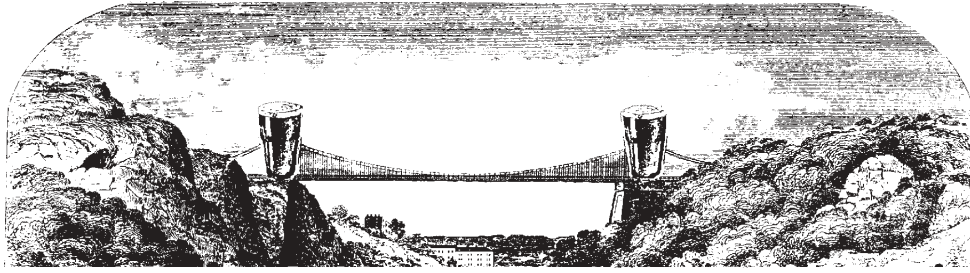




CAMPAIGN
FOR
REALALE

AWARD-WINNING



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REALALE

www.camrabristol.org.uk

PINTS WEST T

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

Smiles brewery closed

Shock news recently has been the closure of Bristol's famous Smiles Brewery following a short period in administration. Staff have been unceremoniously dismissed, and production of the Smiles beer range has

been transferred to the Highgate Brewery in Walsall. The future of the brewery site in Colston Yard remains uncertain, though the Brewery Tap seems to be safe. Richard Brooks takes up the story inside on page 5.

Join our fight



to save top local real ale pub

THE Campaign for Real Ale, concerned local residents, and former pub regulars, need your help. Suddenly and without warning, following a normal evening's trading, the Rose & Crown in Iron Acton closed. By morning a notice had appeared in the window. It simply stated: "We have now closed, thank you for your custom over the years."

The Rose & Crown has been recognised for many years as an outstanding example of a freehouse, a pub strongly supporting real ales from independent breweries, and a regular entry in the Good Beer Guide.

Now a local action group, with support from CAMRA, is attempting to save their pub. Can you add your voice? See inside for further details.

CAMRA, the Campaign for Real Ale

What is it?



CAMRA is an independent, voluntary, consumer organisation. Membership is open to any individual, though corporate entities such as breweries and pubs are not members. Most of its work is done by volunteers at a local level, reinforcing national drives.

The Campaign was founded in the early seventies with the aim of restoring drinkers' rights and promoting consumer choice. A great deal has been achieved over the years and CAMRA has made a major contribution to getting a fairer deal for pub users.

CAMRA is financed through membership subscriptions, sales of products such as books and sweatshirts, and from the proceeds of beer festivals. We are a not-for-profit company, receiving no funding from the brewing industry other than a limited amount of advertising in our monthly national newspaper *What's Brewing* and local newsletters such as this.

CAMRA's mission is to act as champion of the consumer. It aims to:

- Maintain consumer rights.
- Promote quality, choice and value for

money.

- Support the public house as a focus of community life.
- Campaign for greater appreciation of traditional beers, ciders and perry as part of national heritage and culture.
- Seek improvements in all licensed premises and throughout the brewing industry.
- CAMRA also seeks to promote real cider and perry through a sub-organisation called APPLE. Like ale, these are traditional British drinks and, like ale, the traditional product is very different from the 'dead' version.

While CAMRA is a single-industry group, it has a very wide area of campaigning interests. At present, campaigns we are actively pursuing include the following:

- Improved competition and choice in the

brewing industry.

- Preserving the British pub.
- Seeking a fairer tax system for smaller brewers.
- Seeking fuller information about the beer we drink, such as ingredients labelling.
- Reform of licensing law.
- Fighting take-overs and mergers.
- Encouraging higher standards of pub design.
- Encouraging brewers to produce a wide range of beer styles such as porter, mild and stout, in addition to their bitters.

Real ale, real beer, traditional beer, cask ale, cask-conditioned beer — whatever you prefer to call it — this is of course the Campaign's top priority. It is no exaggeration to say that CAMRA saved real ale, and as a result saved many independent breweries. No new ale breweries were set up in the UK for the fifty years before we were founded. There are now around 300 new brewers producing real ale, part of a massive real ale revival.

In total there are currently around 75,000 CAMRA members, from all walks of life. If you haven't already, why not add your voice to that of the most successful consumer organisation Europe has seen? Fill in that membership form inside the back page now.

And what is Real Ale anyway?

Definition

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

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

Ingredients

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

Dispense

Real ale is usually delivered to the pub cellar in either metal or wooden casks. The cask is placed on a 'stillage' in a horizontal position to allow the hops and other sediment which results from fermentation to settle in its belly. A wooden bung on the side of the cask is pierced to allow excess carbon dioxide gas

resulting from the fermentation process to escape. As with home-made beers and wine, real ale is truly a living liquid; the live yeast cells will continue working to convert the natural sugars into alcohol, and develop the flavour, long after it has left the brewery.

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

Distinction from other beers

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

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

and dispensed using the same gas pressure; gas tends to dissolve in the beer in these conditions, and to emerge in the drinker's stomach, causing discomfort and embarrassment.

Real ale without a barrel!

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

Strength

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

If you haven't ... try some!

Norman Spalding

The fight to save the Rose and Crown

The Bristol & District branch of CAMRA, the Campaign for Real Ale, has joined forces with concerned local residents and former pub regulars, to attempt to save the well known and much loved Rose and Crown in Iron Acton.

The pub – an inn since 1680 – closed suddenly and without warning after 11 p.m. on Tuesday, 23rd November, 2004.

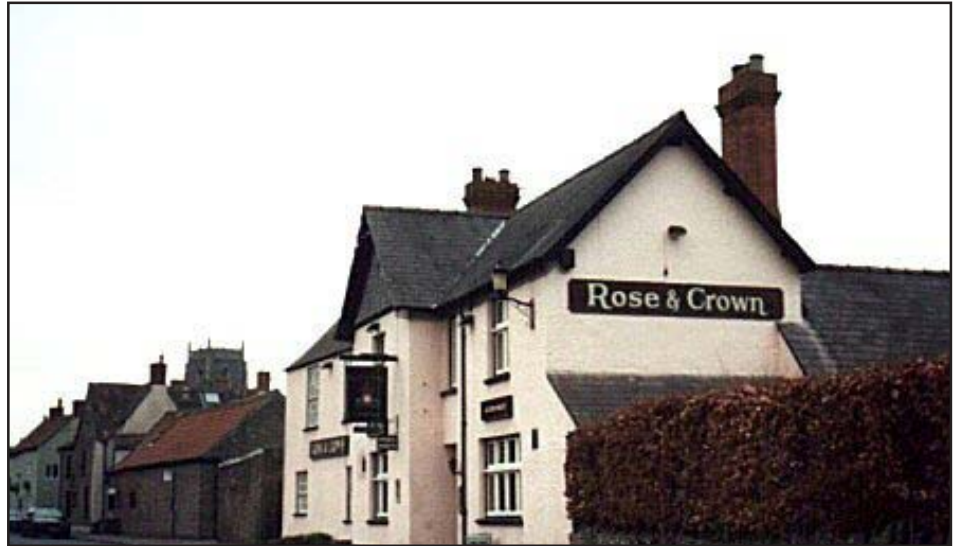
A notice appeared in the window overnight saying “We have now closed, thank you for your custom over the years”.

Allan and Gail Didcott had run the Rose and Crown as a free house since buying it in 1985. It was a strong supporter of independent real ales, especially from Uley brewery – indeed it was the only regular outlet for these fine beers in our area.

It had appeared in each of the last 12 editions of the Good Beer Guide. Unusually, the pub did not open at lunchtimes, except on Sundays, and never served food other than a few filled rolls.

We contacted Allan about a week after the pub closed to seek clarification. He said that they had been unhappy for some time with falling turnover, and poor profit margins, and they had now decided that the pub was “no longer viable”. They had closed without warning to “avoid the fuss”. He said they he would definitely not be reopening and that he doubted that it would ever be a pub again. He felt that it would not generate a good enough price either sold or leased out. He was also reluctant to leave his home.

Shortly after that conversation, a number of people contacted us to express their dismay at the closure. They also disagree strongly with the claim that the pub was unviable. One said that “Iron Acton had lost its heart and soul”. Several said that they had moved to the village to be close to the pub. There are



two other pubs in Iron Acton but they are very different in character.

It has now been decided to hold a public meeting to establish how much support can be mustered, and to explore all possible ways to get the pub reopened. All interested people are welcome to attend and have their say.

The meeting will be jointly hosted by CAMRA and the local action group. Allan and Gail will also be invited to attend and to speak, if they wish. Details of the meeting are as follows:

**MEETING: 7.45 pm
Monday, 14th March
at the Village Hall,
High Street, Iron Acton.**

Further information can be obtained from Vince Murray (CAMRA) by emailing Vincent.Murray@blueyonder.co.uk or from Hilary Connors (action group) by emailing hilary@connors499.fsnet.co.uk. Please head your email either “Rose and Crown” or “Iron Acton”.

We obviously cannot predict the outcome of this meeting, but it is likely just to be the start of things to come. To keep abreast of developments, or to offer

advice or support, please do email the above contacts, and keep an eye on the Bristol & District CAMRA branch web site at www.camrabristol.org.uk.

If you do not have access to email or the web, then you can keep in contact by post — send your correspondence to Vince or Hilary, care of the editor at: **Garden Flat, 6 Royal York Villas, Clifton, Bristol BS8 4JR.**

To remind everyone just how good the Rose and Crown was, we have reprinted on the back page a pub profile which first appeared in Pints West in 1998 — the only things that had changed by 2004 were that Whitbread IPA had been replaced by Timothy Taylor’s Landlord (a change for the better most would agree!), and that Uley Old Spot had replaced Olde Merryford.

We have only a handful of genuine free houses left around here (we lost the Old Fox at Eastville last year) and can ill afford to see them close. If you care about this then please make every effort to attend the meeting – or support it in some other way – and show that we can save this historic pub.

Vince Murray



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 eighth annual festival, organised by the Bristol & District branch of CAMRA, and is making its second appearance at the Brunel Passenger Shed, Temple Meads, on Friday 4th and Saturday 5th March.

At the time of Pints West going to print, there were only Friday lunchtime tickets remaining, all other sessions for this ever-popular festival having sold out.

If you're reading this in time and require Friday lunchtime tickets, they should be available by post from:

**CAMRA, c/o 7 Kellaway Court,
142 Kellaway Avenue,
Golden Hill, Bristol BS6 7YP.**

The session is from 11.30am to 3pm and tickets are £3.50 each.

Please note the above is a postal forwarding address only – tickets will not be sold to callers. Enclose a cheque payable to "Bristol & District CAMRA", together with a stamped (first-class), addressed envelope.

Please also supply a telephone number and/or email address in case of queries. If your application is not in time or there are no tickets left, your cheque will be returned after the festival.

If you wish to take the risk, if you turn up for the Friday lunchtime session without a ticket and there are still some remaining, you may be in luck and be able to buy one on the door. However, we cannot accept any responsibility if you turn up without a ticket on the off chance and are unable to buy one. Note though that all other sessions are definitely sold out and there will be no tickets for those on sale at the door.

If you manage to attend the festival, you should have the chance to sample a fantastic range of well over a hundred real ales plus a great selection of around forty real ciders and perries.

Cheers and wassail!

SP

SIBA beer festival to be held in Bristol

Between the 7th and 9th of April the Society of Independent Brewers (SIBA) will be holding their National Beer Festival.

Luckily for us, this year it is being held at **Horts** on Broad Street in central Bristol.

The festival will comprise around 60 beers, all of which have been short-listed following competitions held in the seven SIBA regions.



This should mean that all of the beers on offer will be good 'uns, although they will all be hand-pumped so there will not be 60 available at any given point in time.

There is no admission charge, so this event should be a must for any real ale fan in the Bristol and surrounding areas.

Tim Nickolls

Pub companies given a clean bill of health: "It's a whitewash", says CAMRA

CAMRA has criticized the Trade & Industry Select Committee for failing to take a harder line to curb the power of pub chains and for not calling for the introduction of a guest beer for pubs owned by pub chains.

Mike Benner, CAMRA Chief Executive, said: "I think the outcome is a whitewash, which doesn't really call for action on anything".

The Committee found that no one pubco or brewer held a dominant position, however they were concerned that national brewers retain a stranglehold on the distribution of beer via distribution contracts pubcos have with the national brewers. They therefore want the Office of Fair Trading to keep an eye on the situation.

They however ruled out the removal of the tie, which they said would not benefit tenants but would advantage the national brewers.

The Committee ruled out the introduction of a "guest beer" for pub chains

which Mr Benner claimed "would provide consumers with more choice and small local brewers with improved access to market". The Committee however claimed that to allow tied tenants the option of a guest beer of a particular type would run contrary to EU Competition Law and could lead to the UK Government being challenged in the European Courts.

The Committee recommended that pubcos allow their tenants more flexibility in the choice of products they sell. "CAMRA will be urging all pubcos to adopt this recommendation and pressing all pubcos to introduce a 'guest beer' clause in their tenants' agreements," said Mr Benner.

Benner concluded that he thought that "The report was a missed opportunity".

The Committee has also fought shy of imposing a statutory code of practice on pubcos but said that if the industry does not show signs of accepting a voluntary code then the Government should not hesitate to impose a statutory code on it.

Smiles brewery closed

IN the period leading up to Christmas it was announced that the Smiles Bristol Brewery had gone into administration.

An immediate result of this was the closure of the brewery and the transfer of production to the Highgate Brewery, located in Walsall. They are managing the Smiles brand and any Smiles Blonde, Best, Bristol IPA or Heritage you drink from now on will have been brewed there.

As well as the blow of losing the actual brewing of Smiles from Bristol, brewery and sales staff also found themselves unceremoniously out of a job.

This is a sad state of affairs, particularly as it happened scarcely a year after the purchase of Smiles by City Centre Breweries, headed by ex-Mansfield boss Ron Kirk, for £1.1 million in December 2003. What happened to those great plans for the future?

It is generally believed that the underlying financial problems of Smiles date back to the over-expansion of the pub estate that took place in the 1990s and resulted in the need to sell that estate to Young's, with the sole exception of the Brewery Tap. It seems that this eventually deprived the brewery of the secure outlets it needed to survive.

To try and look on the bright side of the current situation,



Highgate are viewed as a capable brewery and it's hoped that they will make a decent job of the Smiles beers. It has also been claimed that the involvement of Coors and the Trade Team will actually open up new markets for the brand.

A new, separate pub-owning company will take over the Cornubia (a former Bristol & District branch pub of the year purchased by Smiles in 2004) and the Brewery Tap. The good news is that it appears that the people who are intending to take this on want to keep the Cornubia pretty much as it is now, with the possible exception of a much overdue new carpet!

Plans for the Brewery Tap are interesting. The closure of the brewery means that there is plenty of space to expand the pub, although we hope that the original, CAMRA award-winning bar will be

retained.

In addition, there are plans to set up a new micro-brewery on the site that will supply real ale to the Brewery Tap and Cornubia. It would of course be great to see brewing return to the site, although there is no confirmed time scale for when this might happen.

Richard Brooks

Pub news

Just after the last issue of Pints West went to press, the **Gloucester Arms** in Horfield reopened under the livery of John Barras & Co. There has been a complete refurbishment, with an expanded food menu, and Courage Best Bitter plus a guest on handpump.

Bar Sixty Four is the new name of the pub on Park Row formerly known as The Prince and The Prince of Thieves. There's been another refurbishment, designed to give the place a lighter, airier, more up-market feel. No real ales available when we visited.

The burgeoning number of **Sharp's** fans in Bristol will be interested to know that a new India Pale Ale was recently tested at the *Cask Marque* accredited **Royal Oak** in Clifton. Sold as "Royal Oak Special", it weighed in at 4.8% ABV and was declared a massive success by Landlord Simon Dauncey. Sharp's are now hoping to make the beer available to all outlets during the first part of 2005.

The **Rose of Denmark** in Hotwells underwent a major refurbishment in December. Now just a single bar, with stripped floorboard, pine tables and a real fire in one corner, it seems to be doing very well. Certainly, the barrels ranged along the back of the bar offering Courage Best, Bass and Butcombe are a very pleasant site, and the Thatcher's Traditional Cider goes down very nicely too.

The **Grosvenor Arms** by the river in Southville has also had a complete refurbishment, and is now known as the **Little Grosvenor**, described as a "Wetherforks" pub (geddit?).

The **Red Lion** in Mangotsfield is now under new management, and a lot of work is currently being done on it inside and out. We will keep an eye on the real ale offering (a good pint of Bass when last we checked) and let you know in a future Pints West.

If you're a landlord/lady or regular with some news about your pub, please feel free to email duncan.shine@britishpubguide.com or steve.plumridge@bristol.ac.uk (we'll share the info) and we'll be glad to consider putting it into the next issue of Pints West.

Duncan Shine

National Pubs Week

CAMRA, the Campaign for Real Ale, has announced that National Pubs Week 2005 will take place between Saturday 19th and Saturday 26th February as a celebration of British pubs.

To coincide with this year's National Pubs Week, the Bristol and District branch of CAMRA has picked out seven pubs in the Centre of Bristol that, although located close together, illustrate some of the diversity available.

Whether due to their size, age, design, entertainment or some other reason, these should certainly appeal to range of clientele.

Some branch members will be taking a wander around them on Thursday 24 February, starting at the Brewery Tap at 7:30pm. Or you could of course visit one each day if you prefer. Research shows that 20 pubs are

closing every month, so it is important to appreciate the choice that is out there and to encourage people to visit and support pubs, even if you have to try a few to find the right one for you!

- Brewery Tap
- Zerodegrees
- Griffin
- Hatchet
- Bunch of Grapes
- White Lion
- Watershed

There will also be a feature on these pubs in the "Seven" supplement of the Bristol Evening Post.

Richard Brooks

Old Tom Champion

OLD TOM from Robinson's in Stockport has been named as the Supreme Champion Winter Beer of Britain 2005 by a panel of judges at CAMRA's national winter celebration of beer.

The barley wine has an ABV of 8.5 per cent and is described in the 2005 edition of the Good Beer Guide thus: "A full-bodied, dark beer, it has malt, fruit and chocolate in the aroma. A delightfully complex range of flavours including dark chocolate, full maltiness, port and fruits lead to a long, bitter-sweet aftertaste."

At the announcement, Steve Prescott, Organiser of the National Winter Ales Festival, congratulated Robinson's on their victory. He said, "Old Tom is no stranger to awards. It's a fabulously rich beer and thoroughly deserves the top prize."

On hearing the news Oliver Robinson, Commercial Director at Robinson's brewery, said, "I'm absolutely thrilled. We won the award back in 2000 and it's wonderful to achieve that once again. Old Tom is our flagship beer. We've been brewing it since 1899 and it's still very popular. It's great to get this recognition and I hope the award will help Old Tom to reach its true potential as a classic British beer and a great brand. My thanks go to our excellent brewing team and to all the staff at the brewery."

The silver prize went to Somerset based Bath Ales brewery for their superb Festivity, and the Bronze award went to Woodforde's brewery from Norfolk for their fantastic Headcracker.

A panel of CAMRA experts and beer writers at the National Winter Ales Festival judged the competition. Drinkers at the festival, held in Manchester at the end of January, were able to sample the winners as well as try over 120 old ales, milds, stouts, porters, barley wines and bitters.

Champion Winter Beer of Britain 2005

Supreme Champion: Robinson's Old Tom
Silver: Bath Ales Festivity
Bronze: Woodforde's Headcracker

Category winners

Old Ales & Strong Mild category

Gold: Bath Ales Festivity (Somerset)
Silver: Gale's Festival Mild (Hampshire)
Bronze: Theakston's Old Peculier (North Yorkshire)

Stouts & Porters category

Gold: Bateman's Salem Porter (Lincolnshire)
Silver: Big Lamp Summerhill Stout (Newcastle)
Bronze: Spectrum Old Stootwobbler (Norfolk)

Barley Wines category

Gold: Robinson's Old Tom (Stockport)
Silver: Woodforde's Headcracker (Norfolk)
Bronze: Moor Old Freddy Walker (Somerset)

Category definitions

Stout: One of the classic types of ale, a successor in fashion to 'porter'. Usually a very dark, heavy, well-hopped bitter ale, with a dry palate, thick creamy head, and a good grainy taste.

Porter: A dark, slightly sweetish but hoppy ale made with roasted barley; the successor of 'entire' and predecessor of stout. Porter originated in London around 1730, and by the end of the 18th century was probably the most

popular beer in England.

Old Ale: Now virtually synonymous with 'winter ale'. Most 'old ales' are produced and sold for a limited time of the year, usually between November and the end of February. Usually a rich, dark, high-gravity draught ale of considerable body.

Barley Wine: A strong, rich and sweetish ale, usually over 1060 OG, dark in colour, with high condition and a high hop rate.

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 English bottle-conditioned beers
 Unpasteurised imported bottled lagers

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Success for Bath Ales in the Champion Winter Beer of Britain awards

BATH ALE's gloriously dark, complex and tasty Festivity has taken first prize in the Old Ale & Strong Mild category at the recent CAMRA Winter Ales Festival in Manchester. Perhaps an even greater achievement is taking the Silver medal for all styles of beer. At a winter ale festival the majority of beers are a much higher strength than Festivity's 5% specific gravity; this meant that Bath Ales' reputation for brewing beers that punch above their weight was put to the test. The Gold medal winner was Old Tom at 8.5% and the bronze went to Headcracker at 7.5%.

This prize is a fair tribute to the master brewing skills of Head Brewer Craig Lewis, ably assisted by his team of Gerry Condell and Darren James (pictured). You can sample Festivity at Bath Ales pubs in Bristol and Bath. Success at a major national festival means that demand for the beer will

probably 'go through the roof' perhaps making it difficult to find. Don't worry, as Bristol CAMRA have secured a vintage barrel for the Bristol Beer Festival. Bath Ales is major supporter of the Bristol Beer Festival this year. They supply both the stillage and bar and have sponsored the glasses for this year's event. Paul at The Wellington, Gloucester Road, Horfield is aiming to keep back some of the Manchester brew for the pub's own beer festival planned for the 28th May 2005. This is a date for your diary as, despite the phenomenal success of last year's event, Paul has promised that this year will be even bigger and better. Alternatively, Festivity is available in bottles, mini-casks, or boxes from the pubs or from the brewery's on-line shop.


The Wellington, the current Branch Pub of the Year, is now hosting live Jazz on some Monday evenings in addition to the regular show-casing, top-quality live blues music on Sunday evenings.

Demand for the range of Bath Ales beers has continued to grow following the move to bigger premises last summer. The increasing workload has led to Mark Harding joining as Sales Director from Weston's Cider and Wendy Hasler moving over from Smiles. Brewing capacity will soon be increased to 225 barrels by the addition two more fermenters.

More information about the brewery is available at their newly revamped website, www.bathales.com. This now includes an on-line shop and gives details of brewery tours.

Steve O'Shea





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 Victoria

(next to the Clifton Pool)

**Butcombe Bitter
Wadworth 6X
guest ales planned**

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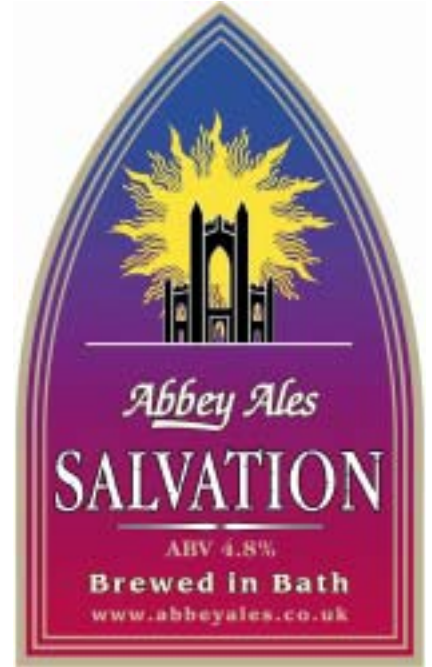
Drinkers boost tsunami appeal fund

THE release date for Salvation, the recent 'seasonal' ale from Bath's Abbey Ales brewery, was brought forward to allow local drinkers to contribute towards the Asian tsunami disaster relief appeal.

For each barrel (36 gallons) of Salvation sold, Abbey Ales has been donating £20 to the appeal fund.

Released at the end of January, Salvation boasts an ABV (alcohol by volume) of 4.8 per cent. It is slightly darker than the brewery's classic Bellringer ale, being produced from Maris Otter and Crystal malts and finished with Challenger hops.

Managing Director, Alan Morgan explained: "We hadn't intended to launch another beer so soon after Christmas but everybody involved with Abbey Ales felt that we should do something for the tsunami disaster appeal fund, and a new beer with some of the profit going to the fund seemed a sensible idea and a positive way in which we as a small brewery could contribute."



Organics at the Hobgoblin in Bath

**OK, so you missed it!
Missed what?**

The Bath Hobgoblin festival of organic ales mentioned in the previous issue of Pints West is 'what'.

For those of you that like to know these things, the list of beers passing through the pumps during the week was:

- Chimera Gold from Downton
- Jurassic from West Dorset
- Ben Nevis 80/- and Glencoe Wild Oat Stout from Bridge of Allen
- Halzephron Gold, Lizard Point, Wolf Rock, Black Rock and Winter Wonderland from Organic Brewhouse
- and finally Traditional, Barbus Barbus, Blackguard Porter, Bit O'Posh, Le Butts and Jester from Butts.

I have made a point recently of visiting the Hobgoblin regularly. Pretty well every time I have found that they have something there that I have not tried before or occasionally have never heard of. This place is rapidly becoming a must for those that like a 'tick' or two.

To whet whistles further, John tells me that he has another two theme weeks in the planning. At the end of February 2005 a winter beer festival is being proposed. And later in the year the Hobgoblin plans to hold a spring/summer *fruit* beer festival. It's possible the former will have been and gone by the time you read this, but do keep an eye open for more events like this in the future.

Phill the Pint

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.

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The Raven (ex-Hatchett's)

SOME visitors to Bath may remember a little pub tucked around the back streets of Bath called Hatchett's. The pub was on the corner between Quiet Street and the quaintly-cobbled Queen's Street, and at one time in the Good Beer Guide if my memory serves me correctly.

Well it isn't any more (in the Guide or called Hatchett's). The pub is still a pub, thank goodness, but it is now called the Raven. And it seems that the lease is in good hands. The couple of visits that I have made have found that there are four hand pumps in regular use and a cheery welcome. So I stopped off to ask what was happening and this is what I found...

The lease is now held by Jill Forsey who reopened the pub last October under its new name. The place has been redecorated and fitted out with some comfortable seats downstairs and upstairs. Of particular interest to me is the fact that the

upstairs bar is exclusively non-smoking. This bar has only recently opened and there are plans to provide bar games (including shove halfpenny) there.

An eclectic mix of organic and home-made food is available at lunch-times which may be extended to the evenings if there is demand. I am a sucker for bangers and mash so I plan to make a visit to try it out some time, but also listed were unusual soups, tagliatelle, salads and houmous.

And what of the liquid refreshment? The beer side of the business is run by Tim Perry who chooses the stock. The policy at the present is that they will always stock Abbey Ales Bellringer plus Speckled Hen. Tim says that it is his intention to keep a malty and a bitter flavoured brew and that he is always open to suggestions regarding the two guest pumps (so I made one). I was also pleased to see that there was a reasonable selection of single malts. Jill told me that she wanted to make sure that there was something for the women as well so they stock ten different wines, five white and five red. (*But women like beer too! Ed.*)

For my part I left there with a nice feeling and the resolve to visit there more regularly than I have in the past. With the possible demise of my works canteen this may be more regular than I first imagined.

Phill the Pint

Extra discount from Abbey Ales

Mention "Pints West" when ordering a Bellringer beer box from Abbey Ales and you will get an extra discount of £5 per 36-pint box for all orders collected from the brewery or from the Star Inn. 18-pint boxes are also available.

Real beer and real football, the perfect combination!

And it is available at Bath's Twerton Park on the weekend of the 1st and 2nd April.

Bath City Football Club will be holding its first beer festival at Randall's on Friday 1st and Saturday 2nd April. There will be 40 premier real ales to taste and, if you can tear yourself away for 90 minutes or so, a game of football when Bath City take on Stamford in the Southern Premier League at 3 p.m. on Saturday the 2nd.

The event is sponsored by Bath Ales, producers of 'The City Ale' regularly on sale at City's home games. Bath and Borders Branch of CAMRA are also lending their support in helping to organise the event. Food will be available at all sessions.

Go along, enjoy the beer, take in the match if you want to and help your local football Club into the bargain.

Tickets are available by post from **Rob Shepherd, 16 Entry Rise, Combe Down, Bath BA2 5LR** and are priced at £3 each (cheques payable to Bath City Supporters Club). Please state the required session, and enclose a stamped addressed envelope. Card carrying CAMRA members will receive £1 worth of beer tokens on the door. Opening Times will be:

Friday 1st April – 6 p.m. to 11 p.m.

Saturday 2nd April – noon to 2.45 p.m.

Saturday 2nd April – 4.30 p.m. to 11 p.m.

The Saturday lunchtime ticket also includes entrance to the Saturday evening session before 5 p.m.

Long term CAMRA member Rob Shepherd, one of the event organisers, explained how real beer and Bath City FC go together. "Bath Ales supply 'The City Ale' (actually rebadged Gem) in both cask and bottle conditioned form for every home game, and away matches always involve a pre-match warm-up in a local CAMRA listed pub. It's all part of a good day out! The beer festival simply takes this one step further."

"Any profits will go to the Football Club to try and improve prospects on the pitch and make a sustained effort to move back up the football pyramid", said Chair of the Bath City supporters Society, Peter McCormack.

Roger Jones, Managing Director of Bath Ales, was happy to support the event. "It is an opportunity to showcase our own beers alongside some premier real ales from other breweries."

For further information please contact Rob Shepherd on 01225 837938.

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Ten years at the top of the hill

BRADD FRANCIS is intending to celebrate ten years at the Highbury Vaults on 27th February this year.

He actually took over the running of the pub, at the top of St. Michael's Hill in High Kingsdown, Bristol, on 28th February 1995, after some eight years as a relief manager for Greenalls in the Weymouth area. (OK, so he is celebrating a day early, for those with a keen eye for detail.)

Under his stewardship the pub has seen very few physical changes over the years, except for the partial covering over of, and the introduction of patio heaters to, the garden. However, there has been a change to the beers available.

Originally a Smiles pub, Bradd was allowed to have two or three guest beers in addition to the Smiles range and Brains SA. However, when Young's bought it, the guest beers went, but Bradd fought



and won the battle to keep Smiles Best, Heritage and the SA in addition to the three or four Young's beers.

The Highbury is still very much a traditional British pub popular with locals and students alike and, as well as a regular entry in the Good Beer Guide, was runner-up in the local CAMRA Pub of the Year awards in 2003.

Pete Tanner

Pub snippets

Building on the success of their previous festivals last February and again in October, and to demonstrate their commitment to real ale, the **White Lion** in Bristol's city centre will be holding another event they dub "Bristol's smallest beerfest".

This tiny Wickwar pub will be offering a dozen or so beers from around the country from Friday 25th to Sunday 27th February, some from handpumps, some directly from casks stillaged in the corner of the pub.

The **Nova Scotia** in Hotwells and the **King's Head** on Victoria Street are two Bristol pubs to have been cited recently as fine examples of heritage pubs by appearing in a new book published for English Heritage, *Licensed To Sell*. The book recognises the pubs for their traditional, historical, unspoilt interiors.

Author Bill Bryson, who launched the book, said: "Pubs are part of what makes England what it is. And like so much of the almost embarrassing richness of England's historic environment we need to hang on to what we've got."

The pubs both serve great beer too!

SP



Brewing excellence from the Heart of Somerset since 1979

It has been 26 years since Cotleigh Brewery started trading from its first home, the Cotleigh Farmhouse in Washfield near Tiverton in Devon. Immediate success forced the brewery to move to larger premises, and in 1980 the company relocated to Wiveliscombe, 11 miles west of Taunton. Last year the business celebrated its Jubilee 25th Anniversary. Cotleigh Brewery supplies 300 Freehouses in the South West and is available in the rest of the UK through selected wholesalers. Cotleigh Beers will now be available to the Bristol area.

Tawny Bitter

3.8% abv

A West Country classic, a subtle hop palate which blends with the sweetness of the malt, to give a beautiful and balanced flavour.

Barn Owl Premium Ale

4.5% abv

Copper coloured with hints of toffee and nut with a smooth malty bitter sweet finish. Champion Beer of the Maltings Festival 1995.

Buzzard Dark Ale

4.8% abv

Traditional old ale, deep copper red in colour. The chocolate malt gives a dry nutty flavour with hints of amaranth biscuit.

Cotleigh 25

4.0% abv

An explosion of flavours originating from the American Cascade hops gives this brilliant pale golden beer a fresh aroma and a fruit filled finish.

Osprey Strong Ale

5.0% abv

A strong and rich full flavoured golden ale. Clean and refreshing with a generous hoppy finish.

Peregrine Porter

4.4% abv

A classic and creamy old style porter brewed with the addition of flaked barley. Dark and bitter sweet with hints of nut and liquorice from roasted malt.

Cotleigh Brewery, Ford Road, Wiveliscombe, Somerset TA4 2RE

Tel: 01984 624086 Fax: 01984 624365 Email: sales@cotleighbrewery.com www.cotleighbrewery.com

How much?!

I HAD the pleasure of visiting Manchester in February. Not surprisingly perhaps, during my stay I took the opportunity to visit some of the finest pubs that great City has to offer.

Eccles is a suburb to the west of the City Centre, best known for the cakes that share its name. I was drawn to this area after consulting the CAMRA National Inventory of outstanding pub interiors. Eccles boasts three pubs with classic interiors, all of which are Holt's pubs – one of Manchester's fine breweries. An additional bonus is that two of the three also feature in the 2005 CAMRA Good Beer Guide.

I was not disappointed. All three were indeed absolute classic multi-roomed pubs dating from the early part of the 20th century.

But here is the main point of this rambling – in the first pub, I ordered one pint and one half of the splendid Holt's Mild – that cost a mere £2.03. Bargain, I thought! After consuming this beery delight, we moved on to the second Holt's gem and ordered the same. On presentation of our frothing pint, I was asked for £2 !

So make of that what you will – but it is quite rare to get a pint under £2.25 in the Bristol area, so to get a pint and a half for only £2 in a classic pub seems like a good deal to me.

There were other pubs we visited in Manchester that made our prices look like, well, an awful lot of dosh for a pint of beer. It made me feel like selling up and moving to Eccles to live on beer and cakes!



Pete Bridle

Coopers Arms update

IN the last edition of Pints West I advised that the Coopers Arms at Highbridge in Somerset, a long standing free house and supporter of independent brewers, had been sold to Scottish and Newcastle.

The hand-over took place on January 10th 2005. I was fortunate enough to attend the leaving party for John and Carol Hayes on the previous Saturday, when a generous free buffet was washed down with pints of RCH Firebox, Santa Fé and B52, plus Hopback Summer Lightning and Winter Lightning and others. A rattling good do all round. John told me that "the new owners had pledged to keep the beer policy going".

My spies tell me that all of those wonderful beers have gone and been replaced by Greene King IPA, Abbot and Old Speckled Hen, plus Fuller's London Pride. This would be a perfectly respectable range for most pubs, but not for a special place like the Coopers. I have been visiting for 27 years but will probably not bother in future – the detour is no longer worth it. I know many of the regulars and am sure that they will follow suit. Why do the big national or multi-national companies always assume that they know better than the consumer? Have they killed another golden goose?

Vince Murray

... Unsurprisingly, trade has suffered as S&N have ditched the beer policy that had made the Coopers successful. The new tenant is unhappy with the situation as is working hard to at least be able to offer RCH beers, which were previously very popular at the Coopers. The nearby Highbridge Social Club has wisely decided to seize the opportunity to grow their own trade by introducing RCH beers.

Tim Nickolls

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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	

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This process provides wonderful fresh flavours and a pleasant, natural effervescence. However, not all ale brands are bottled in this manner.

To check whether a product is a “real ale in a bottle”, you can look for the term “bottle-conditioned” on the label. Another term you might see is “conditioned in the bottle”.

To remove confusion CAMRA has launched a hallmark “CAMRA says this is real ale” (illustrated above) to clearly identify for you products that are the real thing: natural, living beers. Over the coming months you will start to see this logo appearing on the bottle labels of eligible beers.



Rising to real ale challenge

OVER a hundred independent off-licences and a national supermarket chain are backing a scheme to enable consumers to spot real ale on shop shelves.

To showcase the great taste and the variety available, CAMRA, the Campaign for Real Ale, held a tasting for a select invited audience on the 27th January, at the National Winter Ales Festival in Manchester, to celebrate the launch of this accomplishment.

“As part of our programme to promote real British Bottled Ales, we recruited 20 people from a media competition”, said CAMRA’s Marketing Officer, Georgie Howarth. “The intention was to use the tasting as a fun way to illustrate a serious point – many of the participants indicated they didn’t know how to select real ale from shop shelves. Our aim was to give them a brief explanation on the quality of the tastes and the range of beers styles available.”

The tasting was part of CAMRA’s **Real Ale in Bottle Accreditation Scheme**, piloted last August, whereby eligible brewers can opt to use the logo “CAMRA says this is Real Ale” on their bottle labels. The idea is that consumers can understand what type of beer they are drinking, as often the real ale enjoyed at the pub, can be different altogether once bottled.

Ms Howarth continued: “The Real Ale in a Bottle Scheme has come a long way since its infancy in August last year, and seems to have captured the imaginations of brewers and retailers alike. In less than six months CAMRA has signed up over 47% of all eligible breweries. Almost by demand, we are pleased to announce that we have launched a Retailers’ Scheme to show our commitment to the breweries who have participated, and most importantly to educate consumers about this exciting, quality beer category.”

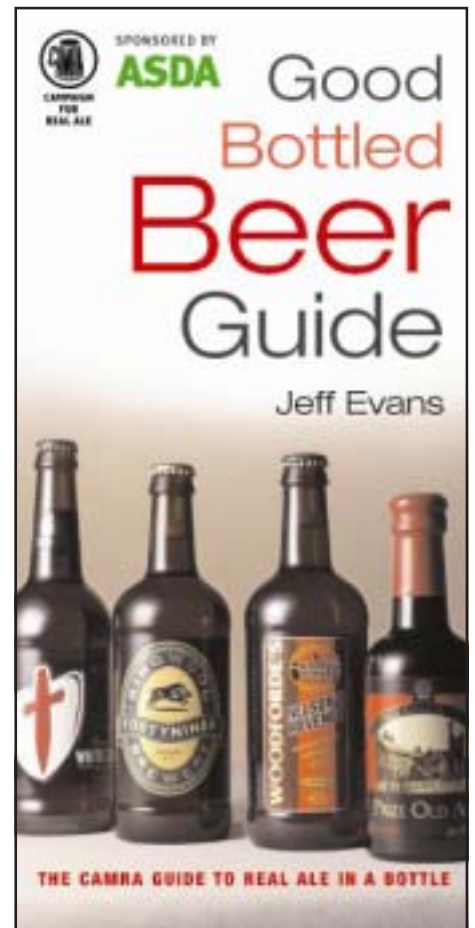
Similar to the level of brewery interest, the Retailers’ Scheme has encompassed both large and small companies.

“We are delighted that, during February, as part of its drinks festival, Sainsbury’s is placing an emphasis on real ale in a bottle. They intend to provide shelf-edge information from the scheme, and the accreditation logo, at the point of

sale in 350 stores across the country. They will also stock many bottle-conditioned beers exclusive to Sainsbury’s during that month.”

Ms Howarth went to explain: “From a pilot to independent stores, which has gained positive feedback, we have recruited nearly 100 outlets. CAMRA has provided them with marketing materials, such as window stickers, leaflets, along with training and advice sheets to support the scheme free of charge. We would like to see many more come on board.”

CAMRA hopes that the participants of the tasting event at the National Winter Ales Festival will maintain the existing enthusiasm and become new ‘real ale in a bottle ambassadors’ of the future.



Bristol Beer Factory opens its doors to CAMRA

IN previous issues of Pints West we have brought you news of the Bristol Beer Factory, a brand new brewery set up on the same site as Thomas Baynton's Ashton Gate Brewery, which was closed by George's in 1933, thus ending over a century of brewing on the site.

We've covered the renaissance of the brewery before — go to the CAMRA web site at www.camrabristol.org.uk and look at Pints West issues 62 (front cover) and 64 (back cover) — so let's see what's new!

Well, CAMRA was invited to pop round on February 10th for a tour of the brewery and perhaps a small sample of some of the beer (purely for research purposes, you understand). So, the first question I ask Simon Bartlett, our host for the evening, is "So what's new?"

"That, that and that!" he replies. The first



"that" is a brand new malt store, which has been erected right next to the brewing line and, I'm reliably informed, painted by Simon's father. Before it was built, there was an awful lot of lugging about to be done. Now however, the malt can go straight into the grist case. And the grist case is the second "that". This has been made by hand by Simon, no mean feat as it is a sizeable wooden structure, with a chute at the bottom, angled perfectly for the grist to go straight into the pre-mash.

However, it is the third "that" that is the most noteworthy. This "that" is a six-foot plus, shaven headed giant of a man with piercing eyes and a warm smile. It is of course none other than Chris Thurgeson, erstwhile brewer at Smiles, who has traded BS1 for BS3 to lend his experience to the Bristol Beer Factory. For those who don't know about Chris's brewing history, it is remarkable. About six years ago he got a job at Smiles washing out the barrels. He knew little about beer, but he set about learning the trade, gaining his brewing qualifications off his own bat, until eventually rising to the top of the heap at Smiles.

There have already been several advances



in the Beer Factory's brewing process. A further heating element has been added, along with automatic cooling in the summer. These are important changes because controlling pitch temperature has been an issue in the past. (*Pitching, I'm told, is the process of adding the yeast to the wort to start the fermentation. To get a consistently good end product, you need to be sure the yeast is pitched at the right temperature, but then you know that, right?*)

Talking of the yeast: another of Chris's



innovations has been to introduce the culture of wet yeast that he had been using at Smiles (and had — give or take the odd mutation — been used at Courage back in the 1970s). This wet yeast is a much more satisfactory solution than dry or powdered yeast.

The first beer sampled is "No 7", a traditional bitter (abv 4.2%) with a good balance of malt and hops, and a clean, crisp, refreshing taste. CAMRA's tasting experts are heard to comment that this is showing great improvement on the experimental brews that

were produced before Christmas.

The second beer is Gold. This light-coloured beer is very much a work in progress, put on especially for the CAMRA visit. Chris uses caramalt — a lighter version of crystal malt — roasted after germination to bring out a slightly sweeter roundness in the flavour. Although we taste the beer twenty-four hours before it's due to be racked, and a full fortnight before it will be ready to serve as Chris would like, we nonetheless get a good idea of the finished product, and are looking forward to seeing it appear on the hand pumps of Bristol.

The beers are being aimed at the free trade, but good bets to find it in Bristol are the *Tobacco Factory*, and the *Cornubia*. The *Brewery Tap*, the *Ship Inn* on Lower Park Row, the *Sportsman* in Bishopston and the *Pipe & Slippers* in Stokes Croft have also stocked the beer recently. Our thanks to Simon and to Chris for a very enjoyable and informative evening, we hope they are brewing in Ashton Gate for many years to come.



If you want to sell Bristol Beer Factory beers in your pub, contact Simon on (0117) 902 6317 or email enquiries@bristolbeerfactory.co.uk.

Duncan Shine

Photos by Richard Brooks

Cider galore

THE last few months have provided a number of very enjoyable visits to cider producers and hostelrys — places which produce and sell the treasured apple juice.

October is designated CAMRA 'cider month'. For us the fun commenced with an event on Saturday, 9th October, and a full minibus travelling to the village of Much Marcle. The object was to help celebrate an open day for the local cider producers in the area, namely the larger family producer **Weston's**, and the smaller but no less impressive **Lyne Down** and **Gregg's Pit**, all based around the village.

What a great day we all had, helped somewhat by good weather; something I recall we didn't get a lot of in 2004!

Weston's gave us a full guided tour of their premises with a detailed history of the company, showed us their enormous storage tanks, and invited us to purchase goods at their well appointed shop. We completed the visit by having a few pints of their various brands in their 'brewery tap'.

Next was Lyne Down, where more excellent cider was quaffed, and many of the party took advantage of a superb hog roast and an hour or so either sitting in the sun, or actually watching the apples being pressed.

Finally Gregg's Pit, where we were met with long queues before sampling more

wonderful product. Not surprisingly, the minibus was heavily weighed down on the way back with plenty of 'carry homes'.

One more stop, at a pub with the car park in England but a footbridge crossing into its Welsh location, some more cider (although it took a bit of investigation), and for a couple of people what seemed like a keg beer masquerading as real ale, and we meandered our way home. All in all, a fantastic day, and no doubt one we will repeat in years to come.

On Thursday, 14th October we held a cider social at the **Cotham Porter Stores**, possibly the most renowned cider pub in Bristol. Several pints of Thatcher's Dry and Cheddar Valley were quaffed, and our host Andy kindly put on cheese and crackers to accompany the beverage. We were joined by an Australian and his wife, who were researching the cider scene in this country, as they were intending to set up a company in their home country.

If there are any readers who've never been to the 'Stores', I cannot recommend it highly enough. It's full of real character and characters — many of the locals have their own cider jugs, and the conversation is never less than entertaining.

Our third social, on Thursday, 28th October, was a 'cider saunter' in the Bedminster/Southville area in conjunction with North Street Traders. On this evening, we took in four pubs known for selling large quantities of cider. These were the **Apple Tree**, which sells copious quantities of Taunton Traditional, the **Coronation**, where we imbibed fantastic West Croft Janet's Jungle Juice, the **Orchard** in Hanover Place with superb Thatcher's Dry and Cheddar Valley, and finally a real classic Bristol pub, the **Avon Packet** on Coronation Road, for more excellent Thatcher's Dry.

A few of our group also managed to pop into the Holy Cross & Southville Social Club close to the Coronation (which any CAMRA member can do on presentation of their membership card) for an



extra cider on the way.

Your scribe had to leave the Packet at around ten o'clock, but I understand that the social carried on for quite a while after that, and some individuals sauntered in after the event was supposed to have finished!

Saturday, 15th January saw what appears to be becoming an annual event for the branch — a Wassail.

Wilkin's Cider Works in Mudgeley, near Wedmore, was the chosen location for this genuinely traditional event. On a bitterly cold evening, 30 of us merry revellers travelled down to the remote Land's End Farm, which is not the easiest place to find in the pitch black.

My thanks at this point to John Lansdall, who took on navigating duties for the evening. Had it been left to me, we could still have been wandering those country lanes at this moment in time!

A very enjoyable evening followed, and for an entrance fee of £8 we were provided with unlimited cider throughout. There was also cider with honey, cider with gin, cider with ginger, and a generous ploughman's, including probably the best pickled onions this writer has ever tasted — and of course the traditional Wassail, which was very entertaining. We returned to Bristol in time for the midnight buses, once again carry-outs being the order of the day for many of the attendees.

My intention over the coming months will be to arrange more cider socials, visiting various producers within a reasonable distance, and supporting the local pubs which sell the marvellous liquid! If anyone is interested in joining the regulars, feel free to get in touch with me via the normal channels (see our web site or the contact details at the back of Pints West).

The Beer Festival should also be fun, as I have ordered around 40 different varieties of ciders and perries which will, I hope, satisfy most tastes, so please come and join us at the stand.

Drink up thee zider, drink up thee zider, tonight we'll merry be...

Richard Walters



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REFRESHINGLY HOPPY BEERS

Cider Sisters

WITH the country moving into election mode, it seems appropriate that this article should have a bit of a political flavour. Just before Christmas, courtesy of our friends in the Welsh Cider Society, we got notice of the Parliamentary Cider Group's AGM. We didn't feel we could miss this – a chance to visit the mother of all parliaments, drink cider with elderly red-nosed peers of the realm, and find out if Gordon Brown prefers still or gently sparkling.

Cider Sister 1 being out of action due to child-care responsibilities, it was down to Sister 2 to blag an invitation. Thanks in part to the similarity between "Pints West" and "Points West", I was soon armed with a journalist's pass, bought a notebook to give an air of professionalism, and off I went.

The AGM was held in a marquee on the Common's terrace. It took me a while to find it but after wandering down endless grand corridors and making my way through numberless security checkpoints, I was there – a great long room full of middle-aged men in smart suits.

I felt completely awkward – knowing no-one, and unable to tell the MPs from the cider-makers without peering a couple of inches away from their tiny name badges on their chests. Luckily I spotted the Burrow Hill table in the corner and quickly hooked up with Shaun, their cider-maker, who was just as uncomfortable as me. They were doing a roaring trade in their excellent cider brandy and pomona, which seemed particularly popular with the members of the upper house.

I managed to miss the business of the AGM while chatting with Shaun, which wasn't hard as it was all over in about two minutes. I managed to catch a bit of Lord Larry Whitty's speech, and then Hugh Archibald (chair of the National Association of Cider Makers) saying something about the importance and relevance of cider. I was rather distracted by Lord Whitty's thick mane of

silver hair, but I don't think I missed much.

From that point on, I decided the only way forward was to get trying the ciders on offer, and sure enough after a couple of glasses I was buttonholing all and sundry. I mostly talked to the cider-makers present – a very dashing representative of Aspalls offered to get me a drink, I told him to surprise me, and he came back with a glass of Aspalls.

There was a really good range on offer, from big and small producers, and they were all going down well with our elected representatives. At some point I expressed surprise at just how many people were there, to which a parliamentary old-timer replied simply: "booze". A division bell rang and I expected to see the place empty out as all the MPs exercised their democratic responsibilities. No-one went anywhere.

So what were the highlights? One was definitely getting to talk to Kevin Minchew of Minchew's cider in Gloucestershire, a very experienced cider-maker who is particularly keen to promote perry as a unique regional product – he told me its use of the methode champenoise pre-dated Dom Perignon. His bottled cider was on offer, but he was also carrying around some secret under-the-counter unlabelled which was rather special. We hope to go and visit him someday and report back for a future column.

I also really enjoyed getting a rare taste of the Welsh Seidr Dai perry, which was absolutely delicious – very soft and complex. James Daley of the Welsh Cider Society was there, and told me it was produced from pears from a 200-year-old perry orchard in Monmouthshire.

You'd expect the West Country to be well-represented, but I also talked to Jim Hill, a cider-maker from Norfolk – I hadn't known there was a cider tradition there, but apparently they use cookers and eaters and the cider is consequently a bit bland. Jim, from Whin Hill Cider, on the other hand, uses proper cider apples from down our way, with much more interesting results.

An hour or two into the evening and, with the cider flowing freely, everyone was loosening up nicely. I started talking to some of the politicians, including David Wilshire, who is MP for Spelthorne in Middlesex and the only cider-making member in the House. I was proud to introduce Ray Beggs to the delights of Burrow Hill Pomona – he's an MP from Northern Ireland and he admitted that the closest he'd previously got to an apple product was his wife's crumble (which is apparently very good).

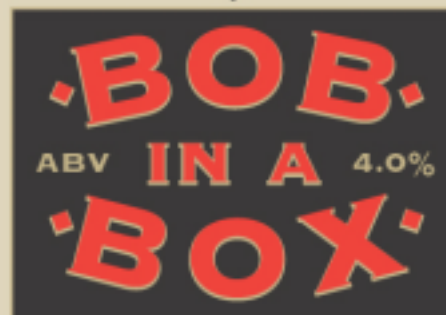
By this time, I'd had a few cider brandies and was feeling very relaxed, enjoying some scurrilous parliamentary gossip from some young MPs' researchers. In fact, it was lucky that I had a train back to Bristol booked and had to head off, because I could see that all-out drunkenness was just around the corner. I was disappointed not to see any household names – Gordon's cider preferences will have to remain a mystery for now – but encouraged that there were so many MPs and peers there appreciating a drink they might otherwise never try. How much it will have helped the British cider industry I have no idea, but I certainly had a good time and that's what matters after all.

Erica & Freya McLukie

Cider festival

THE JUBILEE INN, on the A370 at Flax Bourton, is proposing to hold a real cider festival. It is at the early stages of being planned and managers Rich and Mel would appreciate any ideas and support that Pints West readers and local CAMRA members could give. They can be contacted by 'phone on 01275 462741, or by emailing jubileeinn.flaxbourton@Eldridge-Pope.co.uk.

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Weston Whispers

(pub and beer news)

IT is pleasing to report that the **Major From Glengarry** appears to be in a state of much-needed stability. Lesley Hunt and Rob Hase took over at the Major at the end of last August. Both are born-and-bred Westonians who had never previously run a pub. Their background was in retailing, having run two local shops. Both had been long-standing regulars at the Major and they had got fed-up with seeing it in decline since the departure of Ken Oliver in June 2003.

The following 12 months saw no less than five different people running the Wadworth-owned pub. Lesley and Rob got heartily sick of seeing their local, a pub with a strong history and bags of potential, gradually going downhill and decided they had better have a go at running it themselves!

Sitting in a pub thinking that you could make a better fist of it than the landlord is something that many of us may have thought at some time, but it takes some gumption to actually go for it. So far, Lesley and Rob are happy with how things are going. They report that local trade is steadily building up. They run various events such as quizzes, race nights, karaoke, discos and also offer good value food, with many meals costing less than a fiver.

On the beer side, they were recently awarded Cask Marque accreditation, which

recognizes a pub's ability to keep and serve real ale in top-quality condition. They scored full marks across the whole range of beers when they got their unannounced visit from the inspectors in January this year. The beers on offer are Wadworth 6X and Henry's IPA. In addition they offer a guest beer from a list provided by Wadworth. On my last visit this was Bath Ales Gem in top-notch condition.

Long-standing Pints West readers will have read these words several times before, but if you haven't been to the Major for a while, give it a try.



The nearby **Criterion** on Upper Church Road is another pub that has recently changed hands. The ex-Ushers pub now advertises Bass and Young's Bitter, although on my only visit neither were available.

The lucky residents of Compton Martin were able to see in the New Year sipping the marvellous London Porter from Fuller's in the **Ring O'Bells**.

The first birthday party for the **Raglan** under Gary Havard's stewardship took place on Sunday 23 January. Apparently a good time was had by all. The excellent band Fallen Apples provided musical entertainment. The pub was so busy that towards the end of the evening the glasses washer collapsed with exhaustion, flooding the bar.

In the last edition of Pints West we highlighted a few pubs that were still providing a pint of real ale for less than £2. I did not expect that the list would be exhaustive and other pubs have since been mentioned as being in the "**Under £2 a Pint Club**". The **Regency** on Lower Church Road, referred to elsewhere in the *A Round With Robin* column, is one such example.

Robin's column touches on the question of what makes a particular pub attractive to a person and my raising the thorny issue of the price of beer triggered some debate about what makes a pub worth visiting.

Clearly there are a wide number of factors that influence the decision on where someone chooses to go for a drink. For some price will indeed be a major factor. For others it will be beer quality (who wants a pint of poorly kept beer that costs £1.50?) or range of beers on offer – the beer may be cheap and/or in good quality, but some people don't want to have to stick to the same drink all night.

Other people will consider the quality of service (the beer may be good and cheap, but if you have to wait ten minutes for off-hand, inattentive staff to attend to your requirements, can you be bothered?) or the general ambience of a pub – it may be worth an extra 20p a pint for a warm, inviting atmosphere with a friendly, interesting/witty clientele. What is the food like? Is there a real fire blazing away on a winters night? Is there a nice garden? Is there a family room? Is it too smoky? Is there any music? How about a quiz or race night? Can I watch sport? Is there a skittle alley? These and many other factors can influence the decision over where is worth visiting.

What is your favourite pub in the Weston area and why? We would be interested to hear your thoughts. These should be sent to Steve Plumridge at the editorial address.

Finally, in the next Pints West, there may be news on the rumoured Birnbeck Brewery, which, if our initial checks indicate, could be the first brewery in the town since 1372.

Tim Nickolls



available at all Wadworth pubs and selected free houses

A Round with Robin

I SOMETIMES wonder if this article should be called "Robin's Ramblings" rather than "A Round with Robin". That being the case this Rambling has as the main theme – my local, or rather, not to be too egoistic, local pubs. We all have a local pub though it may be a local for different occasions. However, your nearest pub is probably not your local. I have only visited my current nearest pub **The Ancaster** in Drove Road, five times in 15 years.

But let us go back to my early years when I lived in Selsdon, south of Croydon in Surrey. The village of Selsdon was built up just after the First World War, and due to a restrictive covenant on the land no public houses could be built there. Fortunately in 1956 there was a big fire in one of the pre-1920 houses, and following its demolition, some entrepreneur had the idea of building "**The Good Neighbour**". This was a Courage, Barclay & Simmons establishment where they also sold Watney's, Mann's, and other terrible stuff. As there were better pubs in the three-mile staggering radius from Selsdon, this was not my local. One pub that I did frequent on a regular basis was **The White Bear** at Fickleshole, near Addington (their glasses were stamped Davies 1870), which sold draught Bass and draught sherry! During the general elections in the late 1960's/early 1970's various wags at different times painted the stone white bear that stood outside the pub, both blue and red so that sometimes the locals would refer to the pub as "The coloured animal"! The 15th century pub is still there, and happily Selsdon now has a second pub, a Wetherspoon's on the site of the old Co-op grocers.



When I moved to Wells, my nearest pub was **The Mermaid Inn**, but I preferred **The Sun Inn**, **The Globe**, **The Fountain**, or **The Full Moon** in Southover. At The Sun Inn you could buy the rawest rough cider I've ever tasted, for as cheaply as you could get it at **The Lamb Inn** in Glastonbury. One of the landlords at the time seemed to spend most of his time on our side of the bar in slumber, and it was not uncommon for customers in greatcoats to pull rabbits out of one pocket and ferrets out of the other. The Fountain became a local when the Wells Folk Club moved there from **The Sherston Arms**, near the old level crossing gates. Most pubs in Wells in the mid 1970's had at least one real ale, but the pub I would have called my regular local then, was **The Rifleman's Arms** in Glastonbury where there was always a choice of three real ales including Royal Oak.

Moving to Weston-super-Mare in the spring of 1977, my nearest pub was **The Britannia** or **MacFarlane's**, or even **The London** if the back door to Worthy Place was open. I used to enjoy sitting in the courtyard of The Brit on summer days, but later I favoured **Maximillian's** in Wellington Place, where many had the doubtful pleasure of falling up or down the steps by the entrance. My local, however, soon became **The Silver Jubilee** in Lower Church Road. I expect some readers will remember the pale blue carpet with the royal coat of arms on it, and the unusual ceiling decorations. This was the Top Hat night club before it became a pub. At some time in the early 1980's David, Cynthia and Paul took it over and it became **The Regency**, and the long tradition of serving the best pint of Bass in Weston started. It was a genuine free house and although Whitbread beers seemed to dominate, some exciting ales were seen from time to time. These included (not in any order) Butcombe (in its infancy), Guvnors (from the Miners Arms at Priddy), Mendip, the Farmers Glory from Wadworth, and Cotleigh Ales (also in their infancy). Later owners added more pumps, and continued the excellent "village pub" tradition of nibbles and sausage rolls on the bar on Sundays.



I can't remember when The Regency first entered the CAMRA Good Beer Guide, but I suspect it was at around the time Mark Short and Mark Pullen came on the scene. It is now over 11 years since they took over the running of The Regency and there have been mini beer festivals, mystery ale competitions, and a greater movement away from the Whitbread domination, at least as far as the six real ales were concerned. Bass has continued to be the biggest seller, and when **The Raglan Arms** and **The Windsor Castle** pubs in Weston were closed, all the Bass drinkers came to The Regency, some never to leave. When writing this article there were but four real ales on, but this may change according to the season. At least one real ale is priced at under £2 a pint. As regular readers of Pint West will know, Tim Nickolls wrote an article on the excellent food here. This still remains in my heart as my local but there is now great competition from **Off The Rails** and The Raglan Arms.

When the Raglan Arms in Upper Church Road re-opened a year ago, there was much speculation about what real ales might be available. Gary, the landlord, has championed Tom Newman's brewery and has had on draught, Wolver's, Bite, Woolly Mammoth, Red Stag and most recently the Cave Bear

Weston Diary

○ Friday 4th, Saturday 5th March – Bristol Beer Festival

○ Wednesday 16 March – Skittles Evening, White Hart, Palmer Row. 8.30 start.

○ Wednesday 20 April – Hotwells Crawl. Meet at The Merchants Arms 7.30-8.00.

○ Friday 22 April – Maltings Beer Festival, Newton Abbot – Arrangements to be confirmed. Further details from Tim Nickolls at the beginning of April if interested.

○ Saturday 30 April – RCH Brewery Celebration Day – This day is RCH's 21st birthday. To commemorate this event, all 7 of their regularly brewed beers will be available in Weston. There will be one of the beers at 7 named pubs. This will be a great pub crawl to undertake. Full details available from Tim Nickolls at the beginning of April.

○ Friday 6 May – West Mendips Pubs Crawl. Minibus outing visiting pubs in Compton Martin, Blagdon, Ubley (there is one in Ubley, but only on the first Friday of each month!) and Churchill. Minibus leaves Off The Rails, Weston Station at 7.15. Cost £5.

○ Wednesday 18 May – Off The Rails. 8.30 start.

○ Wednesday 15 June – Bath Crawl. Train from Weston at approx 18.30 (subject to Summer timetable)

Non-members welcome at all of the above events.

Contact

Tim Nickolls - 01934 628996 (eves)
or email tim.nickolls@virgin.net

Stout. This is not to say that he has neglected other breweries. Far from it, as we have seen Bath Ales, GFB from Hopback, Smiles, Butcombe, Grand Union, and RCH beers, always at £2 a pint, no matter the strength of the beer. Added to which, the Friday night acoustic music sessions, and the warmth of both the open fire and the host, have made this another "local pub" about town for Robin's Ramblings.

Robin E Wild

RCH — a jewel in the

In RCH brewery, based in West Hewish just outside Weston-super-Mare, we are lucky to have one of the finest breweries in the country on our doorstep, although in the murky pub world this does not mean that it is easy to find their excellent beers in local pubs – more on that later.

RCH are celebrating their 21st anniversary this year, so I thought this would be a good time to visit the brewery to reflect on their beginnings, their substantial achievements, and to hear about their future ambitions.

Paul Davey, the Managing Director, was a chef in Oxford until April 1984, when he bought the Royal Clarence Hotel in Burnham-on-Sea. A small brewing operation was already in situ at the hotel, with the sole beer being brewed called KC Bitter – the initials coming from the original owners of the hotel. When Paul took over he changed the name of the brewery to RCH.

One of the regular customers at the Royal Clarence was Graham Dunbavan, an engineer working in Bridgwater, who was keen on brewing and was also Chairman of the Somerset Branch of CAMRA. Graham started doing some brewing for RCH on a part-time basis. A pivotal moment in the history of RCH came when Graham was made redundant from his engineering job. The brewing had been building up, with demand starting to come for the beers from beer festivals and beer agents. The decision was taken to take Graham on as full-time Head Brewer. This sparked further growth in the business and the production of a stable of superb, award-winning beers.



In the early days the beers produced were Clarence Pride and Clarence Regent, which Paul says was a fore-runner to East Street Cream. Then the following were produced, roughly in this chronological order: Old Slug Porter, Pitchfork, Firebox, Santa Fé, PG Steam, Hewish IPA and Double Header, with various “one-offs” produced along the way. Over the past couple of years the brewery has also produced monthly specials.

A major milestone for the brewery came when Paul sold the Royal Clarence and the brewery moved to its current site in West Hewish. This provided increased capacity, which enabled them to expand, grow the bottling side of their operation and start proactively pushing their beers in the local and regional pub market. When the brewery started, 120 barrels a year were brewed. This figure is now up to 3,500 barrels.

The brewery's first award was Beer Of The Festival at the Bury Beer Festival in 1993 with Pitchfork. This was the first of many triumphs for RCH beers. To my surprise Paul has not kept a record of these. However, he says that the most memorable ones were Pitchfork winning the Champion Best Bitter of Britain at the Great British Beer Festival (GBBF) in 1998, Old Slug Porter winning a silver award at the 1998 Brewing Industry International Awards, Double Header being crowned Supreme Champion at the 2000 Maltings Festival, and East Street Cream winning a silver award at the 2003 GBBF.

The quality of RCH beers has been recognised beyond these shores, with 1,000 cases of bottled

Pitchfork, Ale Mary and Old Slug Porter heading westwards to the USA every year. Most of these go to the east coast cities where there has traditionally been interest in good beer (as opposed to the Budweisers and Rolling Rocks that tend to dominate the local markets), but Paul reports that there is now growing interest in Miami!

The brewery's 21st anniversary is coming up on the 30th of April and they are planning an open day to celebrate the event. This is expected to be held during late May or early June. Their anniversary will also be commemorated by a new beer – probably to be called “RCH 21” which Paul says will be a 4.5 per cent ABV golden brew.

I concluded by asking Paul what his main frustrations were and his expectations for the future. On the issue of frustrations, Paul spat out the words “pub companies” before I had finished the question. As regular readers of Pints West will know, pub companies own about a third of the country's pubs and most of these use their clout to prevent their tenants from stocking the beers that they would like to and to force them to buy their beer from the pubcos at inflated prices, which are then of course passed on to customers (or at least the dwindling band of drinkers who have not already deserted the pub – seduced into their armchairs by the much cheaper beer on offer in supermarkets).

Despite constantly having to battle against the increasing stranglehold that the pubcos have on the market, Paul is reasonably upbeat about the future. He has recently seen a number of hotels and restaurants ordering real ale, as more operators realise that it can be beneficial to their trade to offer a beer of good quality alongside the more accepted meal accompaniment of wine. Also, there is an increasing interest from pubs and restaurants in offering local produce. Even some of the pub companies are realising this and graciously allowing their pubs in the area to stock a beer brewed in Somerset, rather than making them have one from, say, Yorkshire. RCH's beer sales have grown by around five per cent over the past year and Paul Davey is only interested in continual growth.

RCH is one of the finest breweries in the country. I am not being parochial, just because it has Weston-super-Mare in its address. There are plenty of breweries that produce a really great beer – or even two or three – but I don't feel that there are many that can boast such a wide number of excellent ales covering such a diverse range of tastes and strengths.



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

nation's real ale crown

These are the regularly-produced beers and advice on where to get them...

The Beers

(with tasting notes courtesy of the 2005 Good Beer Guide)

Hewish IPA – 3.6% alcohol by volume (ABV) – Light, hoppy bitter with some malt and fruit. Floral citrus hop aroma, pale brown/amber in colour.

PG Steam – 3.9% abv – Amber-coloured, medium-bodied with a floral hop aroma with some fruit. Hoppy and bitter.

Pitchfork – 4.3% abv – Yellow/gold in colour, hops predominate in a full-bodied taste, which is slightly sweet. Long finish – a class act.

Old Slug Porter – 4.5% abv – Chocolate, coffee, roast malt and hops with lots of body and dark fruits. A complex, rich stout, dark brown in colour.

East Street Cream – 5% abv – Superb premium ale, pale brown in colour, it is malty with chocolate hints, hoppy, fruity and bitter-sweet. All flavours vie for dominance in what is a notable and well-crafted ale.

Double Header – 5.3% abv – Light brown, full-bodied strong bitter. Beautifully balanced flavours of malt, hops and tropical fruits. Very refreshing and easy drinking for its strength.

Firebox – 6% abv – Aroma and taste of citrus hops and pale crystal malt. A strong, complex, full-bodied mid-brown beer with a well-balanced flavour of malt and hops.

Where to get them

This is the hard bit. However, this is a guide to where you may find these beers in and around Weston.

Off The Rails – This nearly always has Hewish IPA, the regulars getting through four casks a week. OTR usually takes the monthly guest beer. Old Slug Porter appears about every three months (and at CAMRA socials!) and always stocks the wonderful Xmas beer, Santa Fé.

The Dragon – This has Pitchfork and East Street Cream on a regular basis.



Mark Davey, Paul Davey and Graham Dunbavan outside the RCH brewery

The Raglan – “The Rag” has started stocking Pitchfork as a guest beer on a fairly regular basis, but it is having to fight for bar space with the large number of local breweries that landlord Gary Havard is trying to support.

The Crown, Churchill – PG Steam is a permanent beer here. The Crown is well worth the trouble to get to, not just for the superb Steam straight from the cask.

The Woolpack, St. Georges – The locals like their East Street Cream, which appears on a fairly regular basis. You might get lucky and see Pitchfork as well.

In terms of the bottled beers, which are also excellent, **Tesco** stock Pitchfork, **Asda** usually have Double Header, Pitchfork will be featuring in an up-coming beer festival at **Sainsbury's**, **Waitrose** often has an

RCH beer (usually Firebox), **Safeways** have been blowing hot-and-cold since the Morrison's takeover so aren't reliable, and **Unwin's** stock Old Slug Porter. Availability cannot always be guaranteed at local stores.

Your best bet may be to simply visit the brewery. There you can get any of their bottles, as well as some intriguing items from other parts of the country. Even better, you can get polypins of their beer in 18 or 36 pint denominations – ideal for parties. Ring in advance on 01934 834447 to order these. The shop is open Monday to Friday from 8.00 to 4.00.

If you can't be bothered with making the effort to get to any of the above, then nag your local landlord to try stocking one of their beers!

Tim Nickolls



They say this desert could be awash with RCH beer if it wasn't for the pubcos



Island in the sea

By your Nailsea correspondent
Laurie Gibney

Well done, Sawyers Arms

The generosity of customers at the **Sawyers Arms** in High Street, Nailsea has been phenomenal recently. A £1,000 cheque for the Children's Hospice South West's **Babe Appeal** was presented by landlady Joyce Peters to Radio Bristol's Nigel Dando. Soon afterward, Radio Bristol's Ben Prater, as part of their "Bring Home the Bacon Day", arrived at the **Sawyers** in a stretched limo to be presented with a further £1,500.

Customers have also raised £315 for the Asian Tsunami Appeal and held a race night which raised £503 for the Boys and Girls Welfare Society that arranges breaks from home at farms, etc. for children in need.

Landlord at the **Sawyers**, Ron Peters, is also chairman of the Bristol Licensed Victuallers Association, which raised a further £1,000 for the Children's Hospice South West's **Babe Appeal** that Ron presented at the BLVA Annual Dinner to Radio Bristol's Nigel Dando.

It was at about that time that Smiles Brewery agreed to sponsor an LVA project which Ron arranged and paid out £900 for, soon after which the company then running Smiles Brewery went into administration leaving Ron holding the bill for "their" sponsorship. Understandably, Ron has stopped stocking "Smiles" ales and concentrated sales of cask ales on Courage Best and locally-brewed Newman's Wolver's Ale since.

At the time of writing – though that time will have passed by the time you read this – the Sawyers Arms is planning to support **CAMRA's National Pub's Week** by holding a mini-beer festival between the 19th and 26th February with beers at just £2 per pint.

Pub with no beer?

Carlsberg's distribution system almost left the **Moorend Spout** in Kingshill, Nailsea with no real ale on New Year's Eve by failing to make a scheduled delivery, which was not rectified until Tuesday 4th January, and they had to wait until Monday 10th January for a delivery of Courage Best. Luckily, landlady Lorraine Flower had plenty of Butcombe Bitter in stock, but the other three cask ales ran out on New Year's Eve!

Changes at the Star Inn, Tickenham

Landlord Hugh Dash and his wife Kim are running the **Star Inn** on their own now that their business partners Paul and Debra Cheesley have moved on. They have also relinquished their interest in the **Moon and Sixpence** at Clevedon.

The menu is to be revamped with lots more choice of fish and exotic meats, and Hugh and Kim have introduced a senior citizens' two-course special at £5.95 for a starter and main course between 12 noon and 2 pm on Mondays to Fridays (01275 858836 for details).

A chalk board changed every week on the bar at the Star Inn shows some interesting facts from yesteryear. During the week ending 16 January this year it showed that on the Monday of that week in 1840 the British Penny Post was introduced; on the Tuesday in 1569 England's first State Lottery was held; on the Wednesday in 1970 the first jumbo jet crossed the Atlantic; on the Thursday in 1926 the creator of Paddington Bear was born; on the Friday 1900 Puccini's *Tosca* was performed for the first time; on the Saturday 1922 the Irish Free State was established; and on the Sunday 1920 Prohibition in USA came into effect.

The menu at the Star also contains some interesting local history. We learn that the village of Tickenham was apparently once the longest village in England; the children's room at the pub was once the home of Nailsea Rifle Club; the Home Guard were based during World War II in the skittle alley which is now the children's room; and the first bomb fell in the area on Valley Farm adjacent to the pub.

Real ale at the Star now includes Courage Best, Bass, Greene King's Morland Old Speckled Hen, Wickwar BOB, and now Butcombe Bitter which has recently replaced Smiles Best.

Jubilee revival

After years in the doldrums the **Jubilee** on the A370 at Flax Bourton is enjoying a revival under the management of Rich and Mel who are now stocking Butcombe Bitter and Gold, but regrettably have ceased to stock Smiles's beer while the beer production is relocated.

Real ale sales have hit an all time high at the Jubilee. A beer festival is planned for the start of the summer and once again there will be a good selection of real ales, with entertainers for the kids during the afternoons and music and fun for the adults in the evening. A real cider festival is at the very early stages of being planned and Rich and Mel would appreciate any ideas and support that readers could give (01275 462741).

A "Working Lunch" collector card scheme started at the end of January and is proving very popular. Every time you have lunch at the Jubilee you can collect a stamp: six stamps give you a £5 voucher to spend on food, drinks and snacks. Something very similar when you buy beer is planned.

Pub and club shorts

A third pub to stop selling Smiles Best in the area during the last few months is the **Black Horse** at Clapton in Gordano.

Craig and Cherona, licensees of the **White Lion** in Silver Street, are back in charge on a full time basis, their manager Ralph Milne having left and returned to Scotland.

The **Mizzymead Club** has lost its bar manager Dave Unwin, who has looked after its real ale well for a number of years. Dave is going to work in Portishead at the **Clarence Club** for ex-Mizzymead manager Richard Cole.



In nearby Clevedon

Pints West is saddened to report that the **Regent** in Hill Road Clevedon **will close down** on the 9th July despite a petition with getting on for 2,000 signatures, the support of the Hill Road Traders Association, and there having been a pub on the site for 115 years.

The Hall & Woodhouse Badger Brewery have sold the site for development as 17 flats and three shops. Landlord Tony Antoni is looking for alternative licensed premises in the area and it looks as if he will take a good team of staff with him, as well as 2,000 customers! Readers will probably be able to work out whether or not they will be having Badger beers on the bar!

Go along and support this community pub before it closes. Maybe phone 01275 872460 to reserve a table in the restaurant. Don't delay – these "closure" dates have a habit of being brought forward!

The **Salthouse**, close to the Marine Lake in Clevedon, has reopened after a long closure period. Under-18-year-olds are not allowed in the bar, only in the restaurant. If dining, phone 01275 871482 to book a table. The three real ales include locally-brewed Butcombe Bitter and Newman's Wolver's Ale.

The **Moon and Sixpence**, near the pier in Clevedon, has until recently been under the control of the licensees of the Star at Tickenham, but due to changes at the Star reported elsewhere in this article they have ceased any association with the Moon and Sixpence.

Other than publishing an article in the last Pints West, CAMRA could do little to actively support the battle against closure of the Regent as we are short of "active" supporters in Clevedon, which was a great pity. If you would like to help in Clevedon and District by distributing Pints West, publicising CAMRA's campaigns, supporting local real ale and cider sales, collecting information for inclusion in Pints West and keeping CAMRA informed, please initially call the branch contact, Ray Holmes, on 0117 960 5357.



Away from Nailsea & District

There is no excuse for drinking and driving if you want to enjoy real ale away from Nailsea and District in the Bristol direction, with regular bus and train services to and from the city (call Traveline on 0870 608 2 608 for information). If travelling by bus I recommend you purchase a "Greater Bristol Ten Journey Card" for about £20 on the bus or at PS Travel in Nailsea – it is the cheapest way to travel to and from Bristol by bus.

All buses from Nailsea and Backwell travel along Hotwell Road with stops, just after crossing high above Cumberland Basin at Dowry Square, just before the **Spring Gardens** bistro pub and in Anchor Road outside the college.

In Hotwells you will find ample pubs along the road or on the nearby waterside to serve you more than a fair variety of real ales. As you arrive off the raised section of roadway the **Rose of Denmark**, and around the corner the **Bear**, and a little further on the **Spring Gardens**, all serve a couple or so real ales. Just off Dowry Square, the **Adam and Eve** supports four real ales, some from micro-breweries. Around the corner from the Bear, opposite a return bus stop, is the **Merchant's Arms**, a Bath Ales pub listed in the Good Beer Guide with a good selection of their own real ales and perhaps a guest beer.

At the city end of Hotwell Road is a roundabout with the Anchor Road bus stops shortly after it. On the roundabout is the **Myrtle Tree**, a gravity-fed Bass house, and the award-winning **Bag O'Nails**, with half a dozen changing real ales. A short distance up Jacobs Wells Road from that roundabout is the **Hope and Anchor** with up to six real ales mostly from micros. Back down at Cumberland Basin on the waterside will be found the **Pump House** with a couple of real ales. It recently looked as if it might close down but seems to have been revived. Almost facing it is the **Nova Scotia** which has a good selection of real ales.

Half way along Hotwell Road are two bus stops at which the buses from Nailsea and

Backwell don't stop. Close to the city-bound bus stop is the Mardyke which on my last visit had no real ale. Up the steps near the bus stop, on the hill behind the Mardyke, is the **Lion** in Church Lane, with a few real ales including some from micros, and across the Hotwell Road is the **Plume of Feathers**, which is now a hive of activity and a haven for real ale fans following a long period in the doldrums under the banner of Marston's and Greene King breweries.

Mark Farrell has been the licensee of the **Plume of Feathers** only since March 2004, and with the help of ex-Merchant's Arms man Cyril Standbridge as his manager has succeeded in turning the Plume of Feathers into a "must" venue for real ales fans. The bar is quite narrow but opens out into two seating areas at the back of the pub. Leading off the bar is a spiral staircase at the top of which is a pool room. The Split Tin Bakery supplies the pub not only with pies, pasties and sausage rolls, served with or without baked beans or mushy peas, but also jars of pickles for sale behind the bar.

In mid-September last year a very successful mini real ale festival was held supporting over twenty real ales, with temporary racking in one of the seating areas erected with the help of customer Alec Tilley. The regular real ales at the Plume are Adnams Broadside, Bass, Blacksheep Bitter, Butcombe Bitter and Timothy Taylor Landlord. The guest ale is ever changing and when compiling this article was Cain's Raisin Ale, with guests planned in the near future including Badger Best, Caledonian Six Nations, Elgood's Old Wagg, Evan-Evans CWRW Welsh Ale, Exmoor Hound Dog, Gales Frolic, Highgate's Fox's Nob, Hook Norton Generation, Lees Ice Breaker, Kelham Island Pale Rider, St. Austell Tribute, Titanic's Captain Smith's Strong Ale, Wadworth JCB, and York Brewery's Stonewall Bitter. You can call the Plume on (0117) 929 8666 to discover what guest beer is currently on the bar.

And should you wish to ask First Bus why their buses to Nailsea and Backwell and other places in North Somerset don't stop at the bus stops outside and opposite the Plum of Feathers, and to ask them to do so, you could try contacting Mr. Alan Willoughby, General Manager West, First Group, Freepost BS8931, Bristol BS1 3BR or email alan.willoughby@firstgroup.com.



Further away from Nailsea & District

If you are in the Stapleton area of Bristol, you may care to search out a very traditional

real ale pub, the **Masons Arms**, opposite the Murco garage. The landlady always has a couple of local brews in stock which she changes regularly, and at the time of writing it is Bath SPA and Sharp's Doombar, together with the usual Courage Best, Bass, Butcombe and Wadworth 6X, all at very good prices.

The pub has a small, enclosed patio and a huge, fantastic garden, which makes it user-friendly for children in the summer. It may not be everyone's ideal pub, but it is a lovely, old-fashioned, down-to-earth inn, right on the edge of town. If you call in, tell Diane at the bar you saw it mentioned in Pints West.

Still further away from Nailsea & District

A great pub in Birmingham, tucked away in Cambridge Street behind the Symphony Hall, is the Good Beer Guide listed **Prince of Wales**, which I know from many years boating through Birmingham on the canals. On Sunday afternoons, live music in the form of jazz, swing, blues, country, folk or rock packs the place from 3 to 6pm, so arrive early.

If you are an aficionado of **Jennings**, **Moorhouses** and **Everards** ales and are travelling north, Doug Jones, a local supporter of real ale, suggests stopping off in Cumbria at the **Kings Arms**, Burton in Kendall, near Carnforth (01524 781409) where, besides the above real ales, good food and excellent accommodation awaits you. This is good walking territory abounding with wild life, flora and fauna, and is close to the Lake District, as well as Steamtown, Carnforth



And finally

A recent **TESCO** Magazine gave beer drinkers the green light: under the banner "Believe it or not ... beer is good for you in moderation" it said, "Recent research shows that late night kebabs are really to blame for beer's fattening reputation. A pint a day for women and around a pint and a half for men may reduce kidney stones, late-onset diabetes and heart disease. It may even protect you from osteoporosis and stomach ulcers. What's more, a 250ml glass is rich in B vitamins, fat-free and contains fewer calories than milk or apple juice. Fantastic news!"

So, you can now say that you are going to the pub to take your medicine – but don't build up an appetite for late night take-aways, that's what gives beer drinkers a bad name as well as what has been obviously wrongly described as a beer belly for years!

Laurie Gibney

MPs rally behind call for a full pint

A NEW campaign to put an end to the Great British beer rip off was launched at a recent reception in the House of Commons. A new cross-party Parliamentary Motion is calling on the Government to protect consumers from short beer measures in forthcoming Weights and Measures legislation, by defining a pint of beer as 100 per cent liquid.

The current law fails to protect consumers from short beer measures, and as a result, nine in ten "pints" are short measure, one in four are more than five per cent short measure, and short measures are costing consumers £400 million a year, or over £1 million a day.

MPs also express concern at Government proposals to redefine a pint as "not less than 95 per cent liquid". This would make the problem of short measure worse by giving dishonest licensees a green light to short change consumers.

Dennis Turner MP said: "This is the only piece of weights and measures

legislation that is not on the statute book to protect consumers. Over 15 million beer drinkers lose out because of short measure."

Mike Benner, CAMRA's Chief Executive, stated: "The Government has promised to protect consumers from short beer measures, but the proposal for a 95 per cent pint will have the opposite effect. CAMRA members will be lobbying MPs to get behind the campaign for an Honest Pint Law."

Are you being caught short?

To use CAMRA's on-line calculator to see how much short measure costs you, visit www.camra.org.uk.

Lobby your MP

To send your MP an email or letter asking them to support the campaign for an honest pint law visit www.camra.org.uk.

Pub snippet

The Robin Hood on St. Michael's Hill in Kingsdown, Bristol is a good place to enjoy a drop of real ale nowadays, much more than a couple of years or so back.

Rita and Jeff have been in charge of this Wadworth pub for just over two years now and have certainly turned the place around.

Five beers are usually available — three Wadworth brews (usually 6X, JCB and Henry's IPA) and a couple of changing guests — all in good nick every time I've tried them.

The guests for February include Barnstormer, Gem and Spa from the local Bath Ales brewery, and for April include Tribute and HSD from St. Austell in Cornwall.

Talking of Wadworth beers, I can definitely claim to enjoy the taste, and aroma, of Wadworth 6X nowadays when it is served well (as it is at the Robin Hood and various other places, including the Grapes Tavern in Clifton). A few years back I could take it or leave it — now when I see it on the bar, as often as not it could be my first choice. I'm not the only person to have noted this. The editor would like to know if any readers feel the same, and if so which pubs they think serve it up the best.

SP



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The Inn On The Green

THE Horfield area of the Gloucester Road features several large roadside pubs. Situated on the right side of the A38 as you travel north, opposite the Horfield Sports Centre is the Inn On The Green.

Formerly known as the Royal George, the pub came under the management of current licensee Oliver Bainbridge in June 2003. At the time, the then Royal George was in a very tired state and in need of a major refurbishment. In fact, the new management felt there was nothing they wanted to keep of the old Royal George and, with the help of the Enterprise Inns pub company, they undertook a major refit of the bar and the exterior and renamed the pub the Inn On The Green.

The aim was to create a community pub that could welcome a whole variety of people who live in the area. In that regard, they appear to have been very successful as, on my recent visits, there is a good mix of customers.

When you walk into the pub, you are presented with three fairly distinct areas, all within the open plan nature of the interior. There is a lounge area to the left where there is no music and lots of comfortable seating. In the middle, around the bar area, there is more seating including bar stools, and this area can be very much the hub of the pub with views onto the road, and also you can consider your options for your next ale from the impressive bank of handpumps – but more on the beer later.

To the right of the bar is the sport and games area with pool tables, fruit machines and TV screens, including a big screen for those popular sporting events. The area around the TVs can be very popular during big match events.

Soon after Oliver moved in it became apparent that there would be a strong demand for real ales. To begin with, the pub served four real ales – Smiles Best, Bass, Courage Best and Fuller's London Pride. All the ales were selling very well and the pub made a decision that they wanted real ale to be a major part of their offering.

It is worth noting that the pub realised that well-kept real ale got their customers coming back on a regular basis, staying in the pub longer and, even more important from the pubs point of view, talking about



Photo from Duncan Shine's web site at www.britishpubguide.com

the place and bringing in new customers. That is certainly how I heard about the place – perhaps some other pubs could take some learning from this!

In view of the high turnover of the ales and the customers' enthusiasm, Oliver decided to increase the real ale range to six in November 2003. The pub stuck with the existing brands and added the ubiquitous Greene King Morland Old Speckled Hen and the local brew, Butcombe Bitter. At the same time, the pub started stocking an occasional guest beer – beers that the pub knew would sell well to ensure a good level of turnover.

This increased range of well-kept ales was welcomed by the regulars – and, by now, some new customers. Oliver and his staff noticed that the customers were happy to try new beers and, when a guest beer was on, they would rave about it and bring friends in to try it. This proved to be most important and the pub decided they should have more guest beers on and less of the big national brands. Also, the decision was taken to have regularly changing guest beers. Enterprise Inns has a fairly comprehensive list of guest beers and, with their Specialist Ales Scheme, the pub was able to order a vast array of ales from all over the UK quickly and easily, so

supply was not a problem.

By January 2004 the pub had increased its range to eight beers and regularly had 20 different ales a month. With increased choice, the pub was pleased to note an increased demand – quality was not compromised. In their own words, “the more peculiar the beer the more interest there seemed to be and we found demand was easy to cultivate”.

In January 2005 the pub added two more pumps and has been selling ten real ales since. There are some regulars, such as Fuller's London Pride, Bass and Sharp's Doom Bar, but the others are changing guest beers. Oliver says that “the driving factor is that as long as demand is strong, the quality of the beer sold can be maintained as a result of the stillage time being cut down.” The pub hopes to be able to support 12 real ales by the end of this year and have a new menu of quality food on offer.

I have found my visits to the Inn On The Green very enjoyable with prompt service and the pub always maintained to high standards. This certainly is a welcome addition to the real ale scene in Bristol and the Inn On The Green is a million miles from the pub it was two years ago.

Pete Bridle

Oysters and Peaches

PERHAPS the most unusual beer to be brewed in the Bristol area recently was the speciality beer from the new Zerodegrees micro-brewery at the top of Christmas Steps, available over the Christmas period.

What made the beer different from most was the particular ingredient added during the early stages of production – not a special type of malt, not a rare breed of hop, not an exotic fruit, but oysters!

You may perhaps have heard the term “oyster stout” before – well this was the real thing, with 120 whole oysters going into each batch, shell and all!

The oysters were thrown into the brew kettle during the boiling stage of the brewing process, adding calcium to the wort. This didn't give an overtly ‘fishy’ character, but resulted in a smooth, deep dark, chocolaty stout with a thick, creamy head.

This is a rare style of beer that is difficult to get hold of, so it's good to see it making its mark in Bristol.

At the time of writing, the latest speciality beer from Zerodegrees is a fruit beer made with the addition of peaches. This sweetish but pleasant beer replaced the mango fruit beer on offer earlier.

SP

(Photographs by Tony Durbin)



Campaign for Real Blood?

THE news agency United Press International reported on Saturday, September 25, 2004 that a campaign was to be launched in the Czech capital Prague to attract donors by offering them two beers in exchange for their blood. The web site of the *Mlada Fronta Dnes* newspaper quoted campaign organizer Jaroslav Novak, the editor of a monthly beer magazine, as saying he had been alerted to shortages of blood in local hospitals at frequent beer drinking sessions with Prague doctors.

Putting two and two together, Novak decided to promote both beer and blood at a city fair. He had ambitions to take the campaign country wide if it proved successful in Prague.

In August the World Health Organization recommended the Czech Republic do more to curb alcoholism in the country, which is the world's largest per capita consumer of beer. In the Czech Republic beer is commonly served in half litre (pint) glasses. A beer usually costs less than 50p a glass.

Norman Spalding



Brewers Norman Gapare from London's Zerodegrees (left), and Martin Maier from Bristol's, join forces for the launch of Oyster Stout.

Pub news

The **New Inn** at Cross, near Axbridge, is offering all its real ales for £1.50 a pint on Thursday evenings until further notice as a promotion. On our last visit they were selling beers from Hook Norton, Ringwood and Titanic, plus a seasonal brew from Hall &

Woodhouse. Flock there now while it lasts!

The **Don John's Cross** in St. George has now been demolished and building (probably of flats) has started on the site.

The **Talbot** on Wells Road, Knowle, which was closed for some time, has reopened as a Chinese restaurant.

Norman Spalding

Introducing Box Steam Brewery

WHAT do you think of when you hear the word "Box"? That cardboard thing your telly came in? Or maybe the bulging cubiform container you got from *Humpers* with your Christmas Beer inside? Or perhaps it puts you in mind of powerful pugilists pulverising each other for money?

How about when I tell you I'm thinking of the *place* Box, in Wiltshire? Do you think of traffic congestion on the A4? The home of the Reverend Awdry – creator of Thomas the Tank Engine? Or perhaps the chosen domicile of WOMAD illuminatus and one-time Genesis frontman Peter Gabriel? Or even the *piéd-a-terre* of that really tall bloke who used to be on Casualty and Vicar of Dibley, Clive Mantle.

Well, as admirable as these claims to fame are, the town of Box now has an even bigger reason to be proud. For, on a farm just outside the town, stands the Box Steam Brewery, one of the newest real ale breweries in the region.

It is the brainchild of three very different men: Marshall Ewart, landlord of the Bear pub in Box (of which more in a bit); Mark Hempleman-Adams who, since you ask, does have a famous explorer for a brother, but is getting a bit fed up with everyone going on about it; and Paul Dabson, who describes himself as an artist, lecturer and all-round nice bloke.



To find out more, I venture east from Bristol and meet with Paul in the Bear, where Marshall is cheerfully busy with his customers.

As we sit supping a delicious and flavour-some pint of Old Jockey (*named after a local coaching inn that has long since disappeared*), Paul explains how the business got going. Although up and running since April 2004, the brewery was only formally launched in September. All three of the founders do a little bit of everything to keep the business running smoothly, though Paul is busy full-time handling everything from brewing, to sales and distribution, to designing the website and even



talking to local CAMRA members.

Brewing is carried out on the farm up the hill, with copper and mash coming from Bath Ales when they moved away from Siston Common. Paul cannot speak highly enough of the help Bath Ales have given Box. The brew length is about ten or twelve barrels a week, producing four or more different brews for the local free trade.

The beers are all brewed using, wherever possible, local ingredients. The maris otter, chocolate and crystal grains all come from Warminster, while the variety of hops used are all sourced from Herefordshire. So, to the beers.

The flagship brew is **Tunnel Vision** (4.2% abv), named in honour of another Box claim to fame, Brunel's famous railway tunnel. This is a very quaffable traditional bitter, very clean and crisp to taste and with no cloying sweetness.

Next is **Rev. Awdry's Ale** (3.8% abv), a light, golden brew that must just slide down

the throat on hot summer's afternoons. It's a perfect example of how real ale can be just as refreshing as the lagers and ciders that are so popular, but infinitely more tasty.

In the winter, there is **Blind House**, which is brewed as a "dark, hoppy, full-bodied beer with hints of red wine and cinnamon". Perfect for an afternoon in front of a roaring fire.

There is also **Old Jockey** (4.0% abv). Now I tried it at the Bear and I thought it was a scrumptious pint. Really – and I mean *really* – dry, with a hint of citrus fruit to it. Sadly, Paul tells me that this beer may be discontinued because some people are finding it a bit too "tart" for their liking. I really hope they keep it, as it's a distinctive beer that I think would find a significant market.

So where can you get these beers? Well, Paul continues to strive to increase the number of free trade outlets, so it could pop up anywhere with a genuine guest beer policy.

The Bear in Box is a sort of unofficial brewery tap, so you're always going to find at least one brew there. Other recent sightings have been in the *Green Tree*, *Raven* (formerly *Hatchett's*), *Volunteer Rifleman's Arms*, *Bath Cricket Club*, all in Bath; the *Quarryman's Arms* in Box; and the *Neeld Arms* in Grittleton. There are also plans to introduce the beers to the drinkers of Bristol in the near future.

If you can't wait that long, the beers are also available in 18- and 36-pint boxes, direct from the brewery.

Landlords and landladies interested in stocking these beers should contact Paul at the brewery on (01225) 743 622.

Duncan Shine



The Bear in Box

Shine on Hanham

With an almost metronomic regularity, Duncan Shine reports on the pubs and bars covered by the Bristol & District Branch of CAMRA. This issue, our Dunc ventures over to Hanham.

Full details and photographs of all the pubs mentioned can be found on the www.britishpubguide.com web site. Landlords and regulars in these pubs are welcome to update the information on the website whenever they like.

Picture the scene. Spring is springing, and you love spring. Spring is the time when the snowdrops, crocuses and daffodils start to bloom; when Bristol City's promotion challenge starts to fade; when the Prince of Wales' fancy turns to marrying a [*sorry, I had to censor this bit – Ed*]; when rosetted strangers appear at your door asking if they can count on your vote. But the best thing about spring is that you can finally give up all that New Year's Resolution nonsense and get back on the beer.

Now, on this particular early spring day your new partner has owned up to a keen interest in naturalism, and suggested a visit to Hanham Abbots. Now, coming from the other side of the city you didn't realise that Hanham was a real place. You'd always assumed it was just the Bristol way of saying "Haven't they?", but when an attractive naturalist suggests heading out into the fields, you don't say no...

Imagine your disappointment when you arrive at Hanham Abbots to find out that your partner simply wanted to look at plants and birds and stuff and, if anything, has even more clothes on than normal. Worse still, it turns out that Hanham Abbots is a conservation area! I mean, what's the point of having a special area just for sitting around chatting?



The Swan Inn

Come to think of it, such a thing already exists... At this moment, a shambling, slightly jaded looking figure approaches and clears his throat.

"If you were thinking of finding somewhere for a drink, I may have a few suggestions around here".

You leave your partner searching for a "*lesser-spotted woodpecking thrappledouser*" and head off in search of ale.

Your first port of call is the **Swan Inn** on Conham Hill. Situated at the very western end of Hanham on the hill that eventually leads down to the River Avon, and the Crews Hole Road, this is a

lovely community pub with a garden and a skittle alley. Bass and Fuller's London Pride are on offer, but you plump for an excellent pint of Sharp's Doom Bar while your guide thoroughly enjoys his Bath Gem.

From there you head back to Hanham High Street, where the **Maypole**, set slightly back from the road, offers Greene King I.P.A., and the **Jolly Sailor** sadly offers no real ale on the day of your visit.



The Queen's Head

So instead, you head up the Lower Hanham Road to the **Queen's Head**. Much to your surprise and disappointment, you find out that the previous landlord has not only left the pub trade, but is at this very moment driving the local bus up the High Street. However, the new tenants at this historic Wadworth house seem to be doing very well. The food here is excellent, and the Wadworth beers are in tip-top condition (6X and Henry's I.P.A.). Better still, there is a regularly changing guest beer, with Vale Brewery's Notley Ale taking pride of place this time around.

Next, it's back on to the High Street and up to the **Blue Bowl**,



The Blue Bowl

a delightful 15th century pub that was once a coaching inn on the old route from Bristol to Bath. The low ceilings and labyrinthine interior retain that Olde Worlde charm, and they have Bass and Courage Best on draft.

Now it's time for another detour, as you turn left and head up Greenbank Road. As you climb the hill, your guide points out the playing fields to the right. "That's the home ground of AEK-Boco FC, one of the finest adult and junior football clubs in the area," he says matter-of-factly; though you suspect it may just be a cheap and rather obvious attempt to plug his son's football team.

When you reach the top of Greenbank Road, the **Cross Keys** sits on the other side of Hollyguest Road. The Cross Keys is an unassuming two bar locals' pub, with a large garden in which to while away hot summer evenings. "Let's go in the public bar on the right," says your guide "it's always bustling with lively conversation". You wonder what they could possibly do to preserve wildlife in there, but follow your guide in anyway. Your guide sups a delightful pint of Wychwood Hobgoblin, while you are delighted to find your first traditional cider of the day, a divine pint of Thatcher's Dry.

Next, back down to the High Street, which becomes Bath Road before you arrive at the **Harvester Restaurant**, known for most its history as the Crown. You think to yourself that it's important to encourage chain pubs like this by drinking their real ales so that one day the accountants at Head Office will realise that decent beer and commercial success, far from being mutually exclusive, actually go hand in hand. The Bass and Fuller's London Pride, while perhaps an unimaginative selection, are nonetheless in fine fettle.



The Butcher's Arms

Thence further into Longwell Green and the **Butcher's Arms**. You are worried that the Butcher's doesn't open until 5:30pm, but your guide helpfully points out that no-one has mentioned at what time this pub crawl is taking place, so you assume it's about 6pm and wander in. You find a lovely old pub with a real traditional feel and welcoming landlady. The Bass and Courage Best again fall into the category of unimaginative but perfectly well kept.

"The final two pubs to visit," says your Guide "are down in Hanham Mills". You express concern that that is almost two miles away by road, but your Guide reassures you that another benefit of being on a fictitious pub crawl is that you can use some clever form of transport and people will just think it's a smart science-fiction *in-joke*. So you get Scotty to set the coordinates and beam down just outside the **Chequers**.

The Chequers overlooks the River Avon in an absolutely



The Chequers

idyllic location, and you climb the steps to enjoy two pints from the real ale selection of Greene King Abbot Ale, Greene King I.P.A., and Morland Old Speckled Hen (also brewed by Greene King).

Thence to your final pub of the day. The **Old Lock & Weir** is a beautiful converted riverside cottage with a terrace on the banks of the river. The pub is on two floors, with three linked drinking rooms at ground level, and the bar up the steps at the back. The real ale selection is Fuller's London Pride, Bass, Wadworth 6X, Morland Old Speckled Hen and Wells Bombardier. There is also a good pint of Addlestone's Cloudy Cask-Conditioned Cider. Your partner rejoins you in this pub, full of stories about their naturalist adventures. The beers are so well kept here that you decide to stay for a second pint.



The Old Lock & Weir

The next thing you know you are waking up strapped to a tree on a small island in the middle of the Avon. Through the blur you can see two burly men rowing back across to the pub. One of them says to the other: "And then he asked me if I wanted to go looking for Siskins with him. Pervert!"

Is there an area covered by the Bristol & District Branch of CAMRA that you would like to see featured in this column in the next issue? If so, send an email to duncan.shine@britishpubguide.com and we'll see what we can do.



READERS' LETTERS

Froth Off



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)

No Smiles

So, Smiles now Highgate?

I understand that Highgate Brewery did a very good job of recreating Davenport's Bitter and so let us all hope that Smiles beers will return to being a good imitation of those which they once were (and which they should always have been).

I believe that if John Payne (the originator of Smiles) could be allowed to oversee the transfer to the Midlands then all should go

well. I know that this will not happen but I look forward to Highgate's recreations rather more than I would have looked forward to a pint of Smiles recently.

Geoff Larsen,
St. George,
Bristol.

Beer Factory Beer Sampled

Dear Steve,

Having read the news item about Bristol Beer Factory No. 7 in Pints West, I was pleased to sample the said beer in the Cornubia recently. I can confirm it is as excellent as described in the article.

Ian Mihell
(by email).

Brewery Historian Requires Stuff

Dear Steve,

I am a Brewery Historian. I have just written one book on brewing in a provincial town in Surrey, and now am busy assisting in the conversion of the Brewery History Society's photographic archive from photos into electronic files.

As well as research, I am also trying to build up an archive (since the 1960s) of brewery paper ephemera – that is to say, letters, compliment slips, invoices, business cards, etc.

Now I am fully aware, and no doubt you are also, that "classic" material (e.g. pre-war) fetches very reasonable prices on Ebay, but

the reason for this email is that, although I also collect classic stuff and pay good prices for them, I also collect the later material which so often is not wanted and often ends up in the bin.

You know the kind of stuff, those by-products one is left with after writing round the breweries for visits or promotional stuff following tipplefairs, etc.

I am particularly interested in stuff from independent breweries from the 1960s onwards, and also modern micro-breweries, etc., particularly those which have come and gone within the last two decades.

So many have just simply "passed me by" and I am trying to fill in the missing spaces by sending this email to as many CAMRA branches as I can in the off-chance that somebody has an accumulation of this material and is happy to part with them for a good cause, and which otherwise in the normal run of things are binned.

If you have any quantity of the sort of stuff I am seeking, no matter how few, please do not hesitate to contact me. I would be grateful if you could ask around your fellow committee members in case they may have something. Or perhaps your Pints West readers could help.

Very best wishes,
Richard Symonds,
147 Farhalls Crescent,
Horsham,
West Sussex,
RH12 4BU.
Email: rsymonds@tinyworld.co.uk

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Short Measure

Dera Steve,

Visiting an old favourite, the Ostrich in Lower Guinea Street, a while ago (November) we were offered three pints well short of full. Politely asking for them to be topped up "now that they have settled" we were saddened to be told "I'm allowed five per cent". It will be a long time before we return.

Best regards,

Su Munro and Bob Hutton,
Nailsea.

Fuller's Feedback

Fuller's have launched a customer feedback site and are keen to get reviews of beer quality across the UK. The form can be found at the following web site:

www.proudfyourpride.com.

Perhaps you'd consider featuring something on your branch website and/or newsletter?

Cheers,

Brett Lanios,

Fuller's Brewery.

Dear Vince,

I saw your comments in Pints West and I think you have been very fair to Fuller's. I should just add that if someone takes the time to write to me a) I will reply and b) I will listen.

We at Fuller's always try to produce the best beers we can and customer feedback helps us to improve our beers. Although it

might be impossible to please all of the people all of the time, it is always fun to try!

Once again, thank you very much for your kind comments.

Yours sincerely,

John Keeling,

Brewing Director,

Fuller, Smith & Turner PLC,

Griffin Brewery, Chiswick Lane South,
Chiswick, London W4 2QB.

The above communication was the latest in the exchange of views between Vince Murray and Fuller's appearing in recent editions of Pints West, over what Vince had maintained had been changes in the flavour of London Pride, their flagship beer.

Vince said last time that he had perceived what he considered to be changes in the beer taste again, this time for the better, with the "offending" caramel flavour no longer so evident.

He said he had since gone out of his way to keep trying the beer, both in Fuller's pubs and in the free trade.

He was very pleased to say that the improvement he perceived had continued with the beer back close to its former glory and it now once again a beer that he would choose more often than not.

Vince goes on to say:

"My only reply to John Keeling's letter would be to thank him for his courtesy, and taking the trouble to answer everything personally. I also want to thank him for the

much improved availability of London Porter this year – something that I called for in the article. It has been on for a couple of months at the Fish Market and is excellent."

24-hour drinking?

CAMRA has questioned recent surveys that suggest most adults do not want a more flexible approach to pub opening hours. Research commissioned by CAMRA in December 2002 shows that over 66% of the public supported more flexible opening hours. CAMRA says that more flexible pub opening hours are part of the solution to combat binge drinking, not the problem, and has voiced its support for the National Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy as a way forward to combat binge drinking.

CAMRA has also launched a new campaign, "Pubs for All", which promotes the importance of pubs which appeal to a wide cross-section of people through improved facilities, multi-rooms and more seating. The "Pubs for All" campaign seeks to persuade Local Authorities to use the new Licensing Act to tackle irresponsible promotions, overcrowding, lack of seating and the huge vertical drinking warehouses, which are the source of many of the current problems.

CAMRA claims that the majority of pubs are well run, attract people of all ages and are an important part of community, and should be allowed more freedom over when they are allowed to open.

CAMRA's Chief Executive, Mike Benner, said, "Very few pubs will apply for 24-hour licenses, and even fewer applications will be granted. It is fanciful to suggest that reform will mean more than a handful will be allowed to open for 24 hours a day.

"The current licensing system has failed consumers and local communities alike, and has fueled the current problems of binge drinking, drunkenness and public disorder. Reform is long overdue.

"Binge drinking needs to be tackled but delaying licensing reform is not the answer. The vast majority of Britain's 15 million beer drinkers drink and act responsibly and should not be punished because of the activities of a small minority."

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Diary

Diary of the Bristol & District branch of CAMRA, the Campaign for Real Ale. *See inside for the Weston-super-Mare sub-branch diary and contact.*

Wed 23 February - Branch meeting, Horts City Tavern, Broad Street, central Bristol, 8pm.

Wed 9 March - Branch committee meeting at the Cornubia, 8pm.

Sun 13 March - GBG selection meeting, Horts. Start 12:30pm.

Mon 14 March - Campaign meeting to save Rose & Crown, Iron Acton. Venue Iron Acton Village Hall, High Street, 7.45pm. Bus (depending on numbers) departs Cornubia, 6:45pm.

Wed 23 March - Branch meeting, upstairs bar of the Holy Cross & Southville Social Club, Dean Lane, Southville (50 yards down from the Coronation), 8pm.

Wed 13 April - Branch committee meeting at the Cornubia, 8pm.

Wed 27 April - Branch meeting, Horts City Tavern, Broad Street, central Bristol 8pm.

Tues 7 June - Trip to Butcombe Brewery. Leave from the Cornubia, 6.45pm.

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

THANKS TO THIS ISSUE'S CONTRIBUTORS

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

Inclusion of an advertisement does not imply endorsement by CAMRA.

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.

PINTS WEST ~ brought to you entirely by unpaid volunteers . . .

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

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

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Subscriptions: to be put on a mailing list (for UK addresses) send a cheque for just £2.50 to the editor, *made payable to "Steve Plumridge"* (or some 2nd class stamps up to that value).

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...

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The Rose and Crown at Iron Acton

The way pubs used to be

This pub profile by Vince Murray first appeared in Pints West in 1998. Very little had changed in the intervening years — before its closure that is (see front page and inside) — so it seemed appropriate to reproduce the article here.

ARE you fed up with the endless stream of “theme” pubs? Do you think that pubs in more rural areas have more in common with restaurants or children’s playgrounds, than the wonderful inns that you remember so fondly? Do you despair of being able to have a quiet pint of good ale, in pleasant surroundings, where conversation is the order of the day? Then don’t – because there is hope, in the shape of the Rose and Crown in the High Street at Iron Acton, a small village that lies between Yate and Frampton Cotterell about eight miles from central Bristol.

Allan Didcott grew up in Iron Acton, becoming a skilled tool-maker, and briefly a milkman, before, together with his wife Gail, deciding in 1985 to buy the pub that had always been his “local”. They are still there and intend to be so for a long time to come. This in itself is unusual in the current age of “musical landlords”. The pub is one of the precious few genuine free houses in our area, and they have total control over what to sell and when to open. They employ no staff at all and do everything themselves.

The Rose and Crown was first recorded as a coaching inn as long ago as 1680 and many original features are still evident. The pub has two very distinct drinking areas, both with their own character, and characters. The public bar is described by Allan as being lively and “strong on banter”, comes with pool table and dart board, and is frequented mainly by locals and regulars, although all are made welcome. The lounge bar is an altogether more sedate affair, with comfortable furniture, tasteful décor, and many interesting artefacts and pictures on display, plus a solitary fruit machine. Cribbage is played and a team is based here. Both rooms have real log fires for the winter months, and the only music played is the radio, tuned into “Classic Gold” and kept at a totally inoffensive volume.

In addition to locals, many come from the surrounding area (ample parking is available outside) and others come from further afield, attracted by the pub’s entry in the Good Beer Guide for each of the last six years. The pub offers bed and breakfast in its four en suite bedrooms, normally only from Monday to Thursday nights and used mainly by business folk passing through, although anybody wanting to extend their stay will be allowed to.

Very unusually for a pub of its type, the Rose and Crown does not do food; indeed, apart from Sundays, it does not even open at lunchtimes. The only concession is a handful of filled rolls at the start of the evening, and “once they are gone they are gone”. This allows the emphasis to be firmly on the wet trade, with the selection of real ales taking centre stage. Five ales are



always on sale, with a well-balanced range of styles and strengths, and two local independent breweries featured.

The range is Whitbread Flowers IPA (3.6% ABV), Marston’s Pedigree (4.5%), Draught Bass (4.4%), Wickwar Olde Merryford (4.8%) and Uley Pig’s Ear (5%). The latter is a particularly welcome sight as Uley beers are extremely rare in the Bristol area, and I’m not aware of anywhere else selling Pig’s Ear within 20 miles. It is a superb pale, deceptively strong, ale brewed by a small brewery near Dursley. It has special memories for me, as in 1989 I took my lager-drinking future wife to her first beer festival at Frocester. She was horrified to discover no lager available, but tried Pig’s Ear when I said it was “sort of lager coloured”. It was love at first sip and she has been a dedicated fan of real ale ever since! So if you want to cure a friend or loved one of fizz-addiction, pop down to the Rose and Crown and try the miracle cure!

I asked Allan which of the ales sold best, fully expecting him to say Bass, and was very pleased when he informed me that he sold almost three times as much Pig’s Ear as any other beer (an astonishing five or six nine-gallon casks per week! – so much for there being no demand for local hand-crafted ales!). None of the beers sell less than two casks per week, meaning the chances of a bad pint here are remote. Indeed, Allan and Gail would take a beer out of the range if it sold less.

To the rear of the pub, the Didcotts own a large amount of land, including a full-sized football pitch. The changing rooms have recently been repaired and refurbished, and Allan would like to see them in full use by the middle of the season. He wants the facilities to be used to the “mutual benefit of the business and the community”, with events such as fairs and fetes being held. He is also keen to host a beer festival at some stage.

To summarise, this is a splendid, and increasingly rare, example of a traditional pub at the heart of a local community, which has not been allowed to succumb to internal or external vandalism, or to be taken over by food, and long may it remain so. The Didcotts have no plans to change anything as they feel that they have found a winning formula, and I tend to agree.