



AWARD-WINNING



No. 61
Spring
2004

www.camrabristol.org.uk

PINTS WEST

Award-winning newsletter of the Bristol & District Branch of CAMRA, the Campaign for Real Ale

Meet Tom Newman



the new man in brewing

This is Tom Newman, founder of Newman's Brewery, the newly formed brewery based in a garage in Banwell, and producer of the instantly popular "Wolvers Ale" — humble beginnings maybe, but surely destined to go far. Find out more in Pints Weston inside.

Celebrate your local pub!

WHEN do you go to the pub? Christmas, on special occasions or more regularly? With around 20 pubs closing across Britain every month, you might find that the place you enjoy for good company and good beer (and maybe good food, games and other attractions) has an uncertain future.

National Pubs Week 2004 takes place between the 21st and 28th February and is designed to encourage more people to visit the pub at a quiet time of the year for the pub industry. But pubs aren't just for national pubs week, they're for life! You might be reading this at the Bristol Beer Festival, a showcase of over 100 real ales that should be more than enough to persuade you to try some of them again in a local pub. Or maybe you're sitting at home with a bottle of beer from the increasing range offered by supermarkets. It's fairly likely that you're reading Pints West in a pub, as we deliver to a large number in Bristol and surrounding areas. But wherever you're

reading it, why not revisit a pub you know and love again soon, or venture to a new one, to help celebrate National Pubs Week all year round!

National Pubs Week was originally launched in February 2003 by the Campaign for Real Ale (CAMRA): a staggering 15,000 pubs came on board for the first campaign, organising events and displaying promotional material across Britain. Due to this success CAMRA have now made National Pubs Week a calendar event.

In 2004, National Pubs Week also sees the release of new research findings on pub habits and the launch of a new CAMRA guide to help consumers save their local pub should they need to. But one of the best ways of ensuring our pubs remain viable and thriving, welcoming places to go, is to give them our custom (so off you go!).

Lesly Huxley

The **BELL**

Alfred Place, Kingsdown, Bristol

A Genuine Freehouse

offering

Excellent Local Real Ales

Good Wines, Interesting Lagers

Open evenings Monday to Friday
Closed weekday lunchtimes except Wednesday
12.00 - 3.30 & 7.00 - 11.00 Saturday
12.00 - 3.30 & 7.00 - 10.30 Sunday
Open all day Saturday during the winter

Bristol Beer Festival 2004



This year's Bristol Beer Festival will be / is / was a fantastic event (delete as appropriate depending on when you're reading this).

This is the seventh annual festival, organised by the Bristol & District branch of CAMRA, and is taking place at the Brunel Passenger Shed, Temple Meads on Friday 5th and Saturday 6th March.

Despite the change of venue (the usual Council House not being available due to refurbishment), with the capacity to hold twice the number of punters, advance tickets for all sessions have sold out already. Anyone turning up on the door without a ticket on the off chance of getting in will be sorely disappointed.

To cater for all these extra thirsts, the beer order has been increased to a fantastic range of **120 real ales** plus a great selection of real cider and perry.

The new venue also allows for much greater seating than at previous festivals, something our visitors have always asked for.

Cheers and wassail!



available at all Wadworth pubs and selected free houses

A moving story from Bath Ales

ONLY four years have passed since Bath Ales moved their brewing operation from their original site in Henstridge to larger if still quaintly rural premises at Webbs Heath.

In this time they have increased the number of pubs to six and have seen an incredible growth demand for their top quality real ales.

Now they have outgrown the Webbs Heath site with its 15-barrel capacity and are in the process of relocating to much larger premises in Tower Road North, Warmley, with an initial doubling of production and ample room for future expansion. The new site is being professionally fitted out with brand new, state of the art, British built equipment, including three huge fermenting vessels.

Brewer Craig has had to perform miracles over the past year to find the time and space to produce brewing runs of the two seasonal beers, Festivity and Spa Extra whilst keeping up stocks of the three regulars, Spa, Gem and Barnstormer. As a result Rare Hare has unfortunately lived up to its name and become something of an endangered species over the past year. (However, Craig has managed to find us a kilderkin to put on at the Bristol Beer Festival in March.)

The relatively palatial facilities at the new site boasts previously unheard of luxuries such as a connection to the mains drainage and specialist 'beer proof' block flooring.



Brewer Craig with some of his shiny new toys

The increased production capacity means that Bath Ales will be able to join other local SIBA brewers in having some of their beer distributed by 'Unique', a local wholesaler of local beers. The aim is to be brewing on the new site by the end of March, and in the meantime production is continuing at the old site.

Other news from Bath Ales

There have been changes at the **Merchants Arms** in Hotwells where John Sprague is now in charge. Many of you will remember John from his time at the Coronation in Southville.

James is continuing to amply fill John Lansdale's large shoes at the **Hare On The Hill** in Kingsdown where some interesting (and delicious) guest beers are usually available. Unusual guest beers are also a feature at the **Wellington Hotel** in Horfield where Paul has recently featured beer from the Tring brewery. The Wellington continues to provide some of the best live blues-based music in Bristol; this is performed on Sunday evenings with no admission fee.

Over in Bath, the **Salamander** in John Street has joined the **Hop Pole** (opposite Victoria Park playground) in receiving rave reviews for both their food and beer. The Salamander was awarded the maximum five stars in a recent review in the Bristol Evening Post.

The brewery has responded to the incredible level of demand for their 5 litre (8.8 pint) micro-casks by ordering the containers directly from the manufacturer. This means that the casks are now beautifully regaled in Bath Ales' distinctive Hare logo printed directly onto the containers. They are an ideal way of having a manageable quantity of genuine cask-conditioned real ale at home and are available from the pubs or from the brewery. Further details can be found on their web site at www.bathales.com.

Steve O'Shea



bath ales

To enjoy the full range of bath ales beers at their best, pay a visit to one of our pubs

The Hop Pole
Upper Bristol Road, Bath (opposite Victoria Park playground)

The Hare on the Hill
Dove Street, Kingsdown, Bristol

The Merchants Arms
Merchants Road, Hotwells, Bristol

The Salamander
John Street, Bath

The Wellington
Gloucester Road, Horfield, Bristol
and at

The Bridge Inn
Passage Street, Bristol

Casks and beer boxes available for parties and functions
Contact bath ales on 0117 9527580 or email hare@bathales.co.uk
www.bathales.co.uk

The White Lion

“Bristol’s best little pub on the centre”

THE WHITE LION has been a familiar sight on Bristol City Centre for many years. Situated on Quay Head opposite the War Memorial, this is a former Courage pub, which has been acquired by Wickwar Brewery.

Approached over an area of broad pavement, it can be seen that the White Lion has had something of a make-over recently. The exterior is now very attractive and smart indeed, and seating is available under the cover of an awning.

On entering the pub you realise that the White Lion must be one of the smallest pubs in the Bristol area. It is a one bar pub with floorboards and wood panelling. Despite its small interior, it is a pub with many attributes and features.

One unusual feature of the Lion is the breadboards and cheese dishes that adorn the pub. The pub was once renowned as “The Cheese Pub”. Of more historic interest, the back wall of the pub is part of the old city wall. Part of this can be viewed to the right of the bar. Another historic feature is the narrow, spiral, metal staircase to the gents WC that came from the old city gaol!

Since Wickwar acquired the pub, there have been several managers running the place. The current licensees, Les and

Carol Clayton, have been there for approximately one year. Les and Carol came to the Lion with a wealth of experience in the licensed trade. This has included the running of restaurants, several bars and pubs, nightclubs and even a student union bar at Liverpool Poly. Since their arrival, Les and Carol have developed the trade in all the right ways. They have created a friendly and intimate environment for their customers. Indeed, they have a total belief in the White Lion becoming “Bristol’s best little pub on the centre”.

Permanent features on the bar are Wickwar BOB and Cotswold Way. Other Wickwar beers that come from the brewery’s portfolio of twelve compliment these. Beers recently featured have been the powerful stout, Mr. Perrett’s, at 5.9 per cent ABV, Old Arnold (4.6 per cent), a ruby red ale, and Rite Flanker (4.3 per cent), an amber beer with a large malt taste and a big hoppy finish.

The full range of Wickwar beers usually feature at some time during the year and coming soon should be Premium Spring Ale (3.8 per cent) which is an amber coloured beer, bursting with flavour and very refreshing.

Bristol CAMRA has also just heard

that the brewery will be launching a new beer – IKB (Isambard Kingdom Brunel) at 4.5 per cent ABV – which is described as “strong in multi malt flavours, well balanced to produce rich flavours of cherry and plum” and will no doubt be gracing the bar in the near future.

It is commendable that Wickwar feature guest beers in this pub. This provides an extra dimension to consumer choice and recently featured beers have been from the Rebellion Brewery in Marlow. The Lion also sells Draught Bass in the “Bristol flat” style that appears to be unique to this part of the country. The Bass is dispensed through a mirror box, rather than a handpump, but rest assured that it is still real ale. No extraneous gas in the beer here! In fact, Les and Carol are so committed to real ale that one of the first things they did upon arrival was to kick out the nitro-keg bitter. Why sell that stuff when there are so many good cask ales on sale? No need to “Ask if it’s Cask” here!

To further demonstrate their commitment to real ale, the Lion had a mini beer festival at the end of February – “Bristol’s smallest beerfest”. This positive attitude to their beers and the pub has seen a significant increase in trade and in particular to the real ale sales.

Although not a cheese pub any more, a variety of dishes are available to satisfy most tastes. However, food does not dominate the bar and it is very much a real ale pub.

If you haven’t visited the White Lion recently, then why not drop in soon? I think you may be pleasantly surprised. It won’t cost you a fortune – you can enjoy the ‘beer of the week’ for just £1.50 and all the other beers are competitively priced. You can drink your ale whilst reading one of the free daily newspapers under the watchful eyes of the two white lions or, on one those warmer days, sit outside and see if the city centre development is ever going to finish! The pub is also handy for all city centre bus stops.

Just a word of warning to the chaps, those stairs to the WC can be pretty challenging after a few pints.

Pete Bridle

**DON'T FORGET TO INVITE 'BOB'
TO ALL YOUR PARTIES AND BARBECUES**



**Award Winning
Wickwar BOB**

THE BEER OF GLOUCESTERSHIRE

10 litres only £32

20 litres only £55

Delivered anywhere on the mainland UK



Call 01454 294168

or order online

www.wickwarbrewing.co.uk

GIVE THE BREWERY A CALL FOR COLLECTION PRICES

Shine on Long Ashton

As part of his research for the forthcoming **Bristol Pub Guide 2004**, Duncan Shine is visiting over 700 pubs and bars in the Bristol area. In his third report, he takes a light-hearted look at the real ale situation in Long Ashton.

Full details, opening times and photographs of all the pubs mentioned can be found on the www.britishpubguide.com web site.



Picture the scene. You've decided that, with the over-indulgences of Christmas behind you, and that lovely beach holiday booked for the summer, you really do need to get in shape. You want the sight of you in your swimwear to draw admiring glances from fellow sunbathers rather than visiting natural history film-makers. Full of good intention, you and your partner hop in the car (hopping expends more calories than just getting in) and drive off towards the David Lloyd Fitness Centre. As you head across the Cumberland Basin, you imagine rasping backhands, deftly played drop shots and hours happily spent in the 'cardio zone'. In fact, you are so engrossed in these images that you almost don't notice a shambling, slightly jaded looking figure wandering across the A370 in front of you.

Tires screech as you fight to keep control of your car, your life flashes before your very eyes (even that incident when you woke up wearing a nurse's uniform after a night of heavy drinking in the Sceptre Tavern), but somehow you bring the car to a halt. Your heart is pounding and, after that shock, you feel you need a drink. The shambling, slightly jaded looking figure approaches you, helps you disentangle yourself from your airbag, and clears his throat...

"We're not far from Long Ashton here," he says, "and there are five pubs there, so let me help you through them. Probably best if you let your partner drive".

Your partner is now editor-in-chief of *Soft Drinks West*. The previous incumbent published an article alleging that a soft drinks company had been involved in 'sexing up' the image of some of their products. Specifically, the article said that they had insisted on inserting a claim that a certain energy drink could help athletes go

for three-quarters of an hour longer, even though they 'probably knew' it was not true. This '45 minute' claim proved to be the old editor's undoing, as an inquiry proved that the brand, called "Whitewash", did in fact do everything it claimed. Not only that, but the inquiry also found that the publication was being jolly mean, and that heads had to roll...

You realise that after five paragraphs of this article, you still haven't actually found out anything about pubs yet, so you rush to the **Dovecote Inn**. The Dovecote Inn used to be the Smyth Arms, named after the family who owned the Ashton Court Estate. Nowadays, the Dovecote is run for Vintage Inns by David Willey. You are fascinated by the abundance of old photographs of the locality on the wall. There are two cask ales on offer, Bass and Tetley Bitter. You plump for the Bass, which is in good nick when you visit, while your partner casts a critical eye over a *Strawberry-flavoured Vodka-jelly Virgin*.

From the Dovecote you head towards Long Ashton *proper*, where the first pub you come across is the **Angel**. This lovely old inn, with its secluded courtyard (a haven for nesting swallows in the summer) is these days under the expert care of Siân Powell. There is a lovely 'local' atmosphere to this pub, and you notice plenty of people happily tucking into the excellent food that is on offer there. You decide to have a pint of Smiles Best Bitter, though Bass and Courage Best are also on offer. You wonder if you're the only one who thinks that Smiles Best is getting back to its best after some years when the quality wasn't always as consistent as it might be. You sup your pint in the 'smoke room', which acts as a kind of traditional snug, separate from the rest of the pub, but visible through internal glass windows. Your partner, struggling with a *Benylin Flavoured Iced Tea*, notes that the pub is open all day everyday, except for Winter's Saturdays.

Reluctantly, you leave this charming pub and head on to the **Bird In Hand**, with its picture of a Peregrine Falcon on the sign. Owned by Punch Taverns, the Bird In Hand has been run since the spring of 2003 by Russell and Karen Lee. It's a good old fashioned two-bar pub, with the dartboard and satellite telly in the public bar on your right, and a featured central fireplace in the lounge bar to your left. They have regular curry evenings, and quiz nights.

You decide to have something to eat here, and the food is very reasonably priced and absolutely delicious. To accompany it, your partner selects a *Ginseng & Tonic*,

while you have a choice between the resident ale, Bass, or a weekly changing guest, which at the time of your visit is Bombardier from the Wells brewery in Bedfordshire. Russell Lee has had a lot of work done to refurbish the cellar, and it appears to be paying off as both beers are in tip-top condition.

Your shambling guide suggests that, to make up for exercise you are not getting by avoiding the David Lloyd centre, you should walk up Providence Lane to the final two pubs. You observe that it's easy for him, what with being a fictional character and all, but that no *real* person in their right mind would walk up there when they had a perfectly good car to use instead. He points out that this whole pub crawl is a work of fiction, so you all jog up the hill without breaking sweat.

You don't stop at the **Retreat** (formerly the Robin Hood's Retreat), but your guide mentions that it is now a Gastro Pub incorporating Steen's Diner. Although they offer no cask-conditioned beers, there is a wide selection of bottled beers available, and the food comes very highly recommended, with a four-star rating from the local press.

However, your final destination is the wonderful **Miner's Rest**, Geoff & Carol Rogers' gem of a pub which, despite lots of rumours to the contrary, has not been sold to developers. In fact, as you enter, you cannot help but noticing that the toilet block has been completely redone. Inside this characterful and welcoming pub, with its three interlinked drinking rooms, your eyes light up when you see that the beer is dispensed straight from barrels behind the bar. Both Bass and Greene King I.P.A. are available, with the frequent addition of a guest beer. The Bass is particularly good here, but you decide to have one of the two traditional ciders that are on offer (Taunton and Thatcher's). The views from the orchard garden at the back of this pub are absolutely spectacular.

Your partner has a *Water Solo*, a very trendy drink based on the range of drink *Water Plus* (water with a hint of extra energy, water with a hint of apple, you know the sort of thing). *Water Solo* is like that but with the 'hint of' taken out.

You're enjoying yourself so much at the Miner's Rest that you decide to sample the other cider while you're there. Several hours later, you find yourself strapped to an exercise bike in the David Lloyd Centre wishing you'd never made that "*Iron Man? Piece of Cake!*" comment to the muscle-bound guy in the tracksuit...

Duncan Shine

Cider Sisters

AS it's been a while since our last column, we thought we'd greet you with a seasonal welcome back: *Wassail!*

It's from the Norse, *ves heill*, meaning be in good health, apparently. We were recently kindly invited to a wassail, but it was wet and windy and we didn't fancy a wet and windy wassail, so we gave it a miss. But, we decided to catch up with its organiser – Dave Matthews of the Welsh Cider Society – and find out more.

And Dave's a man who knows his wassailing. "Wassailing goes back into the mists of time, and is pagan or early Christian in origin, based around the idea that people didn't understand that spring would follow winter". People would gather in the orchards, offer cider to the trees and make a joyful noise to wake the spirits of the orchard, ensuring a good harvest the following autumn.

"In the Devon and Somerset tradition, the oldest and biggest tree in the orchard would be chosen, and some cider would be poured on the roots as an offering to Pomona, the goddess of the orchard, and some on the fork of the tree, for the robin – the spirit of the orchard".

Dave and his colleagues at the Welsh Cider Society are working hard to keep these old traditions alive. Cider making spread into Wales from Herefordshire in the 14th Century, and there was a strong Welsh cider tradition in the south east of the country until the early 20th century, when it all but died out.

So in Wales they have lacked the continuous cider-making history that we have here in the West Country – the people making cider now in Wales are a new generation who are starting afresh. At the moment they're using our finest west country fruit, but over time hope to revive the native Welsh varieties. The Welsh Cider Society is supporting these new growers:

"We're promoting Welsh cider and perry in every way we can – helping people to get going, developing new cider-makers, encouraging people to try it and bringing the cider culture back to Wales".

Dave's a West Country man himself originally, and, like so many of us, first got interested in cider in his misspent youth:

"I grew up in Gloucestershire, there was a cider-maker nearby and when we were teenagers we'd take a bit up on a hill and do what teenagers do..."

As an adult, he learnt his craft with cider-maker Kevin Minchew, before starting to make his own cider and perry in 2001. And from our experience, having had a tasting at the Welsh Cider Festival at the Clytha Arms in 2003, his ciders (under the Seidr Dai label) are of exceptional quality. On consulting our infamous notes (which include a pencil sketch of Mr. Matthews that



isn't really of print quality), we had gone so far as to say that his perry was the best we'd ever tasted: "Impossible to describe its fruity perfection – the all time most delicious". You can blame the glorious sunshine and the

convivial atmosphere, but it must have been pretty good. (We also got a rare chance to enjoy a lesser-spotted pider – half-cider/half-perry for those who couldn't work it out – which pretty much made our year).

So, big up the Welsh Cider Society we say, and if you get a chance, get yourselves along to their two festivals this year:

○ 29th - 31st May: Welsh Cider Festival, Clytha Arms, near Abergavenny (tel: 01873 840206)

○ 8th - 10th July: Chapter's Welsh Cider and Perry Festival, Chapter Arts Centre, Cardiff (tel: 029 20311050)

It's not far to go, and as Dave Matthews says: "The more that come over the better!"
Freya & Erica McLuckie

To contact the Welsh Cider Society, visit their web site at www.welshcider.co.uk

Wintry West Croft Wassail (with an Arabian twist)

IN mid-January, Winter suddenly remembered what kind of weather was expected of it. With the temperature plummeting fast, we headed for West Croft Farm at Brent Knoll, Somerset, (home of Janet's Jungle Juice) to join the wassail. Being a Londoner myself, I wasn't quite sure what to expect: but for a passing comment from the trip organiser about sturdy footwear, I might not even have made the connection with a muddy orchard. I came prepared with ski hat and jacket, rugged boots and a thirst for some good, local cider and a glimpse of tradition: neither weather nor cider disappointed, although I was a bit surprised at some of the traditional activity ... but more of that later.

With some warm mulled cider and Somerset apple cake inside us, we stood as close to the wood fires around the farmyard as possible to watch the Chalice Morris Men do their stuff with sticks. Not these the white-clad, hanky waving Morris Men of Summer, but dark-coated, slightly sinister blokes with long feathers in their hats and a predominance of fine (and presumably insulating) facial hair. One of the barns was host to a pig roast, another to barrels of sweet, medium and dry cider, to ensure inner warmth before the real action of the evening kicked in.

At 9pm, the assembled throng of 150 or so people were called to the orchard by a

traditionally green-robed druid and his not-so-trad loud-hailer. We gathered around a large apple tree whilst the druid and his helpers threw cider-soaked toast at the bark as an offering to the robins. Loud shouts and banging drums designed to wake the tree's sleeping spirit were followed by a wassail song. The words on our programme were those sung at the Butcher's Arms pub in Carhampton, near Minehead, "... which claims to host the oldest continuous apple tree wassail in the country". Just for good measure, we also sang another Somerset wassail song with a rousing chorus of "For it's your wassail! And it's our wassail and it's joy to be you, and a jolly wassail!"

We forced ourselves to revisit the cider barn to avoid a sense of anti-climax when the singing and toast-slapping was over, but we needn't have worried. The dry cider was gorgeous and, had we drunk very large amounts of it, we might have thought that the final episode of the evening was a hallucination. Not so: the piping Arabian music and belly-dancers in spangly, diaphanous costumes gyrating on a straw-covered barn floor were real (and probably really, really cold). A surprising end to a very good evening. There was no mention of this in the description of the wassail ceremony in the programme – if anyone knows the origins of this local twist (no pun intended) then do please let me know.

Lesley Huxley

Smiles Brewery changes hands

SMILES' 25th Anniversary in 2003 proved an eventful year. You may have read in previous issues of Pints West of the anniversary celebrations, the creation by Neville Mort and Chris Thurgusson of some new ales such as Bristol Imperial (at 5.2 per cent ABV), Slap and Tipple (4.5 per cent), Bristol Porter (5.0 per cent), and the return of Blond to the on trade.

Possibly the most important piece of news since Smiles was acquired from its founder, John Payne, was announced in December. This was that the company changed hands prior to Christmas, to a new and exciting management team lead by Ron Kirk and Richard Gibbs.

Smiles Brewing Company will continue to trade, so the great news is that Bristol and its homeland territory will continue to see the company flourish, but with a few new twists.

Ron Kirk, the new Managing Director, has made it clear that things are on the move. Already they have a number of freehold pubs within their sights and plans

are being drawn up to enlarge the Brewery Tap into space within the brewery, whilst maintaining its award-winning classic image.

The main points regarding their new plans, also mentioned in the press release that was circulated following the acquisition, could be highlighted as follows:

- Freehold pub acquisitions of ten to fifteen pubs.
- A move to a new brewery site within the heart of Bristol within 18 to 24 months.
- An ability to fund projects with the help of their partner Close Venture Capital.
- Expansion into other city centre sites over time under their holding company "City Centres Breweries".

Shareholders in Smiles Holdings PLC will be called to an Extraordinary General Meeting in the early part of summer and the

company dissolved thereafter. Following this, shareholder funds will be distributed. Their Chairman, Quentin Williams, was, in part, sorry to say goodbye but commented:

"On a personal note and on behalf of my colleagues, we deeply regret that we were in the end unable to make a financial success of Smiles, for which we all worked so hard over the years. At least this solution will see Smiles continue as widely available ales, with all its traditions of quality and authenticity. We wish the new team every success. They have plans and financial backing to do all the projects that we longed to undertake".

Richard Brooks

Pub News

The Station, Hallatrow, nominally a free house, has acquired some large news signs advertising Brains.

John Spragg, formerly licensee of the Coronation in Southville (Hop Back), has returned to Bristol after a sojourn in Weymouth and elsewhere, and has taken over **The Merchants Arms** at Hotwells (Bath Ales).

The Bell at Banwell, an Enterprise Inns house (much discussed in previous issues of Pints West) is offering guest beers and recently was one of the first pubs to sell Newman's Wolver Ale from Weston-super-Mare.

On Old Market, **The Palace Hotel** (better known as the **Gin Palace**) closed down as a Bath Ales pub at the end of December and reopened under new management a few days later, selling Bass and Gem, with a guest beer. The new licensee, Alistair, points out that he is now opening the pub all day, seven days a week, whereas it was previously closed every lunchtime.

A planning application has been lodged to convert **The Forge** on Barrow Road, St. Phillips (no real ale) into flats.

David McKillop, former licensee of **The New Inn** at Mayhill, who left in spring 2003 to take over a pub in Bedfordshire, has returned to the New Inn to take on a 27-year lease. This means that interesting and sometimes exotic guest beers are back on the agenda, including Harviestoun Bitter & Twisted and beers from the Bridge Of Allan brewery in Scotland. Changes to the Unique and Voyager cask ale scheme (of which the New Inn is a member) mean that the focus will be more on local micro-brewers' beers in future though, rather than more far-flung ones.

Norman Spalding



Buy your beer direct from
THE Bristol Brewery

Smiles Best (4.1% abv)

18 pint box - £23.58

36 pint box - £42.81

Bottles by the case (12 x 500ml) or pack of 3:

	case	3 pack
Smiles Best (4.1%)	£16.29	£5.00
Bristol IPA (4.5%)	£16.33	£5.00
Heritage (5.2%)	£18.31	£5.50
Mixed pack		£5.50

Smiles Mustard & Chutney Gift Pack - £6.00

(includes 1 x 200g Smiles Original Beer Mustard, 1 x 200g Smiles Best Wholegrain Mustard, 1 x 300g Smiles Heritage Chutney)

You can buy from either the Brewery Tap or our depot at Portbury. Please telephone in advance to place your orders. Home delivery service in certain areas is available. Please call Jane at the depot for details.

Brewery Tap - 0117 9213668 Depot - 01275 375894
www.smiles.co.uk

LAMPLIGHTERS (Riverside Bar)

Station Road, Shirehampton
Bristol BS11 9XA Tel: 0117 9823549
(2 mins Shire station)

**Real Ales
Homemade Food
Sunday Lunches
Quiz Night Sunday 9pm
Open Mon-Sat 11-3 / 6-11
All day Sunday**

Have these beers changed?

A personal viewpoint from Vince Murray

AMONGST the many real ales on the market these days are a number of very well known brands from the bigger regional brewers. These beers have built up a solid reputation over many years and usually have a loyal following where they are sold. I am prepared to be wrong, but I feel that three of these beers have undergone significant changes to taste and flavour in recent years, but only one has been well publicised – indeed the brewery announced that they had changed the recipe.

The beer concerned was **Young's Special** from the long-standing Wandsworth brewery. Young's announced in 2003 that they were reformulating and re-launching their premium strength beer, with the ABV dropping slightly from 4.6 per cent to 4.5 per cent.

Having attended college in South London in the late 1970s and early 1980s, I got to drink an awful lot of Young's beer, as apart from Fuller's there was very scarce availability of any other independent brews. Young's was always infinitely preferable to the widely available Bass, Charrington, Courage and Watney's offerings. Having said that, I always found Special to be a fairly heavy drinking beer, and not one that I really sought out. Malt seemed too evident to suit my palate.

I first tried the new recipe in summer 2003 and was pleasantly surprised – the beer seems much easier drinking and fresh and crisp, with a less malty, more hoppy, and better balance. Judging by many angry letters to *What's Brewing* (CAMRA's monthly national newsletter), many people disagree and prefer the old recipe – that's the beauty of tasting beer, different tastes suit different people! I do think, however, that Young's might have been better to rename the beer when they changed it.

Another beer regarded by many as a classic is **Fuller's London Pride**, the 4.1 per cent flagship brew from Young's big Chiswick-based rivals. This beer always had a wonderful balance of flavours, with a very distinctive underlying nuttiness. About two years back I started to notice changes to the beer, especially that the nutty flavour had disappeared, and been replaced by a fairly prominent caramel flavour. Caramel is a legitimate beer flavour enjoyed by many, but definitely does not suit my palate. For a while I assumed that a batch of Pride had simply gone a little awry, and that the old flavour would return. That has not been so, so I have to wonder if the recipe changed, deliberately or otherwise? I would love to

know. I have personally stopped choosing this beer, but know many who still enjoy it.

Finally, a few months ago in late 2003, I came across another famous old beer – **Wadworth's 6X**, the 4.3 per cent flagship ale of the historic Devizes brewery. Having drunk this beer a lot in my late teens and early twenties, I opted for others when the big explosion of micro-breweries began in the late 1980s. I found it a little too malt-dominated for my taste. I was very surprised to find it altogether more crisp and clean tasting recently – once again I assumed that a brew had come out a little different. However, I have now tried it on seven or eight further occasions and found this to be the norm. It even seems a little lighter in colour, although I could be wrong. Either way it has moved from being a beer I rarely chose to one I now single out. (*Me too. Ed.*)

As I have tried to stress, these are purely my own observations, not necessarily shared by CAMRA locally or nationally, and I would welcome feedback, especially from the breweries concerned.

Vince Murray



THE STAR INN


Worth a Visit!

Reputedly Bath's oldest inn steeped in tradition and renowned the world over.

Described by The Campaign for Real Ale as a rare and unspoiled pub interior of outstanding historic interest and listed on the National Inventory of Heritage Pubs.

Serving traditional English ales including:
Bellringer brewed in Bath
and Burton's favourite brew Bass.

23 THE VINEYARDS, PARAGON, BATH Tel 01225 425072



Cheers!

Abbey Ales

BELLRINGER

Award Winning Ale
BATH'S OWN BREWERY
01225 444437 www.abbeyales.co.uk

Friar on fire!

White Friar, the latest occasional ale from Bath's Abbey Ales, has proved so popular that the brewery has already had to brew another batch!

The 5.0 percent ABV golden-coloured hoppy ale, launched only recently, sold out almost immediately it went on sale. The beer, originally created as Jubilation to coincide with the Queen's visit to Bath in her Golden Jubilee year, was so well received that Abbey Ales decided to reintroduce it under the name of White Friar.

One of the first pubs to fire off a repeat order was the Green Tree in Green Street, Bath, where manager Tim Bethune experienced a tremendous demand. It was the same story at Abbey Ales' own pub, the Star on the Paragon, Bath, where relief manager Rob Mead quickly experienced the pulling power of Bath's only brewery.

The beer will only be sold locally to pubs in the Bath area. However, drinkers further afield will be (or were, depending on when you're reading this) able to taste it at the Bristol CAMRA Beer Festival, and at the Small Independent Brewers Society (SIBA) Festival being staged at Tuckers Maltings, Newton Abbot, in April.

Managing Director, Alan Morgan



commented, "Martin Langham, our Head Brewer, has always wanted to regularly brew a range of different beers to complement our best selling Bellringer but the need to meet the incessant demand for our flagship ale takes up much of our production schedule. However, he has worked overtime to produce another batch of White Friar, as he was so pleased with the initial response."

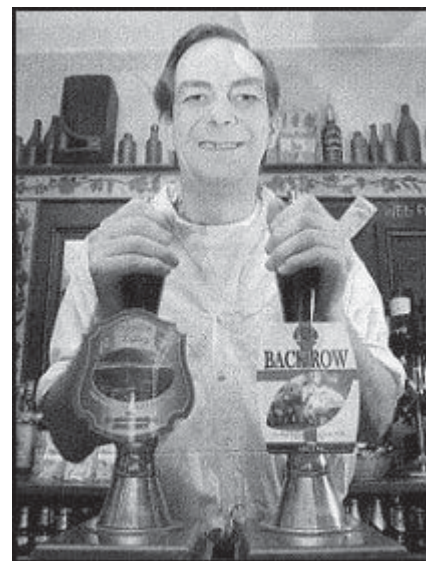
White Friar was also voted the favourite occasional beer on a poll recently held on the brewery web site www.abbeyales.co.uk.

"Although it means extra work at the brewery for Martin and the team, even at this traditionally quiet time of the brewing year, we would be silly not to meet the demand", Alan Morgan added.

All change at the Bag O'Nails

IT seems that central Bristol continues to take its toll on our Good Beer Guide landlords. In recent times we have seen them move on from Horts, the Cornubia and the Bunch of Grapes. Fortunately some other good licensees have appeared in their place!

Now Geoff Syce has moved on from the Bag O'Nails. We wish Geoff well and hope that the new manager can continue to keep the real ale in top condition, and signs so far are that he can!



Here is young Geoff, plus a shot of the unassuming exterior of the Bag O'Nails (borrowed from the Bristol Pub Guide). The pub is of course famed for its real ale and gas lit interior. It is also a former Bristol & District branch pub of the year.



If you can't stand the thought of never seeing Geoff again, there is a rumour that he will be helping out for a session at the fantastic Bristol Beer Festival.

Richard Brooks

Burgundy, Yellow . . . and White – it's a bit of all right!



Well Alan certainly likes it

PLASTIC may indeed be the way forward for Bath's only traditional brewery! Abbey Ales – based on Camden Row in the city – has decided to experiment with plastic firkins (9-gallon 'barrels') as an alternative to expensive, hard-to-acquire and even-harder-to-hang-on-to stainless steel equivalents.

Distinctively coloured burgundy and yellow – the brewery's 'house' colours – the containers are much lighter than traditional ones and will initially be used for the company's take-home and wholesale business, where keeping track of casks has traditionally been a problem.

Abbey Ales Managing Director, Alan Morgan commented; "We were very impressed with the samples that we tested at our brewery tap, The Star Inn, and the quality of the beer in the glass was as good as that from a stainless steel or aluminium cask. We therefore decided to go ahead and order a hundred, which are being delivered shortly, and we intend to use them for our next brew of our occasional beer White Friar which is available from mid February."

Sharp's Brewery cometh

SHARP'S BREWERY from North Cornwall are making a concerted effort to 'conquer' Bristol. Duncan Shine headed down the M5 and along the A30 to find out more.

One October about ten years ago, while on holiday in North Cornwall, I read in the CAMRA Good Beer Guide that a new brewery had opened in the picturesque village of Rock. I went to have a look and there, on the Pityme Industrial Estate, was a small outbuilding with a makeshift sign saying "Sharp's" — a small brewery, set up by Bill Sharp, with just a few outlets among the free trade in the surrounding villages.

Little did I know that, a decade later, the brewery would be occupying most of the industrial estate. Not only that, but they have made such a good job of selling their beers in Cornwall and Devon — last summer they were shifting 2,000 firkins a week — that the only way to continue the expansion was to head east, which is why they are now making a splash in Bristol, and why I am now making a visit to Rock.

I am greeted by Head Brewer, Stuart Howe, who agrees to show me around. Now, what I know about the technical aspects of the brewing process could safely be written on the back of a beer mat, and there would still be room for your shopping list. If you tell me that yeast flocculates, I say that as long as it's in the privacy of its own home, it's none of my business. So, any inaccuracies in what follows are down to me, while all the facts are Stuart's.

First of all, Stuart takes me to see the original brewing plant. This is that original outhouse with all the equipment in one room. In those days they had a ten-barrel brew length, and two fermenting vessels, giving them a maximum of about twenty barrels a week. Later, I get to see the new equipment: they now have no fewer than fourteen ten-barrel fermenters, and a couple of twenty-barrel ones as well. However, as remarkable as this expansion is, what strikes me is how little else has changed.

As Stuart explains: "There are so many ways that expansion can adversely affect the flavour of the beer. Moving or re-propagating the yeast is very difficult and can be disastrous; while introducing fermenting vessels with different dimensions can affect the way the yeast flocculates (there's that



word again), and alter the taste. The strength of any brewery has to be the quality and consistency of the beer, so we have sought to enshrine the brewing ingredients and processes to make sure that the pint you drink today tastes just as good as the one you had in 1994."

So, let's see why the beers have been so successful. We'll start with the malt. It always comes from Tucker's Maltings (the Rolls Royce of malt, I'm told) and is a single varietal malt always to the same specification. I ask exactly which malt they use, but apparently that's like asking a Mason what his secret handshake is. No matter, the point is that it's always the same, and they do not use any adjuncts, the principle being that if they get the malt right in the first place, they don't need to bung in anything else to bring it up to standard.

Now to the hops. Sharp's always use whole hops rather than pellets. While pellets can make the process easier and cheaper, there is a risk that you lose the hoppy aroma that makes the beer so appetising. There are two varieties of hop used, which add bitterness, flavour and, of course, aroma.

But the ingredients are only part of the equation. The brewing process is vital if you are going to have not only a consistent pint, but also one that is going to have discerning drinkers returning again and again to the brand.

For example, the mash temperature is deliberately kept lower than for many beers, with the effect that the beer tastes lighter, and isn't so satiating. Further along the process, the coppers have an integral strainer in them, as using a separate strainer can disturb the brew and affect the balance and look of the pint. The single continuous culture of yeast that has been used since day one is very voracious, so the wort is oxygenated to feed it that bit more and allow a quick fermentation (only 24 hours). The fermentation takes place at a warmer temperature for extra balance.

The commitment to consistency goes even further. The grist mill is exactly the same model as the one used at Tucker's Maltings, and there is a sign on it saying that the settings can only be changed by Stuart Howe personally. He's a big man so I doubt anyone ever ignores this sign twice.

Towards the end of the process, samples of every brew are microscope tested (for nasty organisms and the like, don't you know) before the brew is transferred to conditioning tanks which serve the dual purpose of maturing the brew, and also removing those tell-tale smells you sometimes get (bad eggs, vinegar, etc.). This emphasis on a 'clean' pint also explains why Sharp's do not 'dry hop' for extra aroma at the end. If the hops haven't been through the 'process' then there are microbiological risks in introducing them too late in the process.

All brews are finally racked for seven days before being shipped out to the pubs. That way, the beer is always ready to drink when it ships. For extra quality control, a 'forcing sample' is also taken, and kept in a test tube at a balmy 25°C for five days. That way, if the brew is going to go off, it will go off in the test tube before the main batch is shipped to the pubs and clubs.

So, what are the beers that benefit from this total commitment to quality, consistency and drinkability. Well, the main ones are **Cornish Coaster** (3.6%), a golden session bitter using about 98% pale malt with a little crystal added for good measure. Then there's my personal favourite, **Doom Bar Bitter**, a stonking 4.0% 'best bitter', which is more heavily hopped, and has more roasted barley than Coaster. It is dangerously drinkable, and distinctly moreish. **Special** (5.2%) is fermented at a much higher gravity than the others, to give it a fuller and fruitier flavour, but still drinks surprisingly well into the second and third pint. **Eden** (4.4%), **Sharp's Own** (4.4%) and special occasion beers complete the cask picture.

So why are these excellent beers now appearing in Bristol. Sales Manager, James Nicholls explains: "We've enjoyed such success with our ales in our core market, Cornwall and Devon, that in less than a decade, we have almost reached a point of saturation. Naturally, we wish to continue enjoying the success, so have decided to extend the availability of our popular ales by opening our first depot in Bristol to service the increasing demand". The founder, Bill Sharp, has brought in some new major investors to help fund further expansion, and



there are now plans to extend the brewery still further.

So, expect to see a lot more of Sharp's beers on a hand pump near you. For now, here are just a few of the pubs in the area which are already selling them. You can taste them for yourself at the following outlets:-

- **The White Horse**, Westbury-On-Trym
- **The Winford Arms** at Dundry
- **The Three Sugar Loaves** at the bottom of Christmas Steps in Central Bristol
- **The Clyde Arms** in Hampton Road, Redland
- **The George** at Abbots Leigh
- **The Shakespeare** in Totterdown
- **The Royal Oak** in Clifton
- **The King's Head** in Victoria Street, Central Bristol
- **The Bell** in Kingsdown (occasionally)
- **The Hope & Anchor** in Hotwells (occasionally)

(By the way, yeast flocculation is the process that causes the yeast to sediment at the bottom of the fermenter so it can be harvested and reused in future fermentations. Or so I'm led to believe).

Duncan Shine

The Bristol Pub Guide

AROUND the same time that this issue of Pints West starts appearing in pub and bars in and around Bristol, a new book will be hitting the bookshops. Entitled *The Bristol Pub Guide*, it is the result of several months' research by Duncan Shine, a regular contributor to *Pints West*.

Essentially, he has spent the last few months doing nothing but going to pubs and writing down all the bits he can remember. "It has been a tough job, spending all my time propping up bars, chatting to licensees and tenants, checking out the beers and ciders. But it has been a sacrifice I have been prepared to make for the good of the city," he says, tongue firmly in cheek.

The book features over 700 pubs, with a photograph of each one, as well as a full list of the facilities they offer (Sport on TV, Vegetarian Meals, Pets Welcome, etc.). Perhaps even more useful, however, is the full list of draught beers sold. Every cask-conditioned ale is listed, as well as ciders, stouts and even keg bitters and lagers. Pubs with changing guest ales or ale dispensed by gravity are also featured. And there are maps and special interest lists at the back to help you find the right pub for you.

"The idea," Duncan goes on, "is to give pub-goers a single point of reference to find the pub that best suits their requirements. We haven't been judgemental, and have tried to describe every pub objectively so that people will know what to expect".

The book will be on sale in "all good

bookstores" and also on-line via Amazon, Waterstone's and W. H. Smith, or you can email Duncan.shine@britishpubguide.com to reserve a copy.

Green Beer?

ON a recent trip to China, I found myself in Chifeng, a large town ten hours' train ride north of Beijing. Visiting a local restaurant with some fellow travellers and asking for some local beer, we were presented with bottles bearing labels with a picture of a gherkin on them. Imagine our surprise when the bottles disgorged a green liquid – apparently lager beer. It didn't taste unpleasant, although perhaps rather fresh and yeasty; we all had at least one more. Alcohol content was 2.8 per cent. We didn't find out what it was called, as the label was all in Chinese (which none of us understood) and none of the local people present spoke any English.

A day and a night further south by train, at a place called Luohe, a local hotel produced a different brand of bottle with gherkins on the label – again 2.8 per cent alcohol, and bright green when poured into the glass. This one had a few English characters on the label, as follows: "SLQP". It didn't take much imagination to make this "SLOP". Again, it wasn't unpleasant to drink, but I was pleased to return to more familiar tastes in the next town...

Kim Ale Snug

Britishpubguide.com

BRISTOL PUB GUIDE

Featuring 730 pubs in the Bristol area, with photo and a listing of all real ales and traditional ciders sold in each pub.



Cask Ales Sold



Changing Guest Ales



Beer Straight From The Barrel

AVAILABLE IN MARCH

In Good Bookshops And Online

Visit britishpubguide.com for more details

PLUS PUBS FOR

Families
Wheelchair Access
Eating Out
Live Entertainment
Sport on TV
Pool, Darts, Skittles
Tourist Attractions
Gardens
Pubs by the Water
Pets Welcome
Credit Cards Taken
And much more

Watering Holes in the Desert

news from Weston-super-Mare

Newman's Brewery – off to a flyer

SATURDAY 22nd November 2003 will long be remembered by many as the day England won the Rugby World Cup.

However, it was also the day that saw the launch of the first brewery in the Weston area for 20 years and the first in Banwell since Castle and Rogers Brewery ceased trading almost 100 years ago.

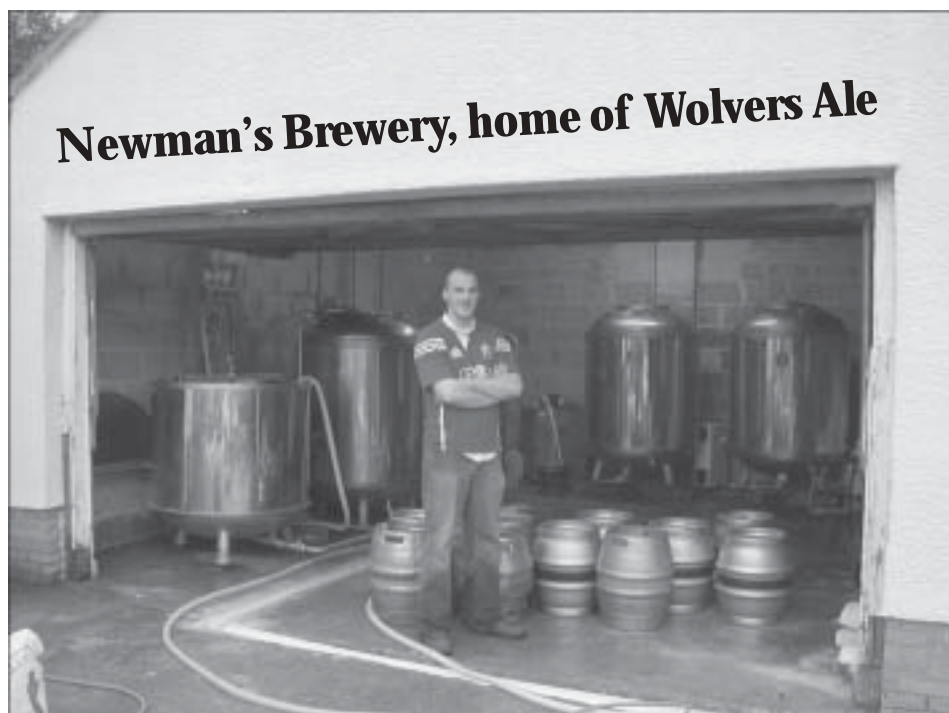
Wolvers Ale from Newman's Brewery, based in a garage in Banwell, made its first appearance in pubs across Weston. The official launch was held at The London Inn and the first brew also appeared at The Old King's Head in Worle, The Claremont Vaults, The Cabot, Hornets RFC, Off The Rails, The Queen's Arms at Bleadon, The Bell at Banwell and The Crown at Churchill.

Not all of the aforementioned venues are known as being supporters of micro-breweries and some people were concerned that after the initial enthusiasm it would be difficult for Tom Newman to get his beers into pubs in the area. How wrong we were – the last three months has seen the brewery go from strength to strength, with Tom's main problem being trying to keep up with demand.

Wolvers Ale has now appeared in 30 to 40 pubs and clubs in the area, with many of these customers now taking the beer on a regular basis. Aside from the aforementioned venues, "Wolvers" has been in lots of other places in Weston – The Regency, The Dragon, The White Hart, The Conservative Club – and slightly further afield at The Woolpack in St. Georges; The Anchor in Bleadon, The Ship in Uphill, The Winscombe Club, The Red Lion in Cheddar, The Prince Of Orange in Yatton, The New Moon in Biddesham, Old Inn and Plough in Congresbury, and at both The Crown and Lamb in Axbridge.

Customers at the latter emptied their two casks in less than three days. Word must be getting around that the beer is popular as Tom's phone keeps ringing, both from existing and new customers. The beer will soon be appearing at Jack Stamps Beer House, Weston Golf Club and The Whistling Duck in Banwell.

Aside from having to more than double his early weekly output (he is now producing



Tom Newman with his brewing equipment

around 25 nine-gallon casks a week), Tom has also won his first award. In January Wolver Ale beat about 30 beers to win the Beer Of The Festival award at the Alternative Winter Beers Festival held in Manchester. The organiser picked his beers for the festival from breweries that have started up in the past two to three years and, according to Tom, he collected all the beers himself from the breweries and took all the empty casks back afterwards! This success for Wolver Ale was recognised with a big splash in the Bristol Evening Post as well as a piece in the Weston Mercury.

The most pleasing thing about Wolver Ale, which is a tasty but easy-drinking session bitter of 4.1 per cent ABV, is that it has been popular in pubs that would not normally be considered "real ale pubs" and several licensees have mentioned that non-real ale drinkers have tried and liked it. If the beer can help encourage keg and lager drinkers to give real ale a try then it will be doing a great service to the real ale cause locally.

It hasn't been all plain sailing. In the

early days there were consistency problems and in some cases the beer refused to clear. However, these problems seem to have been resolved and Tom's main problem at the moment is having to disappoint pubs that want to take his beer. Plans are afoot to resolve this problem too, as Tom is currently looking for larger premises, which will enable him to increase capacity and give his parents their garage back!

Tom is not looking for world domination – simply a steady local trade. This looks to be very much on the cards. If you have not yet tried it, venues taking it on a regular basis are The London Inn, Cabot, Old King's Head, The Crown at Churchill and Prince Of Orange, Yatton.

At time of writing, Tom had just finished a brew of Woolly Mammoth, a German-style "white" beer of 4.5 per cent ABV, which he plans to brew on an occasional basis. This beer was all sold before it was brewed and the most likely place that people will be able to catch it is at The Bristol Beer Festival on 5-6 March.

Tim Nickolls

A visit to Yatton

DESPITE being a mere 15-minute train journey from Weston, and also being known for having quite a high density of pubs for a village of its size (four), for some reason the local CAMRA branch had never made the short trip to Yatton.

Our enthusiasm had never been high, as the story went that the best you would find in Yatton would be a pint of Butcombe and possibly a pint of real mild.

Anyway, our lack of a visit was rectified on Guy Fawkes Night – would there be any real ale fireworks in Yatton we wondered or would it prove to be full of damp squibs?

Arriving by train, the obvious starting point for a crawl of Yatton's pubs is **The Railway**, which can't be missed as it is practically on the northbound platform.

As ever, on entering a pub my eyes headed straight for the pumpclips. Three real ales on – Bass, Courage Best and Adnam's Fisherman. Based on the Suffolk coast, Adnam's beers are rarely seen in these parts, so this was a very nice surprise. My usual acceleration to get to the bar before most of my colleagues proved to be invaluable, as the Fisherman went off after a few pints had been ordered and half of our team had to make do with the Bass and Courage Best (sorry folks – all's fair in love and ale drinking!).

Fisherman is a very nice dark red beer with a nutty taste. On this occasion it tasted a bit tired, as you would expect when you get near the bottom of the barrel and the beer has been on for nearly a week. However, the landlord reported that it had been popular and was a guest beer off of the pub company's list. This list certainly had some decent beers on it and The Railway is a pub that is well worth a look.

Very near to The Railway is The Market Inn on North End Road. However, we felt that it would be best to leave this until the end of the evening, thereby minimising the chances of us missing our last train home!

We wandered through the noisy, smelly evening to **The Prince Of Orange Inn** on Yatton High Street. This pub is about half a mile to the south of the railway station.

Expecting very little, we could hardly believe our eyes on entry, seeing the wide range of real ales on offer. Besides the ubiquitous Courage Best were Hyde's Jekyll's Gold, Cottage Jacko's Thriller, Marston's Pedigree and a mysterious beer badged as Younger's Monks.

The full identity of the latter caused some puzzlement. The beer is not mentioned in the Good Beer Guide and Younger's (makers of foul tins of beer with lots of tartan on the front as I recall) was the victim of a merger many moons ago. Perhaps some far-flung corner of the Scottish Courage empire is being allowed to try and produce some interesting beer – shock, horror!

Anyway, the Monks was a dark beer of 4.5 per cent ABV, that potentially tasted quite good. Unfortunately, it was very near the bottom of the barrel and two people had to take it back to be changed. Of the remaining beers that were tried, the Jekyll's Gold was rated as "fine" and the Jacko's Thriller was very nice, as are most beers from the excellent Cottage brewery of Lovington, Somerset.

The barmaid did not know much about the real ale side of the operation nor the ownership of the pub, but she said that Courage Best was permanent and there are normally three guest beers.

The cost of beer at The Prince of Orange is pretty expensive – Jekyll's Gold

£2.40 for a 4.3% ABV beer, Cottage Jacko's Thriller £2.50 for a 4.5% ABV beer – but the range was interesting and although the quality was variable, we all agreed it would definitely be worth a follow-up visit.

We then made the 20-seconds' walk to the next pub, **The Butcher's Arms**. Guess what? More Courage Best – this time accompanied by Fuller's London Pride and at a more sensibly-priced £2.10. This is a beer that seems to be revered by many ale drinkers in the area and everyone was delighted with the quality of the Pride here. In fact, most pronounced it to be the best pint of the evening.

The punters at The Butcher's must like it – it was on two handpumps and the barmaid explained that this was the only way they could keep up with demand! Despite having a large-screen TV to keep the sports fans happy, The Butcher's feels like a genuinely old pub and we could have happily lingered longer. However, duty called.

We quickly made the half-mile march back towards the station and the final port of call for the evening, **The Market Inn**.

This proved to be the home of the elusive "real mild." Admittedly, this was only Ansell's Mild, hardly a classic example of the genre, but the site of a hand-pumped mild was rare enough for all but one of our party to opt for it – at £1.80 a pint. The ales on offer were Usher's Best, Bass and Butcombe Bitter.

Nice to see Pints West prominently displayed in the bar. Another pub which we look forward to visiting again.

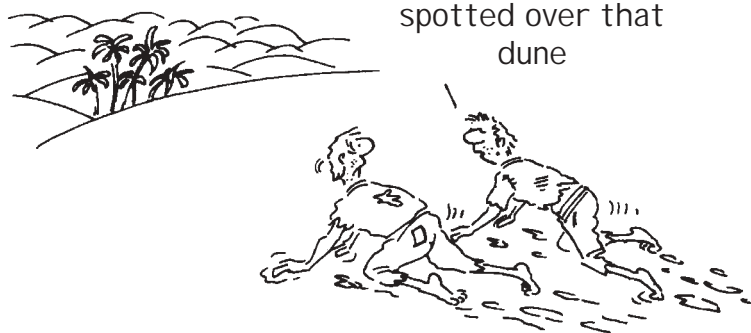
All in all, this was a very enjoyable and enlightening evening. There were eleven different beers on offer across Yatton's four pubs and the range and quality was, overall, good and worthy of further investigation. In fact, we are doing it all over again on **Wednesday 21 April**. Check the diary section for train times.

For the sake of completeness, I should mention the fifth Yatton pub, which is **The Bridge Inn**, located about a mile to the north west of the village on North End Road. This is a Greene King house which, surprise surprise, is focused on food and families.

On my last visit, Greene King IPA and Abbot Ale were available. On an earlier visit it was Badger Best Bitter. I have also had reports of no real ale being available, so it sounds a bit like pot luck. Very good Sunday carvery though.

Tim Nickolls

I could swear that
was a Woolly
Mammoth I just
spotted over that
dune



Weston Whispers

(pub and beer news)

The Conservative Club on Alexander Parade has been getting good reviews. A recent visit by a CAMRA member for a quiz league fixture resulted in him swooning at the quality of the RCH Old Slug Porter. Wickwar Cooper's WPA was also on and in very good condition. Sadly, admittance is for club members and guests only.

The Raglan has re-opened with a lick of paint all round. Bass is the real ale offer.

Cask Marque is an award for pubs meeting high standards of cellarman'ship and dispense. The latest pubs to receive the award in Weston are **The Bell** in Banwell and **The Pavilion** in Weston. The latter came as something of a surprise.

The Pavilion is a Beefeater, located off the dual carriageway, with no housing nearby and access only available via Hutton Moor Leisure Centre. The surprise was that the ownership of the Beefeater chain felt that it was important for their "brand" to be able to demonstrate to the public that they regard the quality of their real ale quality as being important – it costs money to apply for Cask

Marque accreditation.

The Pavilion, as with all Beefeaters, seems to be purely a restaurant, with beer merely an accompaniment to the food. I guess it must be good news that a chain such as Beefeater regard demonstrating that they keep their beer in good condition as being an important issue to them and potentially important to their customers.

Beers at The Pavilion are Bass and Wadworth's 6X. On my visit both were perfectly clear and served at the right temperature. The only downside was that both were dispensed through a sparkler – in the case of Wadworth's, this is against the brewery's recommendation (hey, we aren't all Birmingham refugees in Weston!).

Highlights of a recent CAMRA minibus trip along the A371 were **The City Arms**, Wells, which had six real ales in excellent condition and Addlestone's Cloudy cider, and **The Red Lion**, Draycott. The latter offers two ever-changing ales. On our visit they were Cotleigh Tawny and Badger Tanglefoot. The menu looked enticing and very good value for a rural pub.

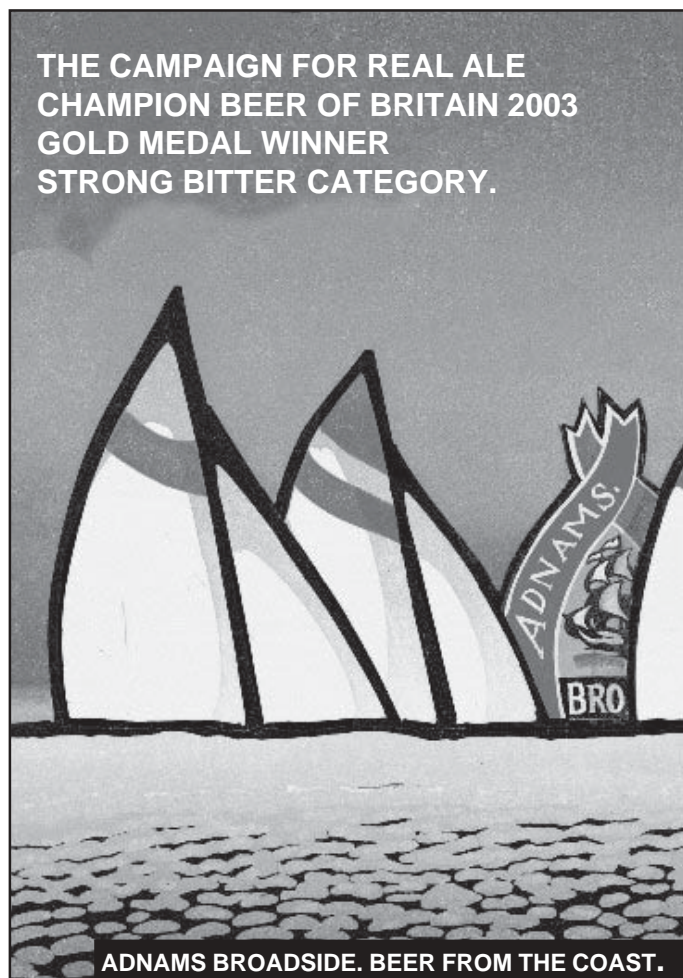
It was great to see the sublime Santa Fé (7.3 per cent in strength and a dream of a beer) from RCH in town over Christmas – briefly at **The Dragon Inn** and for a longer period at **Off The Rails**.

The days of "Courage Best or nothing" at the **Old King's Head** in Worle seem to be a thing of the past. Although the pub only does one real ale, this is now always a more interesting offer from an independent brewery. At the time of writing, the previous three beers had been from Archers, Newman's and Fuller's, and the pub was one of only three in the Weston area to stock Newman's Woolly Mammoth. Beer quality reports are good. Worle real ale drinkers, take note.

The Cooper's Arms in Highbridge has been voted runner-up in the Somerset Pub Of The Year poll held by the Somerset CAMRA Branch. This is an excellent pub a 10-minute train ride from Weston, with a one-minute walk at the other end. The pub can be summed up by landlord John Hayes' comments in the Weston Mercury: "We usually have seven real ales on at a time. We don't do food here. We're a drinkers' pub." Amen.

Tim Nickolls

THE CAMPAIGN FOR REAL ALE
CHAMPION BEER OF BRITAIN 2003
GOLD MEDAL WINNER
STRONG BITTER CATEGORY.



ADNAMS BROADSIDE. BEER FROM THE COAST.

Malt, Hops, Yeast & Water!



What's In Yours?

MAKE IT YOURS AT THE BRISTOL BEER FESTIVAL
&

THE WHITE LION, Quay Head, Bristol City Centre
or

THE PRINCESS OF WALES, Westbourne Grove, Bedminster, Bristol.
Also available direct from the brewery in 18 and 36 pint polypins
or delivered direct to your door.

THE AWARD WINNING BREWERS OF
GLOUCESTERSHIRE

The Wickwar Brewing Co Ltd, Gloucestershire, United Kingdom
01454 294 168

BOB@wickwarbrewing.com
www.wickwarbrewing.com

A round with Robin

THE other day in the Regency I was having a chat with some friends and we were, as usual, discussing the merits of real ale and pubs in Weston and beyond.

This to the uninitiated may sound a very anorakish thing to do as opposed to discussing sport or computer gadgetry, but I assure you that the company was not a one-hobby society. Indeed the relative profession of the company bears a look – a retired policeman, a joiner and a cartographer (that's me, folks).

One of the beers we were discussing in depth (if I may describe something that varies in depth as it goes down the glass) was the relatively new beer, **Wolvers Ale** from Banwell, brewed by Tom Newman. It has to be said that like most beers it is not to everyone's taste. I love it, but not to the exclusion of trying other beers. Some Bass drinkers I know will only drink Bass unless there is nothing else on. Some people – I try hard not to condemn them – will only drink John Smith's Smooth, but however much we try to convert them to real ale we are fighting a battle against professional advertisers.

But I digress. Let us return to **Wolvers Ale**. When it was launched in Weston (at the **London Inn**, where it is served by gravity – the best way) it met with approval from most real ale drinkers. Since then it has been fairly regularly served by hand-pump at the **Claremont Vaults**, the **Regency**, Wetherspoon's **Dragon Inn**, the **White Hart**, **Off The Rails**, and the **Cabot**.

The taste does vary: this is to be expected. Pub cellars or cellar rooms are changeable, and the beer itself may differ from brew to brew. But all things considered it is a decent English beer, not too strong (4.1 per cent), and not too bitter, with subtle fruity hints that seem to alter from

pub to pub and brew to brew. I like this; I find beers that are predictable rather boring, though not I should say all beers. Re-reading this, I'd hate to find my favourite pint of **RCH Pitchfork** or **Butcombe Gold** suddenly tasting of strawberry mousse! But there are beers that do change, and we mustn't stop drinking them just because we find one pint that doesn't meet our expectations.

The company agreed that Tom Newman was to be applauded for his production of **Wolvers Ale**, however we are cautiously pessimistic about his mooted second beer so soon.

Elsewhere in this copy of Pints West you may find an article I wrote about the presentation to **RCH** for their **Old Slug Porter**. When **RCH** first started brewing back in the early 1980s (then based at the Royal Clarence Hotel in Burnham-on-Sea) it has to be said that they did sometimes serve up, in my opinion, some relatively awful stuff. I have an early **RCH** beer mat at home, advertising Clarence Pride on it. I have to say, Paul and Graham, that I think one of the best things you ever did was to cease production of that. However, I am now a staunch supporter of all their beers, though **East Street Cream** does come into that class of beers that I was describing above – it does seem to vary a lot. I prefer my beers hoppy, which is probably why I like **Double Header**, **PG Steam** and **Firebox** so much more than the darker beers. But there are exceptions. Were you lucky enough, dear reader, to imbibe some of the **Santa Fé** around Christmas and the New Year? Let me just say that, if you want an early night, just have five pints of **Santa Fé** and you'll sleep like a baby!

I am looking forward to my two week holiday in Malta. If you've been there you will no doubt know of the **Hopleaf Beer**, occasionally to be found on draught. It is an IPA, originally brewed by a brewer from Kent for the Brits stationed there. Now they have a mild beer, which was just starting to appear when I was there two years ago.

I don't think there is a Real Ale Guide to Malta – I may have to write one. Will two weeks be long enough, I wonder?

Robin E Wild

WsM Diary

Non-members welcome at all events unless otherwise stated.

Wednesday 17 March – White Hart, Palmer Row. 8.30pm.
Social including optional game of skittles.

Wednesday 21 April – Yatton Crawl. 19.27 train from WSM, 19.30 Milton, 19.35 Worle. Train back at 22.56. We will be visiting The Railway, Market Inn, Prince Of Orange and The Butcher's Arms.

Wednesday 19 May – Off The Rails. 8.30pm.

Contact

Tim Nickolls - 01934 628996 (evenings)


Poetry Corner

Observing stuff on shelf and wall
Within pubs strange, both old and new,
Dr John faithfully records it all
So report can be published or just told:

The small glass bottles on a shelf
Labelled medicinal for your health,
Along with tankards and cider mugs.
On walls are prints of yachts and tugs
Posters of matadors and brews
Of ales and stouts and all old news;
Paintings of deer and rustic views.
Price list, now so out of date
For drinks dispensed by landlords – late
Departed from the pub that was
Named differently from now, because
The locals had stopped coming here
Perhaps because they served bad beer?

No longer is the New Inn new
A better name, they think is due,
Will bring the locals back, will you –
Prefer the old, or does it matter;
If the ale is good and a place to natter
To Dr John and friends much fatter.

Robin E Wild



**Privately owned
FREEHOUSE**

The Esplanade,
Weymouth, Dorset

Featuring the 4 R's
Real ale Real food Real friendly Realistic prices
 7 handpumps serving local & guest ales
Food – Bar – Nite Club
Bed & Breakfast
 (groups welcome)

John & Cricket Parker - 01305 766996
www.thedorothyinn.co.uk

The Ale Ages of Axbridge (part 2)

Last time, we looked at one side of the Square in Axbridge, including the present Lamb. Now for the other parts of the town....

The Rest of the Square

On the eastern side of the Square with a Georgian façade is the 1970s Oak House Hotel, on a medieval site. This had the original 14-15th Century Market Cross in front until 1756/7 and then a new Market House until 1829. From 1830, the ground floor of the Town Hall fulfilled the same function out of the driving rain for a village that had 819 inhabitants in 1801 and for the surrounding area. Although the position of ale taster had long since become obsolete, two were still being appointed in 1835. Interested readers may wish to enquire concerning any current vacancies.

The 17th Century Bear Inn, where there is no evidence they held balls, on the south side of the Square was one door to the east of the 1830 Town Hall site until 1828. It was then moved, possibly lock, stock and barrel, to two doors east of the present Moorland Street for about another 100 years. One of Axbridge's more elusive hostelries is the Fleur de Lis Inn, to which there is a passing 1656 reference. As the Fleur de Lis indicates the sixth son, he probably kept quiet about it. Not half as quiet as the seventh, though. He is Rose.

Going West

In the mid-18th Century, the Three Cuppes Ale House was to the west of the present Corner House on the edge of the Square. Further out of town, the Woolpack was the present-day 22 High Street and served fine ales in this medieval wool town from the 17th Century to 1880. In the 18th Century, wool and cloth were still an important economic base for the town. By the early 19th Century, Axbridge was a farming area but popular sheep sales were still taking place in 1820. How they got rid of the unpopular sheep is not known. Opposite the Woolpack, on the present Manor House site, was the 17th Century Stagges Head.

The Grade 2 listed 1606 Red Lion, now in an early 19th Century building on a medieval site at the top end of the present High Street, was a coaching inn. The name of the team is not recorded. It closed as the Axbridge Lion in 1995 and is now the Maclay family residence. A previous owner kept vintage cars there. I suppose he built a vintage port for them. The Red Lion was a

common pub name originating from the 1603 arrival of James VI of Scotland as James I of England. He stopped using the "v" so as not to offend the English. He decreed that the heraldic red lion of Scotland be displayed on all important public buildings. As now, pubs were the most important of all. 20th Century photographs shown a splendid wooden lion standing guard aloft. Pity no one stood guard on the lion, as its whereabouts are currently unknown. There were sheep and other livestock farms on the Lion site and the present building has a Victorian extension to the rear. It must have been a bustling business.



Around Town

The Lion marked the end of medieval Axbridge as Compton Bishop, of which more in a future article, starts across Horn's Lane by its side. This old way out to the north was blocked first by the 1869-1963 Strawberry Line railway and then the 1969 bypass. It was easier going south anyway as it is downhill. At the other end of town, the Crown pub is on a late 15th Century site. In medieval times, Cheddar started at the present Station Road and the big cheeses probably lived at this end of the town.

One lost tradition (thank you kindly HSA and goodnight) is a pram race that started with suitable refreshment at the Lamb, went in first gear up to the Lion for another one, went much more quickly back down to the Crown ditto and finished up where it started. This may possibly have been the origin of the term "round" in drinking circles.

Until the 19th Century, Axbridge was the Pamplona of Somerset. The bull for Guy Fawkes bull-baiting set off from the Market Place, with the crowd wisely chasing it, rather than preceding it. It went up the present High Street and West Street, towards the Bristol coaching road. There it was eaten, possibly in the grounds of a public school. Such events were the origin of present-day property owners boarding up their premises for the passage of football supporters along town streets. Another local pastime, referred to in 1823, was horse racing. I would imagine the horses always won.

Going further back in time, there were medieval markets on Tuesdays and Satur-

days. Four seasonal fairs were held in Axbridge. These were on 2/3 February, Candlemas/St. Blaize, patron of wool combers; 25 March, a 1557 fair on Lady Day, when the labour market used to be held; 11 June, a 1279 fair of St. Barnabas; and 28 October, SS Simon and Jude, replaced by an annual blackberry fair and carnival now held in September. As in Bristol, in 1627 one paid on the nail so that payment was visible. Axbridge's nail is far more impressive with its massive stone base. At one stage, local trade tokens were legal tender and, back in the 10th and 11th Centuries, the town had had its own mint. With so many lambs around, that was probably very necessary. The mint contributed to the Danegeld used to buy off the Danish raiders from 991 to 1012. No one told the people that the Danes had stopped charging protection and the money was then quietly diverted to the army and navy. Not that William the Conqueror took any notice. Axbridge now has two Bank Houses, without even having a bank. That is possibly because it no longer has a river.

Getting back to Beer

John Elliott was a common brewer in Axbridge around 1794, although some said he was really quite refined. In 1801, home brewing still accounted for half the total supplies. In the 1840s and 50s, Charles Fowler was brewing in the present High Street on the western side of the old butcher's shop of whose entrance none less than John Betjeman waxed lyrical. In 1841, William Wear had also been brewing on the south side of the Square, possibly in the itinerant Bear Inn. All this despite the threat of Sunday morning closing, the banning of billiards for the rest of that day and a growing temperance movement.

After 1869, the Strawberry Line probably finished local brewing as a growing number of common brewers could provide a cheaper superior product. In 1840, there were more than 50,000 breweries nationwide, by 1880 only half that number and by 1900 only about 3,000. Common brewers went from producing nearly 60 per cent of supplies in 1861 to nearly 90 per cent in 1880. The beerhouse-brewer was almost extinct by the end of the 19th Century. Georges & Co. were proud to be delivering to Axbridge in 1921, when a gallon of beer cost 2½p, as compared to 6p in 1901, 5p in 1871 and three farthings or 0.3p in 1276. Georges & Co. bottled for J. Tanser & Co.

Well, that just about covers Axbridge. Next time, perhaps we could take a look at another bit of old Somerset.

Dr John

RCH presentation at the Cooper's Arms, Highbridge

ON Saturday 24th of January this year I took the train from Weston-super-Mare to the Cooper's Arms at Highbridge in Somerset.

I'd heard that the brewers of RCH, Graham Dunbavan and Paul Davey, were to be presented with the certification for their Old Slug Porter which gained a trophy at the SIBA Maltings Beer Festival at Newton Abbot last year.

It was also a chance to taste many of the RCH beers that we don't see very often. These included Firefork, a blend of my favourite real ale, Pitchfork, with Firebox. I also heard tell of other wonderful blends like Santa Fé and Double Header – that, unfortunately, was not on that day.

I started the day with a half pint of Firefork, followed by a half of Pitchfork. Then a drop of Cooper's at a mere 80p a half pint, followed by a pint of Old Slug Porter. Luckily I had this when the presentation took place to Graham and Paul after much deliberation as to what advert they were going to stand in front of.

Speeches and photocalls followed but soon it was back to the serious business of drinking, sampling the buffet, and pleasant conversation.



Graham Dunbavan (left) and Paul Davey (centre) receiving their award from George Hemmings

I had a final slug of Slug before it was time to cross the car park to the train station. On my return I have to admit to popping into Off The Rails for a half of RCH Hewish IPA

before my return home. This was the first time I'd been to the Cooper's and not seen any expensive nor strong beers, and yet the choice was perfect.

Robin E Wild

Fifth annual seasonal ales crawl

OUR annual crawl around town pubs in search of Christmas/Winter beers is always one of the most popular events in the local CAMRA calendar and this year was no exception. Our numbers were boosted for the evening by two new members and the appearance of Tom Newman, head of the newly-launched Newman's Brewery.

As ever, the starting point was **The Regency**, which can be depended upon to put on a good Christmas beer. This year it was Robin's Revenge from Gale's brewery of Horndean, Hampshire and was in very good condition. After a natter with Tom about the latest developments with the new brewery, we headed for **The London Inn**, where his Wolver Ale seems to have taken up permanent residency. Not a "seasonal" beer, but quite a few people had still not sampled our new local brew, so it seemed a good idea to have some straight from the barrel.

Unfortunately, only the first three of us managed to get a pint of it before it went off (my customary nippiness in getting to the

bar bore fruit once again) and there was no other real ale on. Result: Wolver Ale brewer resorting to a half of lager and the pub losing the sale of 14 pints as the remainder of our group left and headed for the next pub.

Better news up at **The White Hart**, where the gorgeous Christmas Cracker from Wickwar was on offer. This is a lovely spiced beer (possibly containing nutmeg or cinnamon?) and I was forced to depart from my game-plan of having just a solitary pint at each pub.

It is hard to leave The White Hart on a cold winter's night when they have a good beer on, but **The Dragon Inn** was beckoning. We were delighted to see a very good range of beers on offer, as we have come to expect at The Dragon. In addition to the solid core of regular beers, we were able to choose from more Wickwar Christmas Cracker, Exmoor Exmas Ale and Hop Back Winter Lightning.

Pick of the beers for me was probably Norman's Conquest from Cottage brewery.

Strictly speaking the ex Champion Beer Of Britain is not a seasonal beer, but this dark beer's strength (7 per cent ABV) and fruitiness make it ideal fayre for a cold winter's evening. In The Dragon we also picked up a few extra CAMRA members who joined us for the remainder of the evening.

Again, hard to leave the pub, but we could not conclude the evening without a visit to one of our favourite watering holes – **Off The Rails**. Here was another nice surprise in the guise of Yo Ho Ho, a 6 per cent ABV beer from the mighty Branscombe Vale brewery – a cracker of a beer, supported by Mutley's Dark, a really good, tasty mild from the Spinning Dog brewery of Hereford.

An excellent evening enjoyed by all, with a great choice of beers across the venues visited. Our thanks to the landlords who take the trouble to brighten up their offerings at Christmas by trying something a bit different.

Roll on 15 December, 2004!

Tim Nickolls

Island in the sea

By your Nailsea correspondent
Laurie Gibney

USE PUBS OR LOOSE PUBS! That is the clear message from a number of publicans in Nailsea and District, half of which had licences for sale recently. Reduced gallonage and spiralling costs are the main reasons for concern, but the added costs of the Licensing Act 2003 will not help.

The **Sawyers Arms**, which recently saw Sharp's Cornish Coaster (3.6%) as a guest, has been in the capable care of Ron Peters for many years. Ron is Chairman of Bristol Licensed Victuallers Association, sits on the board of the Licensed Victuallers Trading Association (West) as well as the committee of the British Institute of Innkeepers Wessex Region, and over the past seven years has been involved in consultation on the Licensing Act 2003. The Act transfers responsibility for alcohol licenses from magistrates to the local authorities, and consolidates them with entertainment and other licences. Small pubs would previously have paid £30 for a three-year license, but from next year the cost over three years could be as much as £200.

The **Blue Flame** at West End, near Nailsea is under threat of possible closure. It relies heavily on real ale enthusiasts from outside the hamlet of West End to keep it going. Regretably, it did not quite manage to get into the CAMRA Good Beer Guide 2004 following the reduction in available space. Landlord, Mick Davidson informs me there had been no change in beer quality, and I would agree. So don't let its omission from the Guide deter you from visiting! The partnership between Sue and Mick Davidson is being dissolved and the property is worth four times more if sold as a private house rather than as a pub. If Mike's plans for expansion of the pub do not succeed, this rustic gem of a pub may be lost, so please, **use it or loose it!**

Welcome to Paul Cheesley and Hugh Dash, the new landlords of the **Star Inn** at Tickenham. Paul is an ex Bristol City Football Club player and Hugh has previously been landlord of the **Good Intent** and **Broomhill** at Broomhill, Brislington, Bristol. Hugh tells me that they are joining the Unique Pub Company's Cask Ale Club to enable them to widen the choice of real ales. Bass, Courage Best, and Old Speckled Hen are likely to remain, while Wickwar ales and a rotating guest ale may occupy the other two pumps. The displaced Marston's Pedigree and Smiles Best may appear as guest ales.

Sad to hear that Bert Palmer, ex landlord

of the **White Lion** at Nailsea and the **Bell Inn** at Congresbury, passed away suddenly on November 27th aged 86. He enjoyed playing in a crib team at the Mizzymead Social Club every week until his death. Bert was President of both the Yatton & District Skittles and Darts Leagues and a leading light in the local Licensed Victuallers Association. Also, sad to hear that Richard Kefford, the present landlord of the **White Lion**, may be moving on. He has been there for thirteen years and as manager for the past eight years. The licensee is selling the remainder of his license period to move overseas. The White Lion dispenses Courage Best and Butcombe Bitter in good condition, is a small Unique Pub Company local pub and is unique in retaining its *Off Sales Counter* as well as two bars and a beer garden.

Bernadette O'Reilly, licensee of the **Moorend Spout** – where I recently enjoyed a pint of their guest ale, St. Austell Tribute (4.2%) – denied a rumour that her license was being terminated. On the back of the whole Innspired Pub Group being “offered” for sale, a local consortia had put in an “unsuccessful” bid to purchase the pub from Innspired. Thankfully, Bernadette will be at the Moorend Spout for some time to come.

The **Friendship**, a Pubmaster pub with no real ale in January 2004 and the **Royal Oak** are believed to be changing licensees. The **Courtyard Wine Bar** has changed supplier from Wolverhampton & Dudley to Interbrew. Their only real ale, Marston's Pedigree, has been retained, the white wheat beer Hoegaarden, at £3 per pint, has been added to the line up, and John Smith's keg has been replaced by Flowers IPA keg.

The management of the **Mizzymead Social Club** has changed. Richard Coles moved on to new pastures in Portishead at the end of 2003 and the new manager is Jackie Thursby who previously managed the **Hand Stadium** near Clevedon.

Tony Fey, landlord of the **Old Barn** at Wraxall, has had a fraught year fighting boundary battles with the adjacent hotelier, but Tony assures CAMRA that it is business as usual at the Old Barn and he looks forward to welcoming members there. The “Tickenham Farm Brewery” project is on hold due to other priorities.

Pints West is now available from the **Battleaxes** at Wraxall, the **Jubilee Inn** at Flax Bourton, the **George Inn** at Backwell and the **Backwell Village Club**. The

Battleaxes is primarily a carvery and restaurant but dispensing Bass and Smiles Best. The Jubilee Inn dispenses Bass, Courage Best and a guest ale, which was Fuller's London Pride at the time of my last visit. New landlords, Keith and Eileen Salter, hope to improve on the range of real ale. They ran a Good Beer Guide listed pub “Up North” previously. Andrew and Margaret Beardshaw at the George Inn dispense Bass, Butcombe Bitter, Ushers Best and a guest ale, which was Wychwood's Hobgoblin on a recent visit. Both the Jubilee Inn and the George Inn are on the A370 Bristol to Weston-super-Mare road and offer extensive food menus. The Backwell Village Club is a members-only club and offers a guest ale.

A visit to Scotland...

On a recent visit to Scotland I found a fair selection of real ales, including a good number of low-bitterness ales.

At Leith (home of the Royal Yacht Britannia) the **Old Dock Inn** had seven real ales including Caledonian 80/-, Cotleigh Tawny Bitter from Somerset, Major Bitter from the Riverside Brewery in Wainfleet, Ind Coope Burton Ale, Moorhouses Premium Draft Bitter from Burnley, Skinner's Betty Stoggs Bitter from Cornwall, and Young's Bitter from Wandsworth; the **Waterfront Wine Bar** had two real ales; and the **Malt and Hops** had six.

In Edinburgh, the **Guildford Arms** had ten real ales including Orkney Dark Island, which I particularly enjoy, and the **Café Royal** had four.

At Newhaven the **Starbank Inn** supplied an excellent meal, good service and of their eight real ales, the Belhaven Sandy Hunters Traditional Ale was very memorable.

Falkirk's **Wheatsheaf** (behind Woolworth's) is a gem of a pub where the bar server takes up half the floor space and the friendly landlord fetches a ladder to provide special single malts from the top shelf. Real ales on offer were Caledonian Deuchars IPA, Charles Wells Bombardier, and Harvestoun Bitter & Twisted. Also at Falkirk, a young person pub the **Behind the Walls** had Harvestoun Bitter & Twisted, Harvestoun Old Engine Oil, and five other real ales. The Forth & Clyde Canal side **Union Inn** had Harvestoun Bitter & Twisted and despite real ale signs outside the **Canal Inn** had no real ale. Wetherspoon's **Kirky Puffers** at Kirkintilloch, where our canal cruise made a lunch stop, provided Caledo-

nian Deuchars IPA, Caledonian 80/-, Harvestoun Bitter & Twisted, Harvestoun Schiehallian Real Cask Lager, as well as the usual offerings of Courage Directors and Shepherd Neame Spitfire.

The **Blackfriars** in Bell Street, Glasgow had an interesting selection of real ales including Atlas Zephyr Mild, Houston Peter's Well, Kelburn Carte Blanche, Tetley Bitter and also Hoegaarden, Leffe Blonde and Bruin on draught. Also in Glasgow the **Station Bar** to the North of the centre in Port Dundas Road fielded Atlas Three Sisters from Suffolk, Nethergate Best Bitter and Caledonian Deuchars IPA. Wether-spoon's **Counting House** in Glasgow's central George's Square provided Caledonian Deuchars IPA, 80/- and Golden Promise, as well as the usual offerings of Courage Directors and Theakston's Best.

Back to Bristol...

I thought I would look into the **Golden Guinea** in Guinea Street off Redcliffe Hill, and was pleased to find Bass and a beer from the Moles Brewery of Melksham were the regular real ale offerings. The nearby **Portwall Tavern** opposite St. Mary Redcliffe Church usually offers four good real ales now and their guest recently was Mauldon's Suffolk Pride at 4.8%.

And off to Australia...

Dressed in barman's apron and bow tie, I was a surprise guest at my sister's surprise seventieth birthday celebrations in Geraldton, Western Australia, where during a brief stay I was able to sample a few beers – not cask conditioned I fear, but a recent upsurge of interest has seen the creation of a number of micro-breweries in WA. One of these, Little Creatures at the fisherman's quay Fremantle (see their web page at www.littlecreatures.com.au) brews a delightfully full bodied and distinctive tasting Pale Ale at 5.2%, my favourite ale of the trip, plus Rogers Beer 3.8% and a Pilsner Lager. Instead of waiting at Perth Airport for connecting flights I spent a very pleasant couple of hours with my nephew and his sons at Little Creatures on the way home. My second favourite of the trip was Toohey's Old Black Ale at 4.9% with a very pleasant slightly caramel taste, closely followed by Cooper's bottle-conditioned Best Extra Stout, 6.3%, brewed in South Australia.

As the temperatures varied between 20°C at night and 40°C during the day, chilled beers were the norm. Hahn Premium Light Lager at a mere 2.7%, brewed by Lion Nathan in Sydney, was surprisingly tasty for a low alcohol brew, but the staple diet of Western Australia, Swan Draught, Carlton

Draught, Emu Bitter, and VB Bitter, hardly touched the sides early in the evening in a typical Aussie bar during skimpy hour! Other ales enjoyed included Red Back Original Wheat Beer at 4.7% from Matilda Bay Brewing of Fremantle, James Squires Original (5%), an amber ale with a nutty finish, Strongarm Bitter (5%) brewed by J. Boag & Son of Tasmania (see www.boags.com.au) and Tasmanian Cascade Premium Lager (5.2%) with the extinct Tasmanian Tiger on its label and embossed on the bottles. Tasmanian Brewery dates from 1824 and is Australia's oldest Brewery. As a nightcap, Swan's rich, creamy, full bodied Stout at 7.4% went down well. I reserve judgement on Carlton's Beez Neez, which was a very sweet honey wheat beer.

And finally...

I am collecting names of people in Nailsea and District who would like to attend beer festivals or visit a few interesting pubs "as a group" by minibus, bus, train or shared cars, to avoid drinking and driving. You may contact me on 01275 798479 or by emailing laurie@lgibney.freeserve.co.uk.



Laurie Gibney



THE WINDMILL INN

PORTISHEAD ~ GENUINE FREEHOUSE

6

Real Ales in excellent condition including Courage Best, Bass, Butcombe Gold, RCH Pitchfork and 2 other guest ales.

In fact if you are not completely satisfied with the quality of the beer served, we will exchange it immediately for any other no questions asked.

The Windmill Inn is situated next to the Portishead Approach Golf Course on Nore Road. To contact us please ring 01275 843677.



To sample perfectly kept Butcombe Bitter and Butcombe Gold, plus numerous Guest Beers, why not visit a Butcombe Pub...

THE BELL

Hillgrove St
Bristol
01179 096612

OLD CROWN

Kelston
Nr Bath
01225 423032

RING O'BELLS

Compton Martin
(A368 between Blagdon
& West Harptree)
01761 221284

THE SWAN

Rowberrow
(Off A38 south
of Churchill)
01934 852371

THE LAMB

The Square
Axbridge

THE RED TILE

Cossington
Nr Bridgwater
01278 722333

GREAT BEER / GREAT FOOD / GREAT WINE / GREAT COMPANY
BUTCOMBE BREWERY...01275 472240

www.butcombe.com

PRIDE IN EVERYTHING WE BREW



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)

Pints Where?

Dear Sir,

Given that Pints West is the organ of Bristol & District Branch CAMRA, can anyone please explain how the hell every issue is readily available up here in Edinburgh, South-East Scotland?

Even the fact that I pick it up in a pub called The Guildford Arms doesn't explain that one.

Great magazine folks. Keep up the good work.

Cheers,
Les Thomson.
(by email)

There's two possible ways they got there. One of our branch members has a mate who moved up to Edinburgh a few years back, and he sends him up a few in his company's internal post each issue. Also, another has said: "Virgin Train drivers go all over the country and my driver friend in Derby/Lincoln takes 30 copies and gives them to many other drivers so it could be him." Ed.

Do Your Level Best

Dear Sir,

I don't think that the Bristol area is doing enough for disabled customers who want to eat and/or drink locally. The UK-wide website www.yourlevelbest.com, which lists several thousand accessible establishments, shows how patchy the local provision is.

You have a reasonable choice in central Bristol, but only one in Chew Stoke and one in Clifton.

To qualify for free inclusion on www.yourlevelbest.com, places must have a wheelchair-accessible doorway plus a

disabled toilet. Simple.

I'm not interested in rating food or drink by range, price or quality – as a wheelchair-user, I just want to get inside.

Surely Bristol can do better than this?

I need help from local customers, restaurateurs and landlords. Phone 0208 255 4329 or email info@yourlevelbest.com, or contact me through the website.

As yourlevelbest is a large (3,000-plus listings) and high-profile website which has been featured in *The Guardian* and *Good Housekeeping*, it will be possible to produce a "league table" of UK-wide accessible pubs/restaurants region by region and I want the area to be fairly represented.

Mary Dixon,
London.

Mark Steeds, landlord of the Beaufort Arms in Hawkesbury Upton, points out that he has registered his pub with Mary Dixon's website. How about yours? Ed.

Crawls and Trails

Dear Steve

I read John Macrae's letter in the last Pints West with interest because it is coincident with the "Eight-Pub Crawls", or "Ale-Trails" as I prefer to call them, that I and a couple of colleagues from work have been organising for the past two and a half years.

We select eight pubs in a geographic sequence to end somewhere near the city centre (to assist the crawlers to arrange to get home). The pubs are selected firstly for quality of real ale and secondly for any historic or other interesting features. We pursue a trail every four months or so where between ten and twenty-six people (yes, we work for a large organisation!) follow a strict timetable of 45 minutes in each pub (so any latecomers know where they can find us).

Typically the choice extends to about 20 real ales over the evening.

So far we have trailed Hotwells & docks; St. Michael's Hill; city centre; Clifton; Bedminster & Southville; Old Market; and outside of Bristol we have trailed Bath (six pubs) and Chipping Sodbury (seven pubs).

The eight pubs in Westbury-on-Trym, as mentioned by John, are planned for the first half of 2004, and other future events include Frampton Cotterell/Coalpit Heath (my home town), Gloucester Road and Blackboy Hill/Clifton.

If anyone would like any of the Ale-Trail routes then I shall be pleased to pass them on. My contact details are: 117 Roundways, Coalpit Heath, South Glos, BS36 2LU, or by e-mail, mike@jackson5554.fsnet.co.uk.

Regards,
Mike Jackson.



Shut Up

Steve,

Can you help? I am trying to find out the name of a pub that has been shut and boarded up for about 15 years. It is situated on the corner of Days Road and Kingsland Road. If you or your fellow drinkers or readers can throw any light on this matter can you please contact me by email at nickkaterichards@btinternet.com?

Many thanks,
Nick Richards.

Free Plug

Dear Steve,

The Crown in Soundwell Road, Staple Hill has recently re-opened after many months closure. It has been completely refurbished and is now clean and fresh, somewhat larger, and will be a safe, friendly community boozier.

There is a digital jukebox, pool table, dart board, table football and traditional games available.

Currently we are serving House Bitter (3.7%) at £1.60 a pint, BOB from Wickwar at £2.20 a pint, and Exmoor Gold at £2.20 a pint.

I have run, and still do with the help of manager Julie Bundy, the Old Stillage in Redfield which was the first pub in Bristol to achieve the Cask Marque Accreditation.

A mention in Pints West to help us on our way would be appreciated.

Yours sincerely,
Tony Williams.
Consider it done. Ed.

Sign of the Times

Dear Steve,

The English pub sign is in danger!

I see badly thought out, computer generated images encased in sheets of inch thick plastic – all the rage, apparently, if the large breweries are to be believed...

I see dreadful images of cartoon-like, drunken Irish(?) hobos and cross-eyed, bright yellow ducks, downloaded from clip art web sites, done to death with garish colours, reversed (to avoid copyright laws), and alco-popped into the 21st century design school of the dull!...

I see traditional, historically important English pubs being treated to a "Changing Rooms" smaltzy colour scheme – a doomed dog dead Tuscan visual nightmare!...

A case in point is one sign I've seen recently outside probably Bristol's most historically important waterside pub. A few hundred years ago, Daniel Defoe was sat in this particular pub having a pint, when he heard an old salty sea dog tell a story about a ship wreck. Defoe would eventually turn this tale into the novel *Robinson Crusoe*. And how do we celebrate this historic Bristolian story? Well, let's just say, go and



take a look for yourselves – I'd be interested to hear your opinions!

There are some very good pub signs in Bristol and Bath, however – pubs where the landlord/lady actually gives a damn about the first visual point of contact between their business and its customers. It's worked for thousands of years before, and they see no reason to change.

Hanging signs themselves are generally believed to have been brought over by the Roman Legions, the Roman sign for tavern being a bush of vine leaves tied together above a doorway. This idea would change over the years, such as when someone who brewed their own beer realised that they had a surplus which they could sell – a large piece of bush was strung up on a pole outside a home to let others know what was on offer. Hence the pub name "The Bush".

At a time when very few people were literate, the sign was the only way to show people what trade you practiced. And it wasn't only innkeepers who used signs, everyone was at it. Signs became larger and more elaborate, some stretching across whole streets, and it wasn't until after the Great Fire of London when Charles II made new laws stating that signs should only be fixed to the walls of buildings. This sounded quite a good idea at the time, until on a wet January morning in 1712 one fell down in Fleet Street. It fell down pulling the front of the building with it, taking most of next door along the way and deciding the building opposite needed demolishing as well, this pub sign killed 40 people!

The pub sign often has many different meanings hidden within it. The pub "The Bear", for instance, was so called because of the vicious bear-baiting that often took place within the pub's yard (probably where the bouncy castle is today). This eventually changed when other pubs saw the fashion for bear-baiting change into a penchant for the finer points of bull-baiting ... and then

when all the town's pit bull terriers were knackered, and had lost their taste for blood, other, more sensitive customer-focused inn keepers would touch upon their more feminine side by introducing the subtle art of the brutal cock fight into the snug. Ah, those were the days!

The phrase "a cock and bull story" actually comes from two pubs, "The Cock" and "The Bull", two old coaching inns who were in competition with each other for trade.

The pub called "The White Hart" has origins stretching back even further, to Alexander The Great, who is supposed to have caught a pure white stag and placed a gold collar around its neck.

"The New Inn" is still a popular name for a pub, but dates back to when the church encouraged pilgrimages; originally run by priests who had to set up inns to house and feed the pilgrims on their travels. And when these inns became overcrowded, the priests had to set up a new inn.

"The Rising Sun" probably dates back to when Edward III broke with tradition and had a rising sun on his coat of arms rather than the lion which was used by most kings of England. Later, when Edward grabbed the throne of France, he added the Fleur De Lys onto his coat of arms, which is also seen today on pub signs.

"The Royal Oak", a hugely popular name for a pub, was so called because Charles II once hid in an oak tree to escape the parliamentary army at Boscombe.

One sign that I recently tried but failed to get, was the Cornubia in Bristol, a great little pub with a name that deserved some research. The Cornubia is the name of a ship which sailed from Cardiff, and sank off the coast of Spain killing all on board; but Cornubia is actually the Latinised name for Cornwall, and with Cornwall's links to Brittany in France, and Bristol's maritime history with both places, I really wanted that pub sign.

Anyway, with every neon, flashing, American diner sign blasting out its "Buy me! Buy me!" message, it's great to think that there are still some pubs that still prefer hand-painted signs, by individual, professional artists, and great breweries like Bath Ales who also understand its importance.

You can see some of my work at The Old Duke in King Street, Bristol, Ye Shakespeare in Victoria Street, The Hare On The Hill in Kingsdown, The

Foresters in Gloucester Road, The Waldergrave Arms in Chewton Mendip, and The Sheppy Inn, Godney. I even have some on show on my web site at www.pubsigndesign.com.

Yours,

Graeme Robbins.

P.S. I'm in the middle of painting a new "Myrtle Tree" pub sign on top of the 'old' "Aunties" pub sign which I bought off a bloke in a flea market in Bath, who insisted he was related to Lord Byron!

Uninspired?

Reference: "Chain Of Pubs On Sale For £350m" – Evening Post 17/02/04.

Dear Sir,

With reference to the above article, I for one will let out a huge cheer when Innspired are no more. Having fought them for some form of basic justice for the past four years, I hope the directors of that company suffer the same horrors that they visited on many of their tenants.

In August 2002 my family were forced onto the street by their bailiffs, and given a total of less than 24 hours to remove our belongings or lose them.

Our youngest daughter was a year old and we had nowhere to go. I spent three hours in the shop next door to our pub, (while Innspired picked over the bones of our business, changed the locks and boarded up the windows), trying to make arrangements for my family's immediate future.

I know I am not alone when I relate this tale. Throughout our time in the pub we watched other decent folk go to the wall in a similar manner.

The problem has always been that as licensees of these pub companies, you have no protection under the Housing Acts or the Landlords and Tenants Acts. These were both 'beefed-up' in the seventies and eighties to curb the excesses of unscrupulous landlords. What many pub tenants fail to realise is that Parliament, through the powerful 'Beer Committee' sought, (and succeeded) to 'protect' the pub companies from the improved provisions offered by the amendments.

A pub company can still resort to Victorian legislation to evict a tenant without the need for police or court intervention! The poor tenant has no protection in the amended acts!

I have written on this subject before and will continue to strive for a better deal for our pub tenants. Good riddance to InnSpired, its Directors and Business Development Managers. I shall await with interest their reincarnation under another banner and pray that they may never be able to visit their unjust practices on future, unsuspecting licensees.

Yours sincerely,

R. Barnes,
Weston-super-Mare.



RCH Brewery

**West Hewish
Nr Weston-super-Mare
Tel: 01934-834447**

Brewers of award-winning beers including

- ♦ **P.G. Steam**
- ♦ **Pitchfork**
- ♦ **East Street Cream**
- ♦ **Firebox**

Guest Beers and Beer Festivals catered for

Not content with closing just the Courage Bristol Brewery...

CAMRA, the Campaign for Real Ale, has criticised plans by Scottish & Newcastle, Britain's biggest brewing group, to close the Fountainbridge Brewery in Edinburgh ending 255 years of brewing tradition in Scotland.

CAMRA voiced its concerns over the future of real ale brands such as McEwan's 80/- which will now be brewed at Caledonian Brewery as part of a deal which creates a new 'Caledonian Brewing Company'.

John Holland, a Director of CAMRA, said, "This is a complicated deal and it's difficult to see through all the likely implications for consumer choice and the beer market generally, but we are certainly concerned for the future of the one remaining McEwan's real ale, 80/- which will now be brewed by Caledonian. We can see the potential benefits for the distribution of the existing Caledonian beers, such as Deuchars IPA in the off-trade, but will the real ale version of McEwan's get the same high

levels of marketing support or will it be left to wither and eventually be axed?

"S&N have a history of broken promises and brewery closures including the Matthew Brown Brewery in Blackburn, which S&N once declared to be 'sacrosanct' but went on to close nevertheless. We also saw the closure of the famous Courage Brewery in Bristol only a few years ago. So what's next for the UK beer industry? It seems our brewing heritage is being slowly eroded as the industry becomes ever more focused on the global market.

"I wish the management at the Caledonian Brewing Company the best of luck with the deal. CAMRA has a good relationship with them and we have seen them take Caledonian from strength to strength since Deuchars IPA won Champion Beer of Britain in 2002. We've called for a meeting with the bosses at S&N, so we can judge properly what the outcome of this deal will mean for Britain's 15 million beer drinkers."

CAMRA seeks to boost lobbying power

THE CAMPAIGN FOR REAL ALE has applied for special consumer group status that would allow it to fast-track complaints to the Department of Trade and Industry.

The Enterprise Act gives designated groups such as the Consumers' Association increased powers to lobby the government when they believe the public interest is under threat.

"We believe we will be able to lobby far more effectively on key issues if we have this special status," said Mike Benner, head of campaigns and communication for CAMRA.

CAMRA currently supports the Society of Independent Brewers' (SIBA) campaign, "Access to Market", which aims to persuade the major pub estates to routinely stock at least one beer from a smaller brewer.

CAMRA has also launched its own initiative, called "Local Beer for Local Pubs", which aims to get at least one locally brewed beer into pubs which stock cask ale.



BELGIAN BEER SPECIALISTS

We also offer a great range of beers from Germany, the UK and around the World, plus glasses and mixed cases.

Just a click away!



www.euro-beer.co.uk

tel: 01942 870 451

The Bag O'Nails

141 St. George's Road, Hotwells,
Bristol BS1 5UW Tel: (0117) 9406776

A Real Ale Pub

**Bristol & District CAMRA
Pub Of The Year 2000**

At least 12 different real ales a week

Imported German wheat beers
English bottle-conditioned beers
Unpasteurised imported bottled lagers

Web : www.bagonails.org.uk
Email : pub@bagonails.org.uk

Moor Beer is Best

OLD FREDDY WALKER from Moor Beer Company, Bridgwater, Somerset was named as the Supreme Champion Winter Beer of Britain 2004 by a panel of judges at CAMRA's National Winter Ales Festival held at the end of January.

Old Freddy Walker is a 7.3 per cent ABV Barley Wine and described in the 2004 edition of the Good Beer Guide as a "rich, dark, strong ale with a fruity complex taste, leaving a fruitcake finish".

At the announcement, Mike Benner, Head of Campaigns, congratulated the Moor Beer Company on their victory. He said, "It's an incredible achievement for everyone at Moor. There are many hundreds of old ales, barley wines, stouts, porters and other winter beer styles so the competition is always stiff."

On hearing the news, Arthur Frampton, owner of the Moor Beer Company, said, "I am overjoyed. It's a great result and a reward for all the hard work we have put in at the brewery."

Old Freddy Walker is named after an elderly real ale lover in the village of Ashcott, near Bridgwater where the brewery is based.

The silver prize went to Gale's brewery, which is based in Hampshire, for their superb Festival Mild. Derek Beaves, Head of Marketing at Gale's, said, "Both myself and the brewing team at Gale's are delighted to have won the silver prize. Festival is always popular at beer festivals and flies the flag for real mild beers."

The bronze award went to Shepherd Neame brewery from Kent for their Original Porter.

Champion Winter Beer of Britain 2004

Supreme Champion: Moor Old Freddy Walker (Somerset)
Silver: Gale's Festival Mild (Hampshire)
Bronze: Shepherd Neame Original Porter (Kent)

Category Winners

Old Ales & Strong Milds category

Gold: Gale's Festival Mild (Hampshire)
Silver: Sarah Hughes Dark Ruby Mild (West Midlands)
Bronze: Spectrum Old Stoatwobbler (Norfolk)
Bronze: Theakston Old Perculier (North Yorkshire)

Stouts & Porters category

Gold: Shepherd Neame Original Porter (Kent)
Silver: O'Hanlon's Port Stout (Devon)
Bronze: Crouch Vale Anchor Street Porter (Essex)

Barley Wines category

Gold: Moor Old Freddy Walker (Somerset)
Silver: Robinson's Old Tom (Cheshire)
Bronze: Big Lamp Blackout (Newcastle upon Tyne)



THE BEAR INN

Free House

Wiveliscombe
 Taunton
 Somerset TA4 2JY
Telephone and fax:
(01984) 623537



Andy and Heather Harvey invite you to sample the local ales, the home-made food, and a real local pub atmosphere.

We organise specialist ale drinkers' weekends including visits to Cotleigh and Exmoor breweries, with bed and full English breakfast, provided for £20 per person per night.

Reductions available for group bookings.

Enjoy a Warm Welcome
 and a Pleasant Atmosphere

The Annexe Inn

Seymour Road, Bishopston, Bristol
 Tel. 0117 9493931

A Real Ale Pub

- 7 Real Ales
- Large conservatory (available for private hire)
- Family room (including baby changing facilities)
- Enclosed garden open throughout the year
- Disabled access
- Lunchtime and early evening snacks
 - including children's menu -
- Pool table
- All TV sports events covered
- Relaxed, friendly atmosphere

Monday Night is Quiz Night
 You can also enjoy various promotions
 and special offers during the year

Open Lunchtimes & Evenings
All day Saturday, Sunday & Bank Holidays

Spingo World Cup

A LONG cherished ambition of the author has been to visit the *Blue Anchor* brew pub in Helston, Cornwall, which has been brewing it's own beer since the 15th century and is renowned for its strong beers known as "Spingo".

So it was that on a Friday in November, a group consisting of myself, Vince and Marilyn Murray, and Richard Walters, found ourselves crossing the Tamar with the purpose of meeting up with a friend, Rob Wilson, a Yorkshire man temporarily based in Cornwall, to do a spot of sightseeing and, of course, some pleasant bevvying.

After picking up Rob at the appropriately bleak Bodmin Parkway station we backtracked slightly to visit the renowned *Blisland Inn*, CAMRA's National Pub of the Year in 2000, for lunch. A splendid range of beers, featured breweries including Skinners, Redruth and Garston, whose Goodnight Vienna, an 8% ABV beer was only £2.20, washed down the home cooked food and the large iguana in the family room was a further attraction.

Heading further south, we fitted in a visit to Padstow, spotting Rick Stein's restaurant, where the prices seemed not unreasonable, and then several of us retired to slake our thirst in the *Golden Lion Inn*, which served a fine pint of Sharp's. Movie aficionados would be forgiven for being reminded of the cult British movie "The Wicker Man", as the Golden Lion is the hub of Padstow's Mayday celebrations, including the renowned "'Obby 'Orse", which is hopefully less sinister than it's movie counterpart!

With our spirits duly enhanced we headed for Newquay to visit *Skinner's Ale House*, which serves as the brewery tap for the Truro based brewery. An oasis of real ale that is situated just off the main drag, sadly it was easy to see why the Ale House is the only current Good Beer Guide entry for Newquay, with much of the competition and the town centre in general being somewhat down-market. This is not to detract from a very pleasant pub.

Having completed a busy afternoon we headed to Helston, where we were to stay in the Blue Anchor's own B&B, a relatively new feature two doors away from the pub. The rooms proved to be immaculate, and each contained a television. This would not normally be an issue, and indeed Vince had admitted to a certain embarrassment when asking about TV provision (at my insistence) when he booked the rooms! But as the next day was Saturday, 22nd November, and as the Rugby Union World Cup final was taking place at 9 a.m., I felt on this occasion it was essential!

After a visit to a local curry house we retired to the Blue Anchor itself, where three beers were available, "Jubilee", a fairly new brew and the weakest of the beers at 4.6 per



The Blue Anchor in Helston

cent ABV, "Middle", a good traditional mid-brown ale of 5.1 per cent, and, happily, "Special", a mighty dark concoction packed with flavour at 6.7 per cent.

We occupied the rear room, which is one of two served from a single bar. A third room across the corridor is also available. It was good to see a wide range of people of all ages using the pub, which is in itself something of a local institution. The only thatched roof building in central Helston, it sits towards the bottom of Coinagehall Street, which is a main thoroughfare (beware of the very deep gutters when crossing the road or parking).

As you would expect of a 15th century building, the pub is chock full of character, and each flagstone seems to be a different height to the next one! The main (front) bar features a most interesting list of the unfortunates who were executed in Cornwall in the 19th century, giving name, date and crime! The skittle alley at the rear of the pub is now a music venue, a sign over the stage proclaiming "Spingo Rock". It has the considerable benefit of its own bar, which includes real ales. It's far enough from the main area of the pub for the music not to be a distraction to those occupying the bars.

After a very pleasant session we retired to the B&B, content as we had discovered that we could watch the Rugby in the pub itself in the morning.

After a splendid breakfast we rushed around to the Blue Anchor in time for the game, as the appearance of a TV was an innovation for the pub the attendance was relatively small and we were able to procure the best seats. We started drinking coffee (well it was 9 o'clock in the morning) but as

the tension and excitement mounted we switched to "Middle". One of the locals declared that he would celebrate each England score with a pint, a promise he kept, although England's failure to score in the second half proved something of a trial to him and he was forced to switch tactics rather than go without beer! Naturally, as the game reached its fantastic conclusion and the World cup was awarded the celebrations were considerable

Of course when we emerged from the Blue Anchor it was still relatively early so we headed off to Falmouth, a town new to all of us. I visited the splendid National Maritime Museum before catching up with Rich and Rob in the *Seven Stars*, located very near the town square. A splendidly down-to-earth traditional pub, the Seven Stars is listed on the CAMRA National Inventory of historic pubs and serves Bass and Skinner's beers straight from the barrel. Rob was bemused when informed by the barman that no local beers were stocked. When he said that he thought Skinners was on he received the reply, "Skinner's isn't local – it's from Truro!"

We finished our stop in Falmouth by sampling the splendid local pasties and met up with Vince and Marilyn, who reported favourably on the *Quayside Inn* which was serving a range of eight real ales. Also enjoyed was the *Mason's Arms*.

Next we headed out to St. Agnes where we visited the *Driftwood Spars*, where we tasted the Cuckoo Ale, which is brewed on the premises. The drinking area comprises two very different rooms – you step from the front (traditional) bar through a door into what is seemingly a totally different building,

airy light and modern. The spirit range here was also, I thought, worth a mention in dispatches, being very wide ranging.

Next stop was the *Star Inn* at Crowlas. It was apparent as soon as we walked through the door that this was a quality pub, and we enjoyed several excellent pints, Cain's Dark Mild and Cotleigh's Old Buzzard being particularly praiseworthy. Forgoing the pleasure of visiting the restaurant of Chris Old, a member of the victorious England cricket team of 1981, we had tea at the pleasant *Queens Arms* at Breage.

So it was back to the Blue Anchor to end a truly memorable day, the party atmosphere being enhanced by a very passable band playing rock classics in the skittle alley which saw the rare sight of Messrs. Walters, Cummings and Murray dancing the evening away. I will certainly never forget my first visit to the Blue Anchor – it's a pub where you need to stay for a while, to chat to the locals and to soak up the atmosphere, and of course, for the very distinctive beer. I'm looking forward to my next visit already!

Phil Cummings



Delight in the Blue Anchor for our party as we celebrate seconds after the final whistle

The thirteenth CHIPPENHAM BEER FESTIVAL *April 23rd and 24th 2004* Studio Hall, Olympiad Leisure Centre, Chippenham

Friday 23rd : 6 - 11 p.m. (admission £4)
Saturday 24th : 11 a.m. - 3.30 p.m. (admission £3), and
7 - 11 p.m. (admission £4)

- Over 80 real ales, ciders & perries all served at cellar temperature in an air-conditioned hall.
- Admission for eve sessions by advanced tickets sale only
- Admission includes festival glass and programme
- Food and soft drinks available at all sessions.
- Only 5 minutes from the train and bus stations
- £2 of **free beer** tokens to CAMRA members per session (even if you join at the festival)
- Live music on both evening sessions:
 - Friday evening, **Sleepwalkers**
 - Saturday evening, **Bob the Imposter**

Tickets available from:

The Olympiad Leisure Centre, Chippenham, or
PO Box 2058, Calne, Wilts SN11 8TP (please include an SAE,
Cheques made payable to CAMRA North West Wilts)



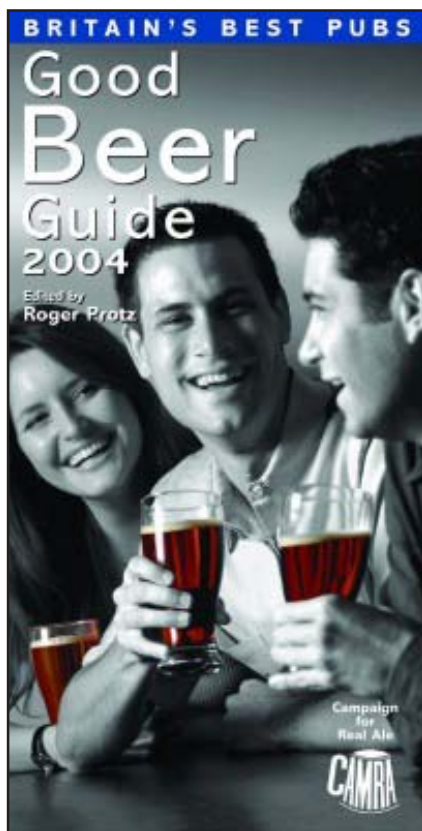
Good Beer Guide 2004

CAMRA, the Campaign for Real Ale recently launched the 31st edition of the award-winning Good Beer Guide.

This best-selling guide highlights the top 4,500 real ale pubs in Britain and offers a unique directory to every brewery in the country, large or small, with details of all the cask-conditioned and bottle-conditioned beers they brew, together with unique tasting notes (around 500 breweries in all, 35 being new this year).

Each pub entry, surveyed on a regular basis over the year by CAMRA members, gives a detailed summary of why the pub has been included in the Good Beer Guide and highlights information on the pub's facilities for families and the disabled, history, architecture, food, accommodation, local places of interest and, of course, the beer!

There are almost 900 *new* pub entries in the 2004 Guide and each entry has been visited throughout the year by CAMRA members. There is no charge for entry into the Good Beer Guide. These elite pubs are selected by the real pub goer (unlike some guides, some of which may only send a questionnaire and are never visited). The pubs that appeared in the previous edition have all been updated with new information for 2004, making this the most up-to-date



and comprehensive guide to British pubs in today's book market.

An entry in the Good Beer Guide is a stamp of approval from CAMRA and the Bristol & District branch take this seriously. The number one consideration for entry is consistently good quality real ale. We endeavour to survey all year round to check on this and hold an open and democratic selection meeting. We certainly don't rest on our laurels, and there are always changes in the pub entries each year.

Space is limited in the Guide, and each branch of CAMRA has its own quota of places it can fill. Inevitably if a hitherto unremarkable pub shines out as a gem for real ale worthy of recognition in the Guide, another must unfortunately make way for it, possibly even one whose own beers may still be just as good as ever.

If you would like to assist us in our never ending quest to find the best real ale pubs, please come along to a branch meeting (see the diary opposite for details).

As well as being on sale in most book shops (just £12.99), the Good Beer Guide is also available at Bristol & District branch meetings. There is a substantial discount in the price for CAMRA members if you buy from us direct.

NATIVE SPECIES	SEASONAL VISITORS
Tap Bitter 3.5%alc Smooth malty flavour & clean bitter finish	Holy Moley 4.7%alc Spring beer which is truly heaven 'scent'
Best Bitter 4.0%alc Well balanced, golden coloured bitter	Barleymole 4.2%alc Straw coloured Summer ale
Molennium 4.5%alc Deep amber coloured premium ale	Molegrip 4.3%alc Rich ruby red, malty Autumn brew
Landlord's Choice 4.5%alc Dark, strong and smooth hoppy bitter	Moel Moel 6.0%alc Wonderfully warming Winter ale
Molecatcher 5.0%alc Copper coloured ale with spicy hop aroma	

*Wiltshire premium beers
brewed in the traditional way*

Moles Brewery
Melksham, Wilts SN12 6TJ
Tel: 01225 708842

www.molesbrewery.com

The Coronation, 18 Dean Lane, Southville, Bristol BS3 1DD

The Coronation offers a warm welcome and a full range of Hop Back beers that include the multi-award-winning Summer Lightning (GBBF champion strong bitter) plus monthly specials and guest ales.

**Saturday special: noon to 6pm
all Hop Back beers @ £1.50 a pint.**

**New menu available for eat in or take away
evenings only.**

**Sunday lunchtime: complimentary
cheese board.**

**All beer available to take away in polypins and minipins
at superb discount prices.**
Summer Lightning £24 for 18 pints & £46.50 for 36 pints.
Order by ringing Matt on 0117 940 9044.

Past editions of PINTS WEST on-line

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. It is also the place where you can find past editions of Pints West, from edition 50 onwards. Number 50 also contains a potted history of Pints West from the very first edition in 1989, when it was then known as Avon Drinker.

Letters: please send any correspondence to *Pints West Editor, Steve Plumridge, Garden Flat, 6 Royal York Villas, Clifton, Bristol BS8 4JR*

or by email to

steve.plumridge@bristol.ac.uk

Seven thousand copies of Pints West are distributed free to pubs in and around the cities of Bristol and Bath.

Advertising: contact Steve Plumridge (details above) or call – evenings or weekends – (0117) 9743242.

Current rates are:

6cm x 6cm £28 6cm x 8cm £36

8cm x 9cm £42 9cm x 12cm £65

Other sizes occasionally available, but not guaranteed.

Published by the Bristol & District Branch of the Campaign for Real Ale, Feb 2004©
Next edition: May 2004 (probably).

Pinching: any written article in this publication may be reproduced *provided the source, including the contributor's name where applicable, is stated.* (No lifting of logos or pictures without prior permission.)

Subscriptions: to be put on a mailing list (for UK addresses) send a cheque for £2.50 only to the editor, made payable to Steve Plumridge.

CAMRA Good Beer Guide: suggestions for future entries, and comments on existing ones, can be made to our GBG Coordinator, Richard Walters, care of the editor (above).

Further information on all aspects of CAMRA can be had from Ray Holmes on (0117) 9605357 (h).

Trading Standards Officers: contact numbers for problems such as consistent short measures, no price lists...

Bristol: 0117 9223444

S. Glos: 01454 624000

Glos: 01452 426201

N. Somerset: 01934 632026

B.A.N.E.S: 01225 396755



Diary

Diary of the Bristol & District branch of CAMRA.

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

Tuesday 9th March: Trip to Mendips. Start at the Cornubia, Bristol, 6.45pm.

Wednesday 10th March: Committee meeting, Cornubia, 8pm.

Sunday 14th March: GBG selection meeting, Horts City Tavern, Bristol, 1pm.

Wednesday 17th March: Beer Festival wash-up meeting, Cornubia, 8pm.

Wednesday 24th March: Branch meeting, Horts City Tavern, 8pm.

Branch meetings are generally held on the fourth Wednesday of the month and are open to all members (and would-be members). Committee meetings are usually the second Wednesday of the month. They are open meetings in that any branch member can attend, space permitting, as an observer (rather than as a participant).

For more information on local events either attend our branch meetings or check the diary section on our web site www.camrabristol.org.uk



THANKS TO THIS ISSUE'S CONTRIBUTORS

Norman Spalding
Freya McLuckie
Richard Brooks
Erica McLuckie
Phil Cummings
Laurie Gibney
Duncan Shine
Steve O'Shea
Robin E Wild
Vince Murray
Lesly Huxley
Tim Nickolls
Pete Bridle
Dr John

Editor: Steve Plumridge

Views expressed in Pints West are those of the individual authors and not necessarily supported by CAMRA.

Inclusion of an advertisement does not necessarily imply endorsement by CAMRA.

Hounsfield Printing

57 Old Market Street
Old Market
Bristol BS2 0ER

www.hounsfieldprinting.activenet.co.uk
Tel: (0117) 925 5541

Join over 70,000 CAMRA members now

Pints West 61

Bristol & District (AVN)

CAMRA MEMBERSHIP GIVES

Monthly copies of What's Brewing, CAMRA's entertaining, informative and highly-regarded newspaper.

Generous discounts on CAMRA products and publications (including the best-selling Good Beer Guide).

Advance notice of beer festivals throughout the U.K. and Europe - and discounts when you get there. Many festivals allow CAMRA members in at reduced rates or free.

An invitation to join in CAMRA's activities such as brewery trips, meetings and socials.

ABOVE ALL, you will belong to a flourishing consumer movement which is acting as a champion for beer drinkers and pub users. CAMRA has been hailed the most successful consumer organisation in Europe.

Just fill in the form below and send, with a cheque payable to CAMRA, to:

Bristol & District CAMRA Membership Secretary,
238 High Kingsdown, Bristol BS2 8DG.

Rates are:- Single: £16 Joint (at same address): £19

Under 26, Unemployed, Disabled, Pensioner: £9

Joint pensioners (at same address): £12

Name(s).....

.....

Address.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....



Where did you pick up this copy of Pints West?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....



**NOW AVAILABLE
THROUGHOUT BRISTOL AND
THE SOUTH WEST**

