the Lion just ahead of our 7.39 schedule we were overjoyed to see Cotswold Way on special offer at £1.20 a pint so the other Wickwar offerings were ignored as the special deal was unanimously taken. 7.57 soon arrived and we bid farewell and slipped into the side entrance of the **Commercial Rooms**. The twelve Ales of Christmas festival was in progress with Burton Bridge Santifreeze and Cotleigh Red Nose Reinbeer on offer on top of the usual Monday Club selection including Weston's for Steve our cider drinker. My pint of Santifreeze was excellent but at 8.18 it was time to move on.

New landlord Jason has improved **Horts** since taking over a couple of months before and I was keen to demonstrate the beer quality to my fellow crawlers. Youngs Bitter, Special, Triple A and Winter Warmer competed with Bass, Smiles Best and Heritage and our guest cider drinker Steve was happy with draught Thatchers. We also learned that in the New Year a promotion would reduce the price of Youngs Bitters for an hour after the tolling of a bell.

My heart was in my mouth over the next phase of the route which relied on the 8.47 departure of the 545 bus from St Mary's on the Quay to get us to the **Swan With Two Necks** at 8.57. Geoff from the Bag O'Nails had to rush back to retrieve his tobacco tin so we all planned to pay with ten-pound notes to delay the bus if necessary. We were not let down by Geoff's fleet of foot nor the bus nor by Val and Leroy at the Swan. The refurbished reopening of this one room bar in Little Ann Street has been one of the highlights of 2002. We were welcomed with Tring Jack O'Legs, Bass and Thatchers on gravity with Butcombe and Bath Ales Festivity from the pumps. I had to drag the crawlers away at 9.16 to the **Old Castle Green**.

When the route was planned Trevor had recently opened with Stonehenge Benchmark and Pigswill but on the day of our crawl no real ale was available. It was our *raison d'être* and so we could not pass by. There is every intention to get the Castle back on the real ale trail if demand can be generated. Real ales will be introduced so watch out, or better still, call in to sample what is on offer.

The **Swan** on Midland Road guarantees a warm welcome and this was no exception at 9.39 as the group selected from Butcombe and Bass. Our 17-minute stay coincided with James Beattie netting a last minute winner at Upton Park ensuring the Southampton fan amongst us sported a wide grin for the rest of the night.

For the first time in the 18-year history of the crawl a change from the published schedule was agreed on the hoof. Just the previous day the **Gin Palace**, a.k.a. the

Palace Hotel, at the top of Old Market Street had reopened and everyone wanted to check it out, especially Dave and Alison who are due to emigrate to Crete in February. Bath SPA and Gem, plus Crouch Vale High Tide, were on tap and of the quality we take for granted from Bath Ales. Steve enjoyed Luscombe Organic Devon Cider.

The extra stop was to be offset by the option to miss out the Kings Head on Victoria Street. But Sean and Bob, noting the generous eight minutes' walking time allowed for the leg from Old Market to Temple would not be beaten and rushed on along New Kingsley Street over the new footbridge to the **Knights Templar**. There was plenty of choice. Bass, Theakston Best, Abbot Ale, Spitfire, Directors and the festival beers were passed in favour of Hopback Summer Lightning and on we went across Temple Way to the **Kings Head**. Smiles Original was chosen rather than Courage Best or Bass and were able to sup up in time to meet the others at the **Cornubia** at the appointed hour of 10.46 where Timothy Taylor Landlord took pride of place ahead of RCH Hewish IPA of the four ales available from the constantly changing menu.

Landlord Mike returned from the Levellers gig at the Academy to share the final minutes and hear the tales of mutiny in Old Market.

This crawl has always offered an open invitation to newcomers. Chris, Kevin, Simon and Maggie appeared for the first time to vouch for good quality beer throughout. The 19th event will take place on Monday 1st December 2003. The route will be available from early November.

Bob Ford

Wickwar's White Lion
and Princess of Wales advert

Diary



Diary of the Bristol & District branch of CAMRA.

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

Wednesday, 5th February: Trip to Chipping Sodbury and districts. Leave from Cornubia, Temple Street, Bristol, 6:45pm.

Saturday 8th March: Regional meeting at the Great Western, Swindon, opposite the railway station, from 12:30pm.

Wednesday, 12th February: Committee meeting, Cornubia, Bristol, 8pm.

Wednesday, 19th February: Trip to Nailsea and North Somerset. Leave from Cornubia, Bristol, 6:45pm.

Wednesday, 26th February: Branch meeting, 8pm. Venue to be confirmed – possibly the Ropewalk, Bedminster.

Thursday 27th February to Saturday 1st March: Bristol Beer Festival. See inside for details.

Tuesday 5th March: Next Pints West planning meeting and social drink – Horts, Broad Street, Bristol city centre, 8pm.

Sunday 9th March: GBG selection meeting, Horts, 12 noon.

Wednesday 16th April: Joint social at Congresbury with Weston-super-Mare sub-branch.

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

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Watch the Web


Bristol and District CAMRA would like to remind readers that we have a web site at

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. **Past editions of Pints West can be viewed there!**

Check out also the independent pub web site **www.britishpubguide.com** which is now up and running. Over 400 pubs in the City and County of Bristol are featured, plus many in North Somerset and South Gloucestershire, with pictures of virtually 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.

PINTS WEST

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- ☐ **LETTERS** can be sent to:  **Pints West Editor, Steve Plumridge, Garden Flat, 6 Royal York Villas, Clifton, Bristol BS8 4JR** (Email: steve.plumridge@bristol.ac.uk)
- ☐ **Suggestions for future entries for the CAMRA GOOD BEER GUIDE**, and any comments on existing entries, can be made to our GBG Coordinator, Richard Walters, care of the editor (above).
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Pints West 57

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