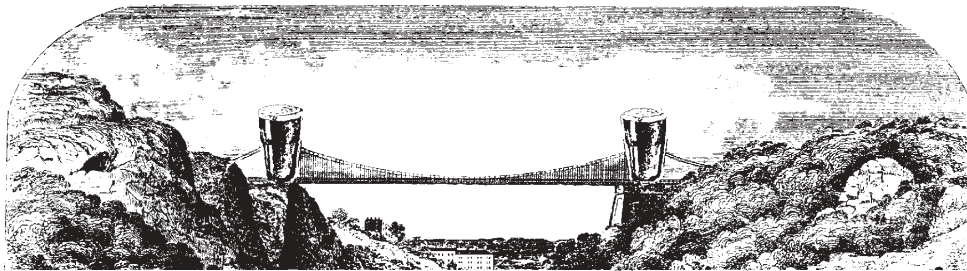




CAMPAIGN
FOR
REAL ALE

AWARD-WINNING



www.camrabristol.org.uk

No. 69
Spring
2006

CAMPAIGN
FOR
REAL ALE

PINTS WEST

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

Real smoking ban

THE biggest change to the pub trade in many years is coming. Not extended hours, but the smoking ban. A pub could decide to stick with the same opening hours it had always observed, but the smoking ban will be imposed on all pubs and clubs without exception.

Some licensees are already predicting that this is draconian legislation that will ruin their livelihood. They say that this is the nanny state gone mad and a serious affront to our liberties. People expect a traditional boozy, smoky atmosphere in a pub. What ever will the government ban next?

Of course the alternative view is that this is great news for the health of people who work in pubs. The majority of the population are non-smokers and this may attract many more potential customers (who don't want to go home smelling like a used ashtray) to actually use their local. And the beer should taste better as well.

CAMRA had favoured a middle way, where pubs with the appropriate facilities could have had a separate smoking room. However this was not to be and out of the options that were put forward (some of which were clearly unworkable) the total ban was the only likely outcome.

So what do you think of the ban? We are interested in the views of licensees and pub-users in our area. You can write to Pints West or email your views to camra@camrabristol.org.uk.

On the subject of extended pub hours, whatever happened to the "end of civilisation as we know it" that so many were predicting? I guess I must have missed it. Despite many pubs taking advantage, we've received a plea: "Please point out that those of us living in the suburbs have been unable to enjoy more time in the best Good Beer Guide pubs as First Bus have made no attempt to extend late bus services – so last orders is still 11pm for us!"

Richard Brooks



CAMPAIGN
FOR
REAL ALE



Richard Brooks

Festival tickets sell out in record time

THE ninth annual Bristol Beer Festival takes place at the Brunel Passenger Shed, Temple Meads, Bristol, on Friday 24 March and Saturday 25 March 2006 and this year all the tickets sold out well in advance and faster than ever.

The festival has grown in popularity each year, but ticket sales have been truly exceptional this time. There was massive initial demand when the tickets went on sale on 19 December and the Friday evening session sold out within a couple of weeks. Friday lunchtime is traditionally the slowest-selling session and yet every single ticket was snapped up seven weeks before the festival was due to open.

This proves that there is plenty of

local interest in real ale and cider and what an enjoyable event the festival is. The success of the festival is of course down to the hard work put in by the organisers and people who work at the festival, who are all unpaid CAMRA volunteers.

There will be more than 120 real ales and around 40 ciders and perries. For the provisional beer and cider order and further details about the festival please visit www.camrabristol.org.uk.

Finally, many thanks to Rab at the Bridge Inn, Paul at the Hare On The Hill, Ollie at the Inn On The Green, and those at Off The Rails in Weston, all who sold tickets for us.

Julian Dyer / Richard Brooks

National Pubs Week

CAMRA first launched National Pubs Week in February 2003 to encourage more people to enjoy the unique atmosphere that pubs have to offer. Licensees taking part are encouraged to host activities to promote their pub within the community. CAMRA has published research that has revealed that 26 British pubs are closed forever every month, costing many communities their social hub and depriving residents of a place to meet and socialise. In an effort to combat this worrying trend CAMRA called on those who love their local to get behind National Pubs Week by adopting a pub.

In previous years more than 15,000 pubs have taken part by organising events to attract more custom and celebrate Britain's fantastic pub industry. This year National Pubs Week ran from 18th to 25th February and some of our local pubs to support this initiative included



the Bunch of Grapes (who have a full programme of live entertainment and are open until midnight each day) and the Seven Stars (who have a popular cider festival on the last Sunday of each month). Licensees of both pubs are pictured here proudly sporting their National Pubs Week T-shirts.

Richard Brooks

Pubs in Time

CAMRA has awarded a plaque to the **George** at Norton St Philip as part of their **Pubs in Time** project. The George, a Wadworth's pub, was the Duke of Monmouth's headquarters in 1685, prior to the Battle of Sedgemoor. Initially, fourteen pubs have received plaques, and it is hoped that pub-goers and landlords will be inspired to nominate their pubs for future plaques. It's not just great historical events that are eligible; writers or artists associated with a particular pub, or legendary gigs, may also be celebrated. For more information, see the CAMRA website: www.camra.org.uk.

Andrew Swift

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Current rates are:

6cm x 6cm	£34
6cm x 8cm	£43
9cm x 8cm	£56
9cm x 12cm	£78
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Don't demolish this!

THE former Ashley Court Hotel – located at 63 Ashley Hill, Ashley Down, Bristol – is in danger of being demolished. It's a Victorian gothic style, former rectory of St Werburgh's Church, built in 1878 and with fabulous views over Bristol and the St Werburgh's allotments.

Until it closed in 2005, its bar, **The Ship Aground**, was the only one in the local area, so residents have lost a valuable public amenity. A Planning application (05/04749/F) has been submitted for a large new building of 22 one- and two-bedroom flats with parking.

Residents in the area have mounted a high profile campaign to save this Victorian gothic building and the local branch of CAMRA is happy to lend its support.

Not only would the proposed block of flats be quite out of character with the buildings in the surrounding area – comments from the Urban Design Team state their displeasure at the current plans saying, "Its demolition would be a sad loss of this fine piece of architecture" – but let's not forget that the local community would lose yet another public house forever, the Ship Aground bar.

When considering this application for change of use, we would urge Bristol City Council planning officers to take into account the fact that the community has already lost five pubs: **The Botany**; **The White Horse**; **The Duke of Cambridge** (being turned into yet more flats); **The Montpelier Hotel**; and **Kearneys** (Blarney Castle).

Aside from the current planning application, we are aware that there is a potential "buyer" waiting in the wings, who is willing to buy the property, keep the building and re-open it as a hotel and public bar.



Photo by Duncan Shine, from the www.britishpubguide.com web site

So what can you do?

○ Lodge an objection on the ukplanning.com website

○ Get some signatures on the petition (this can be downloaded from uk.groups.yahoo.com/group/saveAC/) and send it to:

Planning Dept, Brunel House, St Georges Road, Bristol BS1 5UY (quote 05/04749/F).

Alison Bridle

STOP PRESS: As Pints West went to press the application had just been withdrawn, **BUT...** the planner seemed to think that there will be another submitted in the next month (for a smaller, similar build). So keep the pressure up.

News from the Bristol Beer Factory

THE Bristol Beer Factory in Bedminster finished its first year of trading just before Christmas, with all four regular brands (No. 7, Gold, Red and Sun Rise) continuing to increase in volume. The second half of February saw the brewery produce its hundredth full-scale brew.

The first Bristol Beer Factory bottled product, "Brunale" (commemorating Brunel's 200th anniversary – and brewed within sight of the Clifton Suspension Bridge) should now be on sale and available at the Rummer, Cork's Off License, Southville Delicatessen and the Tobacco Factory (among other places). Keep an eye out for further venues. The beer is described as a dark English ale at 4.6 per cent ABV with roast malt and fruit notes. The beer, for the moment, is sterile filtered and unpasteurised, although not bottle-conditioned. This is something the brewery will be looking to change in the future – hopefully being able to

gain CAMRA's "Real Ale in a Bottle" accreditation.

A local Bedminster butcher – Bob Werlock on North Street – has started making a Brunel sausage using Brunale, which is on sale now (and delicious we're told).

Brunale will also be making an appearance in cask-conditioned form when head brewer Chris Thurgeson can fit it into the brewing schedule.

Alongside this, Chris says they are proud to announce that, after reviving the "Sun Rise" brand name of the Ashton Gate Brewery (the remaining building of which houses the Bristol Beer Factory), they are also reviving the most popular beer they used to produce – "Milk Stout". Their version of this was in the trial stage at the time of writing, and will be slightly stronger than the version made there up until the 1930s, weighing in at 4.8 per cent ABV. Chris says they are very excited about being able to recreate such an historic style – sadly almost extinct today – on the very premises it was once brewed on such a large scale.

Pub news

○ February 21st saw the **Richmond Spring** in Clifton – a Scottish & Newcastle pub just over the road from the Students' Union building – opening under new management, the new licensee being the landlord of the nearby Lansdown. The pub may also get a new name, having been dubbed the "Clifton Sports Bar". Whether this is to be an official change of name or not, though, I don't know. When I first walked in on day one I was worried the real ales had all disappeared, as none of the handpumps (apart from the traditional cider) had any pump clips. My fears were dispelled when I was informed they simply hadn't got the pump clips at that moment, and that Theakston's Old Peculier and St Austell Tribute were on. The latter proved very tasty. Two sources have told me there may be plans afoot to alter the pub's interior, with perhaps some internal walls being removed to open it up.

○ Meanwhile, the previous landlord of the Richmond Spring has moved on to the **Ship Inn** in Lower Park Row, another S&N pub. Lovers of mild will be pleased to learn that he sells Theakston's Mild.

○ A short walk up from the Richmond Spring brings you to the **Clifton Wine Bar**. This place recently reopened following a period closed for refurbishment. A nice job they've done too. Real ale aficionados should not be put off by the name. Yes, it does sell plenty of wine, but this is a Wadworth establishment and has three of their beers on handpump – always in good condition in my experience.

○ The **Hillgrove** in Kingsdown – a short stroll along from another great pub, the **Hare on the Hill** – recently agreed a completely free-of-tie lease with the pub company, Pubfolio, meaning landlord Glen Dawkins is free to buy in whatever beers he wants. So the pub can now serve all sorts of wonderful micro-brewery beers. Real ale has grown to around three-quarters of all beer sold there. The pub's hours have also changed, now opening from 4pm (noon on Sundays) to midnight.

○ The **Eldon House** in Hotwells (Lower Clifton Hill, off Jacobs Wells Road) has been under new management for a few months now. In that time they have significantly improved the beers on offer. They are free of tie as far as beers go, unlike previous licensees there, and have opted to support local breweries. Recent offerings have included beers from Newman's, Moles and Bath Ales. The pub has gone for extended hours, opening until midnight Mondays to Thursdays, and 1.30am Fridays and Saturdays.

○ The **Queen Square Dining Room and Bar** has opened where previously stood Bristol's central post office – and to rave reviews. Methinks it's very refreshing to see a new establishment like this – one that is much about good wining and dining – going to the trouble of putting good real ales on the menu too. Good quality Fuller's London Pride and Butcombe Bitter are available on draught.

SP

A second Ring O'Bells for Butcombe



THE Ring O'Bells in Hinton Blewitt is Butcombe Brewery's latest acquisition, bringing their total number of pubs to nine. Butcombe completed the deal on January 13th and took over management on February 2nd.

This friendly pub, which is situated on a hilltop above Bishop Sutton, can pose a bit of a challenge to locate for the first time visitor, but is well worth the effort. Outside seating, and a garden from which to appreciate the views, make it a popular stop-off point for

ramblers and cyclists, especially in the summer months.

In keeping with Butcombe's guest beer policy, there are two guest beers – one of which is currently Bath Ales Gem – alongside two of their own ales. A new wine list has also been introduced to complement a very varied selection of food which is available at both lunchtimes and evenings.

As the Ring O'Bells is a real village pub, it supports both indoor and outdoor activities,

including shove halfpenny, and golf and cricket clubs. The landlord also hopes to rekindle local rugby interest. At present, enthusiasts can watch rugby on the TV above the bar.

There is a no-smoking 'snug' and children are made welcome in the pub as are family members of the canine variety.

Opening hours are 11 to 3 lunchtimes and 5 to 11 evenings, with extended opening summer weekends and on special occasions.

Margaret and Terry Evett

Cider Sisters

IT needed to be good. It was the weekend before Christmas – over two years since our last cider weekend, and the pressure was on to maintain our previous high standard. The temptation was strong to avoid disappointment by revisiting some old favourites, but we stuck to our stringent self-inflicted rules and set out for pastures new. Aided by the 2006 Good Beer Guide (we're boycotting the new Cider Guide on account of it missing Bristol off the map... hats off to Rich Walters for his sterling work in the last edition of Pints West), we headed for the previously unexplored territory of North Dorset (via Somerset).

As with any cider weekend there were highs and lows but we kicked off on a high with a visit to **The Barton Inn** at Barton St David. Unprepossessing from the outside, it reminded us of our old fave **The Blue Flame** in Nailsea. Inside it was an unspoiled gem, quiet, friendly, cosy and just a tad dusty. The landlady and regulars were very welcoming and though there were only very few in there at the time it was a disproportionately lively scene.

There were fewer ciders on that day than we'd hoped for (the guide had said to expect up to twelve, there were actually two), but Jill the landlady was definitely a cider supporter and assured us that she usually carries more. Nevertheless we enjoyed a Weston's organic with the winter sun slanting through the window and the fire ablaze in the grate. Talk turned (as it so often does) to Pints West and we were embarrassed (OK, delighted) to be asked to sign a copy. It was the kind of place where you could happily settle right in, so we found it hard to drag ourselves away.

Luckily our next stop was also a winner, **The Halfway House** at Pitney. Although we had fancied a seat by one of their two roaring fires, the friendliness of the locals meant we never left the bar. On the recommendation of Dan the barman we were drinking a delicious half and half mix of Thatcher's Old Rascal and Heck's Kingston Black. That was as good as we could have hoped for but when we mentioned we were planning to go on to Burrow Hill cider farm we were offered a motorcycle escort by Tim, the world's loveliest biker. How we laughed as we struggled to keep him in our sights through the winding lanes of wherever it was we were.

Burrow Hill farm was fantastically Christmassy – the trees full of twinkling lights and the barn warm and welcoming and groaning

with fine cider based products. Between us we bought some bottle-fermented champagne-style cider, a bottle of 10-year-old cider brandy and some Eau de Vie, all of which we highly recommend.

We went on to Buckhorn Weston to spend the night at **The Stapleton Arms**. As our notes say, "no bedding, no heating, no light or toilet rolls – otherwise fine". Not the greatest pub of all time but they did serve a very nice Weston's Old Rosie (also an overly sweet perry that we turned our noses up at). Being a food-oriented place we sat in the restaurant for a civilised meal. Strangely, the next thing we knew it was gone two in the morning and we were propping up the bar drinking cider brandy and arguing with the landlord on the subject of marriage.

That night we barely noticed that you had to walk through the pub kitchen to get to the bedroom, but the next morning... we don't know if you've ever tried to wade your way through a hot fog of porky smelling steam with a cider hangover, but we wouldn't encourage it.

Luckily our final stop on the way home was a real rejuvenator – **The Hunters Lodge** just outside Priddy was suggested to us by Jill at The Barton Inn, who'd obviously got our number. A unique mix of 1850 and 1950, we'd never been anywhere quite like it and knew it was for us when the landlord said he could see we were trouble as soon as we walked in. We were very happy to find a nice drop of Wilkin's on tap... soft, fruity and delicious, just what the doctor ordered. It's only a short drive from Bristol and well worth a visit, the kind of pub that won't be around forever, so enjoy it while you can.

We'd be back in a flash if it weren't for those damned rules...

Freya and Erica McLuckie



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News from Bath Ales | Pub news

Festivity does it again (and again)

THE incredible record of Bath Ales' dark winter beer, **Festivity**, in gaining national recognition for excellence in its class goes on. At this year's CAMRA National Winter Ales Festival, which took place in Manchester at the end of January, Festivity took the bronze award in the Stouts and Porters category.

This year's Festivity is a superb creation; it's such a complex beer with dozens of aromas and tastes combining and competing in your nose and mouth that the debate by local tasting panel members as to whether it's a stout or a porter has gone on long into many a hazy evening. The achievement is all the more remarkable in that the brewers pack such a punch into a 5 per cent beer. Many of the beers at the Winter Festival are much stronger; the overall winner was the 9 per cent beer "A over T" from the Hog's Back brewery.

Bristol Beer Festival

The good news for visitors to this year's festival is that we have a barrel of the award-winning brew available for you to try and enjoy as well as the hugely popular organic

beer **Wild Hare** (5 per cent). This beer is from the opposite end of the beer spectrum from Festivity as it is light coloured, dry and hoppy, with loads of citrus and floral aromas. Once again the local CAMRA branch is indebted to Bath Ales for their support in providing the stillage, bar and manpower to enable us to set up the Festival.

Bath Ales pub news

The Swan at Swineford has been closed for a major refurbishment and was due to reopen at the end of February. Work includes providing a large car park on the same side of the road as the pub and an outside drinking area. The interior is receiving the "Otto" treatment to sensitively incorporate the "Bath Ales Style" into the existing features of this ancient drinking hole.

The Hare on the Hill in Kingsdown, Bristol staged a Stout and Porter Festival from the 23rd February where a dozen prime examples of this style of dark beer were available. This is the first of a series of themed beer festivals which Paul and Dee will be putting on during the year. April/May will see a Spring Festival featuring light beers, Autumn will have a Red Ales Festival, followed by a Winter Ales event.

The Hunters Lodge near Priddy now has four beers on and has made changes to the range for the first time in many years. On a recent visit the range was Butcombe Bitter, Glastonbury Lady of the Lake, Blindman's Mine Bitter and a Robinson's seasonal brew – plus Wilkins cider. Nothing else seems to have changed and the landlord this year celebrates 60 years in the building and over 40 years in charge.

The King's Head in Victoria Street in Bristol has replaced Bass with Old Hookey.

The Masons Arms in Stapleton is serving six beers, including Butcombe, Sharp's Doom Bar and Wadworth 6X – all well below £2 except Butcombe Gold at £2.20

The Chelsea Inn in Easton is selling four beers – Bath Ales Gem, Adnams Broadside and two guests.

Cadbury Heath Social Club is planning a beer festival for late May bank holiday, with food and entertainment involved too.

Vince Murray

Brewery tours

Tours of the Bath Ales brewery in Warmley can be organised, as well as the opportunity to buy all the brilliant Bath Ales products, by visiting the website at www.bathales.co.uk.

Steve O'Shea



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THE PRINCE OF WALES

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THE BELL

Hillgrove St, Bristol
0117 9096612

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SHINE on Fishponds

Every issue we ask *Pints West* readers to let us know if there is a part of Bristol (& District) that you would like to see featured in this column. Then, when no-one writes in, we decide for ourselves. This issue, we're having a look at Fishponds.

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: you're sitting on a cool, grassy bank, beside a crystalline natural pool. A gentle waterfall splashes over the rocks, and all around you there is the gentle sound of humming birds buzzing from flower to flower. You are overcome by a sense of tremendous well-being, and close your eyes as you drift into a deep sleep. Deeper and deeper you drift. You're under! When you wake up you will feel fully refreshed, and for some reason desperate to know what real ales the pubs in Fishponds sell. Furthermore you will find the style of the *Shine on* articles both witty and informative, and not at all the inane ramblings of a jumped-up saddy who really ought to get a life. Three, two, one, you're back in the room.

A shambling, slightly jaded looking figure appears next to you, and clears his throat. "Well, if you're going to be visiting Fishponds, there are a good many pubs to try".

At the top of the Strait, where the road splits (Downend to the left, Staple Hill to the right) sits the **Cross Hands**. This is a busy



The Cross Hands

Victorian pub with a mixed clientele. There's live footie on the telly, and a pool table to the rear. Until quite recently, you could get a good pint of Bass or Butcombe Bitter in here, but on the occasion of your visit there are no real ales on offer, not even any hopeful hand-pumps. You move on down the main road, and past the **Porto Lounge** on the junction with Manor Road. This is one of a chain of (at last count) three trendy wine bar establishments with a distinct downer on real ales. Again, you move on.

You wonder how Fishponds got its name. The shambling, slightly jaded looking figure, in his usual irritating manner, has the answer. "The name comes from two old quarry pits filled with water that existed in this area since the time of King James. These quarries were called 'Fish ponds', hence the name. History does not relate where these ponds were [you mean you couldn't be bothered to look it up – Ed] but they have long since been filled in and built over".

Continuing along Fishponds Road you next reach the **Old Post Office**. While you are in the pub, a skeleton walks up to the bar and says to the person serving: "Give me a beer and a mop". But enough of that. The Old Post Office is a fairly recent conversion from Fishponds' main post office. From the look of the pub – with its glossy menu, massive screen showing Sky Sports News, and its trendy patio – you are not hopeful for traditional beers. But you needn't have worried. Three real ales are on offer (four if you count Courage Best – which apparently you should). You forego the Courage Directors, but sample both the Wickwar BOB and the fairly rarely seen Wye Valley Bitter. Both are in excellent condition, and the woman behind the bar removes the sparkler to serve you with much good grace.



The Full Moon

Moving along, the next pub is the **Full Moon**. The Full Moon has been in place since around 1850, but on the day of your visit sells no real ale so on you go. You've agreed to end your tour at the Van Dyck Forum, so for now you move on to the **Railway Tavern** in Station Road. While you are waiting to get served, a man walks in and orders a drink. After sitting for a few minutes, he hears a



The Railway Tavern

voice say, "nice tie." He looks around but doesn't see anybody near him. Some time passes and he hears the same voice say, "nice shirt." This time he looks everywhere; behind him, up and down the bar, under the chair, behind the bar, everywhere he can think to look, but he doesn't see anyone. A few minutes later he hears, "nice haircut." He can't stand it any more, so he calls the barman over and tells him he has been hearing this voice. The bartender says, "Oh that...that's the nuts – they're complimentary." But enough of that.

A throwback to the days when trains stopped in Fishponds, the Railway Tavern is a thriving pub with an L-shaped bar and a hidden beer garden to the rear. The beers on offer are Courage Best (sic), Old Speckled Hen and Wadworth 6X. Now, Old Speckled Hen is another of those beers that have been uprooted from their home and moved elsewhere, something you hate in principle, but you have to admit it is on fine form, as is the 6X.

Next, your journey takes you to the **Portcullis**, a fantastic double-fronted building,



The Portcullis

again dating back to Victorian times at least, with an impressive metal Portcullis 'sign' out the front. While you are in the Portcullis, a Penguin waddles into the bar and orders a pint. The lady behind the bar says "That'll be £3.20. You know, we don't get many penguins in here". The penguin looks up and says, "At those prices, I'm not surprised". But enough of that. The real ale on offer in the Portcullis on your visit is Fuller's London Pride. You're still upset with Fuller's over the whole Gale's takeover, but again, the Portcullis is keeping a good pint.

Across the road and past Morrisons, you come to another Victorian boozer, the **Farriers Arms**. While you are there, a man walks into the bar carrying a piece of tarmac under his arm. He says, "I'll have a pint please," and points to the tarmac: "and one for the road".



The Farriers Arms

But enough of that. The Farriers has a really colourful and ornate exterior, and is a lively and vibrant pub. Real ale-o-philes will find the Wells Bombardier eminently drinkable.

You carry on further until you reach the Golden Lion music bar. A real down-to-earth street corner boozer. Unfortunately, the only 'real' ale on offer is Courage Best [*that's quite enough having a go at Courage Best – Ed*] so you move on to the **Cross Keys**.



The Cross Keys

As you walk in, a man goes up to the bar and notices that there is a giraffe behind it, cleaning glasses. The man stands staring at the giraffe. The giraffe looks down at him and says, "What's the matter, haven't you ever seen a giraffe behind a bar before?" "It's not that", says the man, "It's just I never thought the horse would sell the place". But enough of that. The Cross Keys is actually something of a good news story. It had been closed for months, with the windows covered by that ghastly silver 'boarding'. However, it has now



The Van Dyck Forum

reopened and – very sensibly – is currently concentrating on serving just one very good pint. It's Butcombe Bitter and on stonking form.

So, you save a trip to Lodge Causeway for another day and turn back to the **Van Dyck Forum**: a massive Wetherspoon's conversion of a former bingo hall and – before that – cinema. While you are there, a priest, a rabbi, a nun and an Essex girl walk in, and the barman says, "Hey, what is this, some kind of a joke?" But enough of that. Now, Wetherspoon's pubs can polarize opinion somewhat, but on your visit there is Courage Best (see, no jokes), Courage Directors, Cottage Goldrush, Marston's Pedigree, a special ale called 'Between The Posts', Butcombe Bitter, Wetherspoon's Brigstow Bitter, Greene King Abbot Ale, and Weston's Old Rosie and Organic ciders from boxes behind the bar, so it can't be a bad place to spend an evening. The 'Goldrush' and the 'Between The Posts' are both scrumptious. Then you move on to the ciders...

The next thing you know you are lying in a crumpled heap by the bus stop outside the pub, having been

unceremoniously thrown out. Two members of staff are walking back in, muttering, "I warned him not to tell any more Man Walks Into A Bar jokes".

Please note, the Portcullis does not charge £3.20 for a pint. Nor does a giraffe work behind the bar in the Cross Keys (though they do let him collect glasses occasionally).

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.

Gluten-free beer

New gluten-free beer is launched for people with coeliac disease

LAKEFRONT Brewery, a craft brewer from Milwaukee, has recently launched a new beer that is aimed at people with an illness that leaves them unable to tolerate gluten, a protein found in wheat and other grains.

The new Grist Beer will be targeted at people with coeliac disease. It is brewed with sorghum, and it is the first U.S. beer brewed without malted barley or gluten-containing products, according to Lakefront.

"We're glad New Grist makes it possible for people with coeliac disease to finally have a beer," said Russ Klisch, Lakefront president, in a statement on January 12. "And I'm very pleased with the initial requests and compliments for this product that have been pouring in from around the country." New Grist is to be the company's first beer sold nationally.

In the United States three million people live with coeliac disease.

Wonder how long before we will be able to buy a sorghum-based real ale in the UK?

Norman Spalding

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Champion Aromas Over Tongham

"A OVER T" from Hogs Back Brewery in Surrey was recently named as the Supreme Champion Winter Beer of Britain 2006 by a panel of judges at CAMRA's national winter celebration of beer.

A Over T, which stand for Aromas Over Tongham, is a barley wine of a deep tawny colour and is complex and powerful yet well balanced. The beer has fruity notes with hints of chocolate and raisins

At the announcement, Steve Prescott, organiser of the National Winter Ales Festival held in Manchester, congratulated Hogs Back on their victory. He said, "A Over T is a fantastic barley wine that fully deserves this accolade. I hope this will encourage more beer drinkers to try this style of beer."

On hearing the news Tony Stanton, Marketing Manager for Hogs Back Brewery, said, "A over T is our flagship dark strong ale at 9 per cent ABV and is our king of ales too. At Hogs Back we have always been proud of our range of winter dark ales and having the opportunity to exhibit at Manchester and win the national title was amazing".

Steve Prescott went on to say, "It is also excellent news that Gale's Festival Mild won the national Silver award. We hope this recognition will encourage Fuller's [who recently took over the Gale's] to continue brewing this excellent brew at Horndean in Hampshire."

The Bronze award went to Goff's Black Knight.

On a more local level, Bath Ales took the Bronze award in the Stouts & Porters category for their excellent Festivity.

Champion Winter Beer of Britain 2006

Supreme Champion: Hogs Back - A Over T
Silver: Gale's - Festival Mild
Bronze: Goff's - Black Knight

Category winners

Old Ales & Strong Mild category

Gold: Gale's - Festival Mild (Horndean, Hampshire)
Silver: Goff's - Black Night (Cheltenham, Glos.)
Bronze: Orkney - Dark Island (Stromness, Orkney)

Stouts & Porters category

Gold: Brazen's - Knoll Street Porter (Salford)
Silver: Fuller's - London Porter (Chiswick, London)
Bronze: Bath Ales - Festivity (Warmley, Bristol)

Barley Wines category

Gold: Hogs Back - A Over T (Tongham, Surrey)
Silver: Isle of Skye - Cuillen Beast (Uig, Isle of Skye)
Bronze: Robinson's - Old Tom (Stockport)

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.

A Melbourne brewpub

Dispelling some of the myths about Oz drinking

THE Commonwealth Games take place in Melbourne, Australia from 15th to 26th March. Many beer enthusiasts visiting the city will have written off any hope of finding interesting drinking venues but I can confirm that a short detour away from the tourist track there is a little gem hidden away south of the city centre.

My wife Lynne and I had the good fortune to visit **Bell's Hotel and Brewery** twelve months ago and we both enjoyed remarkable hospitality and an excellent range of beers brewed on the premises, broadly in the style of Bristol's Zero Degrees but on a smaller scale.

On our visit there were six in-house draught beers available and between us we sampled them all. Summer Belle at 5.3 per cent was a light wheat beer, amber in colour, with a citrus aroma. Hells Belles was my favourite, at 6.2 per cent a stronger wheat beer. Lynne, more a wine than a beer drinker, was especially

impressed with Ginger Bells at 4.6 per cent, tasting of green ginger and honey. Stout Billy at 6.2 per cent was an exceptionally dark beer with a coffee and dark chocolate aroma.

Of special note was Black Ban Bitter at 4.8 per cent, not dark at all but in the style of an English bitter: hoppy with a sweetish aftertaste and light golden in colour. It takes its name from the black-listing of the pub by the 'Save Albert Park Group' who were opposed to the Australian Formula 1 Grand Prix being relocated to south Melbourne. We were also introduced to the first brew of a new addition to the range, a pilsner called Zero. The lady who served us the new brew turned out to be the head brewer, Jo Horn.

We settled at a table near the counter between the sports bar and restaurant areas and a gentleman asked to join us, having observed our interest in the beers. He was surprised that we knew about the pub and told us brewing had commenced in 1988 and was

eager to hear our comments. The gentleman turned out to be Bill Bell, the third generation of his family to run this establishment. When we got up to leave to catch our tram back to our hotel he insisted in pulling rank and asked Jo to take charge while he drove us back across town.

Bell's Hotel is at 157 Moray Street, at its junction with Coventry Street in south Melbourne. The phone number is 03 9690 4511. The number 1 tram runs within 100 yards. The tram travels over the Yarra River from the Central Business District, passing Alexandra Gardens on the left and the Victorian Arts Centre and the National Gallery on the right before arriving at Southbank Boulevard. It turns right then left into Sturt Street. Get off at the junction with Kingsway and walk west along Coventry Street. The journey will take about ten minutes.

If the Commonwealth Games is not your thing then perhaps the Grand Prix from 30th March to 2nd April will provide an excuse to sample the beers, or the Ashes test match at the MCG from 26th to 30th December. You will not be disappointed.

Bob Ford

Pioneering beer from the coast

IT has a whitewashed lighthouse, pastel beach huts, attractive Georgian and Victorian houses, a clutch of fine pubs, and the North Sea on its doorstep, but Southwold in Suffolk may soon become best known as the town with Britain's first green brewery.

Global warming and dwindling supplies of oil could change the way beer is brewed, and in an attempt to grapple with the urgent need to conserve energy, Adnams has designed a new brewhouse to come on stream in 2006 and will be highly energy-efficient.

And the efficiency will be a major consideration in the years ahead. As MD Jonathan Adnams says, in conventional ale breweries a lot of energy goes up the chimney. That may not be possible or permissible in the near future.

The European Union has intervened with a new draft directive that will demand industries waste as little energy and raw materials as possible. An EU working group is already drafting a proposal that will determine how much energy can be used and how much waste there can be in producing a given volume of beer. If the directive is approved, all breweries will have to comply by 2007. If they refuse, they will face sanctions and even a ban on production.

Ale is traditionally made by a simple mashing regime known as infusion. But the

traditional mash tun which produces the wort, runs it off, and then sparges the grain, all at different temperatures, could not be described as either energy efficient or cost effective.

Adnams' new German-built brewhouse will use a system based on a mash conversion vessel to produce the wort. The wort will be pumped to a lauter tun to be filtered, leaving behind the spent grain. A third vessel will heat the wort so that when it reaches the copper whirlpool to be hopped, it will already be boiling, requiring less energy than a conventional copper where the wort has to be brought to boiling point.

As the mashing vessel does not have to filter the wort, it can be used more efficiently to produce four brews every 16 hours. The new equipment will also reduce the risk of oxidation, which means less chance of stale or off flavours in the finished beer.

Adnams' ancient wooden fermenters have already been replaced by new stainless steel vessels. They are enclosed to trap the carbon dioxide given off during fermentation, but they are still traditional squares: Jonathan Adnams says that ales made by warm fermentation - as opposed to cold-fermented lagers - produce better aromas and flavours in squares than in conicals.

Annual production will rise from 110,000 barrels a year to 150,000 when the new

brewhouse is in operation. The £2.5 million invested in the equipment indicates great faith in the future of cask beer.

As well as the brewhouse, Adnams is also building a new warehouse in a

disused gravel pit in the neighbouring village of Reydon to keep HGVs out of the narrow streets of Southwold. The complex won't be an industrial blot on the countryside, though, because it will be 12 metres underground. It will have a grass roof that will help insulate it and walls built and painted with chalk, hemp and lime to keep the complex cool. Rainwater will be recycled to wash vehicles and provide showers for the staff, and will then be run into surrounding reed beds. Solar panels will provide natural energy.

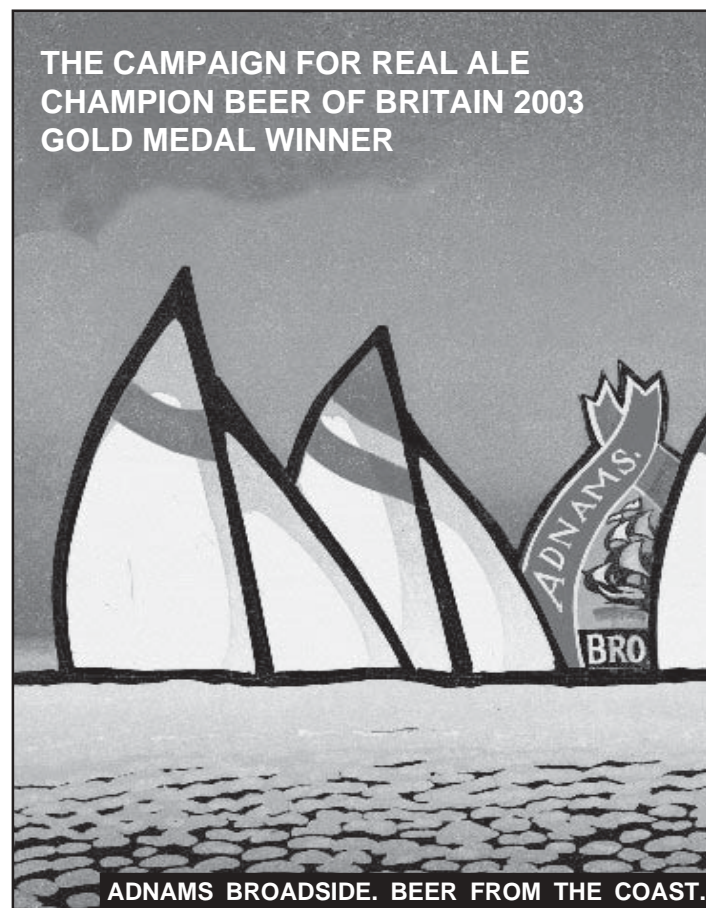
"We will become the industrial version of the Eden Project," Jonathan Adnams says. "We want to do business in a sustainable way. The warehouse will in effect be a giant Thermos flask."

To add to its new green credentials, Adnams hopped Flagship, its Trafalgar bicentenary special, with the new Boadicea variety, which needs fewer pesticides and fertilisers than conventional strains. Flagship was also brewed with a small amount of wheat malt and the new brewhouse will enable Adnams to make a fully-fledged wheat beer if it decides to go down that route.

For beer lovers, the most important consideration is that Adnams' beers, tasted in the convivial pubs of Southwold, and wherever else they appear further afield (Bristol included), are as good as if not better than ever.

Roger Protz

This article first appeared in What's Brewing supplement 'Beer' in December 2005.



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Not a lot happens in Bath

I DO seem to have let the editor down in this issue since my rambles around Bath pubs has not thrown up much to report. Having provided the title of "not a lot happens" I should have added the word "new". What is happening here is that there is an excellent choice of real ales kept really well and served in the most convivial surroundings. These are what I did find...

The Pulteney has apparently changed hands. Unfortunately it is on the other side of town from me and I rarely get there so I do not know any other facts.

The Raven is introducing regular jazz nights on Tuesdays, and quiz nights. Fuller's beer is going to become a regular for a while at the pub.

The Bell is in the process of refurbishing the bar. When I heard this my first reaction was aarghhh!% but when Jamie Matthews (licensee) asked me what I thought of progress in the bar so far my reaction was, "What progress?" It had been painted but I could not tell the difference: same old charm, same old feel – thank goodness. However, there are two other recent innovations here and they are a small "laundrette" (Jamie's word, not mine – I think he means that it is very, very small) and free wi-fi.

Now this had to be explained to me since I had never heard of it. Apparently you can have internet access free of charge in this pub via a radio link and your lap top. So simple a child of 10 can understand it. Unfortunately I am over 50 and therefore have trouble with such things. There are free 240-volt supplies for you too.

Thinks: is it safe to surf and drink at the same time?

For those that like winter beer festivals, hopefully you have not just missed the one at the **Royal Oak**. There will be more to report in the next issue of *Pints West* because the event happens too late to catch publication deadlines. The Royal Oak is now in the planning stages for a summer event that they are calling "F.A.T.O." This is the *Folk At The Oak* event that will be from 13 to 16 July and timed to coincide with their summer beer festival. I recently enjoyed Burns night there with the surprise appearance of Haggis and Neeps. The Haggis was traditionally murdered by a real Scotsman with quotes from the bard himself. Didn't understand a word of it myself but my goodness the beer flowed.

On 28 November last year there was another interesting event at the Royal Oak. This was the launch of Andrew Swift and Kirsten Elliott's book about the lost pubs of


Bath titled, fittingly enough, **The Lost Pubs of Bath**. Unfortunately it coincided with Bath's first serious snowfall, which arrived half an hour before the launch was due to start. Even so one person was brave enough to struggle all the way from Stroud to join the festivities.

Andrew tells me that some people came with their own fascinating stories about old pubs. One man, who lived in the old Rising Sun on Richmond Place (closed in 1936) actually turned up with a tap from the pub, which he had found in his cellar (the tap, not the pub).

The range of beers on offer was as usual an impressive one and included the wonderful Spingo Special from Blue Anchor. Music was provided by the Bill Smarme & the Bizness plus Jonah Flatfoot from the Zen Hussies, resident blues man John, and various other people who dropped by. Andrew tells me that he advertised the launch but not the entertainment for fear of being swamped with punters.

Apparently *The Lost Pubs of Bath* has generated an enormous amount of interest. Andrew tells me several people have written or emailed to share stories of pubs they remember or pictures of forgotten boozers. When time permits he says that this material will be gathered together and put onto the Akeman Press website and maybe form the basis of another book. If anyone out there has any memories of Bath's lost pubs, Andrew would love to hear from you. The email address is info@akemanpress.com, and the snail-mail address is Akeman Press, 58 Minster Way, Bath BA2 6RL.

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Black Friar continues the Abbey habit



THE latest in a series of one-off special brews was recently unveiled by Bath's own brewery, Abbey Ales, as it celebrated yet another milestone in its history.

Black Friar, a dark warming winter ale brewed to an ABV of 5.3 per cent, went on sale nine years after the company was founded back in February 1997.

Recalls Abbey Ales managing director, Alan Morgan, "Time has passed so quickly since 1997. I remember walking into Ye Olde Farmhouse in Bath after I had just been made redundant and landlord John Bradshaw telling me that he was pleased I'd lost my job because we could now start Bath's first brewery for over 40 years!

"I can also remember not being that keen to do it as I preferred working for someone else. Having said that, I had no doubt that we could succeed and was extremely fortunate to raise the capital required from our shareholders in record time."

The first beer, Bellringer, was launched in February 1997 at the Bath Beer Festival – proving an instant success. It is still the only beer brewed on a regular basis – more recently the brewery has introduced a monthly guest beer programme, Black Friar being the latest.

"We have enjoyed tremendous support from the people of Bath and I have recently been told that many now look upon the brewery as an important attribute for this world heritage city," continued Morgan. "Drinkers and landlords alike have supported us all the way, and we have, in turn, hopefully given them some of the tastiest beers ever produced in these parts. Black Friar certainly falls into that category!"

The beer, which came runner-up in the SIBA Maltings beer festival (Porters and Old Ales category) went on sale in many of Bath's top real ale pubs from Monday, 6 February with a newly designed pump clip.

Why cold beer is tasteless

Belgian researchers explain why beer is more bitter when consumed warm

A NEW study reveals why our taste perception is enhanced as the temperature of food and beverage products increases, explaining why beer is more bitter and ice cream is sweeter when consumed warm, according to a report published on 19 December 2005 by Foodproduction Europe.

By increasing our understanding of the taste mechanism, the findings could be used to help manufacturers mask bitter, unwanted tastes that often turn consumers off, say researchers at the Catholic University of Leuven, in Belgium. The study, published in the journal *Nature*, identified microscopic channels in our taste buds – termed TRPM5 – as being responsible for different taste perception at different temperatures.

According to the researchers, the reaction of TRPM5 in our taste buds is much more intense when the temperature of food or fluid is increased, sending a stronger electrical signal to the brain and resulting in an enhanced taste.

"The clearest example for sweet taste is ice cream. As we all know, ice cream does not taste sweet when it is frozen but only when we melt it in the mouth. On the other hand, melted ice cream is very hard to drink because it is extremely sweet," said the researchers. Interestingly, because ice cream is consumed cold, ice cream makers need to add considerable amounts of sugars or sweeteners in order to endow the product with the much rewarding sweet taste, to the detriment of our health," they added.

The same effect occurs with beverages like beer or wine, in which a bitter taste becomes much more apparent when the products are consumed above the appropriate temperature. On the other hand, consumers enjoy a certain

amount of bitter taste in some beverages, such as coffee, tea or cocoa, which is why these taste better when hot.

How consumers sense tastes is crucial knowledge for a food industry constantly looking for new food formulations. And according to lead author Dr Karel Talavera and his colleagues, their findings could allow for the modification of the taste channel in order to achieve the outcome the food vendor requires.

"Taste perception could be modulated by adding something to the food that could enhance or inhibit the work of the TRPM5 channel, such as a particular chemical, or by changing the temperature of food," said Dr Talavera.

Previous research into taste has revealed that the human tongue has about 10,000 taste buds with five taste sensations: sweet, bitter, and umami, which work with a signal through a G-protein coupled receptor; salty and sour which work with ion channels.

Contrary to popular understanding, taste is not experienced on different parts of the tongue. Though there are small differences in sensation, which can be measured with highly specific instruments, all taste buds, essentially clusters of 50 to 100 cells, can respond to all types of taste.

Taste buds (or lingual papillae) are small structures on the upper surface of the tongue that provide information about the taste of food. Human taste perception is being increasingly examined by scientists in an effort to improve consumers' nutritional intake.

Perhaps this new understanding might also help to make sure that beers are served at the correct temperature – many real ales are meant to have a bitter taste, but if they are served too cold you can't taste it!

Norman Spalding

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Beer Festivals

Bristol City Centre

Once again building on the success of their previous festivals, the **White Lion** in Bristol's city centre will be holding another event they dub "Bristol's smallest beer festival".

This small Wickwar pub will be offering 16 or so beers from around the country from Friday 10th to Sunday 12th March. Some will be served from handpumps, some directly from casks stillaged in the corner of the pub. What they will all have in common though is something old: every beer will have the word "old" (or "olde") in their name.

This festival follows an earlier promotion by the pub in which, during a four-week period from mid-January, in addition to their normal range of Wickwar beers, a whole range of winter ales were showcased. In fact no less than 26 delicious winter beers from renowned breweries across the country were featured. Anyone who did not pay a visit missed a treat. Well done Les and Carol – same again next year please!

Portishead

The Windmill Inn in Portishead will be hosting a mini beer festival over the Easter weekend. Their "Fifth Annual Real Ale Festival" will run from 14th to 17th April.

Liam Swallow who runs the pub says that he and Pix, and all the other members of staff,

will be offering nine different ales from all regions of the country, replacing their usual range, and throughout the weekend there will be raffles for real ale prizes and on the Bank Holiday Monday evening there will be a pub quiz with more giveaways (of the ale kind of course).

The Windmill was "discovered" by the Bristol & District branch of CAMRA a number of years back and soon became popular due to its excellent range and quality of real ales, good food and panoramic views across the Bristol Channel to South Wales. In fact it went on to become runner-up in the Pub of the Year awards in 2004.

Visitors from Bristol need not drive as the 358 bus runs at least hourly from Bristol bus station and opposite the Hippodrome and stops right outside the pub – stay on until about half a mile after the High Street.

Claverham

This year's Claverham Froth Beer Festival is to be held from 30th June to 2nd July in the enlarged Claverham Village Hall. There will be 40 beers plus ciders and wines. The Committee, which comprises the Village Hall and Yeo Valley Lions, is seeking sponsorship, so if you would like to sponsor a cask of beer please contact Nigel Carson on 01934 838899 or email n.carson@virgin.net. More details in the next issue of Pints West.

Cylinder-less beer engines

InBev UK has introduced a new dispense system for cask ale. The cylinder-less beer engine will be used to dispense Bass and cask Boddingtons, and is to be "rolled out" to pubs following a successful trial.

The font will pump beer directly from the cellar through the "python" cooling system to the glass, with no beer left standing in a cylinder where it often sits and warms up before being served to the hapless next customer. Some liquid will still be left in the lines, but the removal of the cylinder reduces this amount substantially.


This is a very welcome invention, as warm beer is the most common problem associated with serving cask ale correctly and accounts for more than 90 per cent of pints failing Cask Marque audits. Cask Marque recommend temperatures of 10 to 14 degrees for real (i.e. cask) ale.

The font will also look distinctive, as it has a raised tap, lifting the point of dispense above the bar. This news may remind older readers of a device called the "Dalex" pump, very popular in the Midlands. It had a horizontal clear perspex cylinder mounted at eye level, so the customer could watch the piston pushing his beer along the cylinder and into the glass. Seemed like a good idea at the time...

Norman Spalding

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Bristol pub wins national design award

THE winners of the prestigious national CAMRA pub design awards were announced in January. The awards fall into five categories:

1. *New-Build Pub*: This category is for entirely newly built pubs. The judges look for style and originality in addition to the pub fitting well within its surrounding.

2. *Conversion to Pub Use*: This is where an existing building is converted to pub use. Pubs are judged on the taste and restraint used on both the inside and outside of the pub.

3. *Refurbished Pub*: Refurbishment can range from a complete gutting and replacement, to an enhancement of what was previously there. Refurbishment should suit the individual pub and not be an excuse to use uniform furnishings to brand the pub with the brewery's or pub company's image.

4. *CAMRA / English Heritage Conservation Award*: This award, sponsored by English Heritage, is usually given for work which conserves what is good in the pub to ensure its future for generations of new customers.

5. *The Joe Goodwin Award*: This is reserved for outstanding, refurbished street-corner locals.

Pub Design Award judge Steven Parissien – Dean of Arts and Professor of Architectural History at the University of Plymouth – said: "This year's crop of award winners represents one of the strongest and most eclectic set of designs it has been our pleasure to announce in over twenty years. Between them, they prove that investing in good pub design – whether this involves creating a contextually-sensitive new-build pub or rescuing a much-loved landmark from dereliction and decay – makes economic as well as social and aesthetic sense."

The Bristol Branch of CAMRA has seen a number of pubs close in the last couple of years, including the regular Good Beer Guide entry, the Rose & Crown in Iron Acton, and the splendid Fox in Easton. Equally, many new pubs and bars have opened in recent years, particularly in the central Bristol area. However, these are mostly uninspiring bars, usually part of national branded pub chains. And so it was with great satisfaction that we learnt that one of this year's national award winners was located here in central Bristol.

During the award ceremony, judge Steven Parissien said: "It is hugely refreshing to be able to announce a New-Build Pub Award winner – something the judges have, over the years, been rarely able to do." As they say at the Oscars:

And the winner is . . . Zerodegrees.

(Pause for applause.)

Zerodegrees, in Colston Street, near the top of Christmas Steps, was designed by local architects Acanthus Ferguson Mann, led by the current president of the Royal Institute of British Architects and co-star of TV's *Demolition* programme, George Ferguson. The pub is an unashamedly contemporary new design that has proved popular with drinkers

since it opened. As the judges said of the pub in their report, it's a pub "that nestles snugly into the dense and complicated urban grain of Bristol City Centre and manages to combine cutting-edge design with a warm architectural welcome".

The judges continued: "Outside, the steep stone wall to the south has been impressively rebuilt with the glazed walls and wave of the roof of the new building rising imperiously above. They've even found room for a small, south-facing terrace, equipped with starkly modernist seating. Inside, the brewing kit is all exposed – as is increasingly the case with new brewpubs – with the pipe connections to the blue bar counter amusingly over-emphasised and pink ambient lighting giving the grey industrial a rosy glow. Downstairs is primarily oriented as a pub with the smarter restaurant on the first floor. Altogether, Zerodegrees represents a beacon of good and successful design and a wake-up call for more timid pub owners".

On top of all that good design, the pub also sells some very interesting beers. As well as a pale ale, black lager and other regular brews, check out the ever changing special brews. Zerodegrees is certainly a most welcome addition to the local pub and drinking scene in Bristol.

The other national winners were:

○ *Conversion to pub use*: **The Yorkshire Terrier** in York – this is a conversion of a shop and its rear yard into a pub. The resulting pub interior by local architects is admirable. York is a fantastic city to visit for many reasons including some great pubs. Now you have another reason to go!

○ *The Refurbishment Award*: This was won by **The Racecourse** in Lower Kersal, Salford. Formerly a hotel, its powerful exterior has been nicely restored and the inside is even more impressive.

○ *CAMRA / English Heritage award*: This award went to the **Prestoungrange Gotherburg** in Prestonpans, Scotland (yes, an English Heritage award in Scotland!). The "Goth" dates from 1908 and is one of only three surviving "Gotherburg" pubs – semi-temperance outlets created to limit alcohol abuse. By 1960, all of the Scottish Gotherburgs (a concept imported from Sweden to Edwardian Scotland by Thomas Nelson) had succumbed to commercial pressures and had abandoned their original



Wendy (Zerodegrees Area Manager SE), Norman Gapare (Head Brewer Greenwich), Martin Maier (Brewer Bristol), Stephen Holman (Area Manager SW). Photo by Tony Durbin.

moral stance. Cleverly though, the phoenix-like rebirth of the Prestoungrange Goth has reinterpreted Nelson's original charitable enterprise for the 21st century, with service profits being channelled into local arts initiatives. The pub has differing bars, each with their own sense of tradition and atmosphere which have been admirably restored.

○ *Joe Goodwin Award*: The best refurbished street-corner local is the **Yarborough** in Brigg, Lincolnshire. Amazingly, this pub was closed over 30 years ago robbing the community of a much-loved local and social focus. It has now been reopened with cream-painted walls, appropriate local pictures and simple furniture. The judges commended the results as distinctly worthy of the award.

Pete Bridle

Bottoms up with beer

And you thought beer was expensive in Bristol!

SOME Belgian beer producers are developing a new generation of brews aimed at winning over wine connoisseurs. Deus, the most expensive of the brews, looks like champagne and costs just as much, the Sunday Times reported on 18 September, 2005.

The beer, brewed in the Belgian village of Buggenhout and matured in the Champagne region of France, comes in a champagne-shaped bottle. Restaurants charge £25 a pint, eight times the price of a beer pulled in a pub, the newspaper said.

"We treat it like champagne," said Antoine Bosteels, director of the Bosteels brewer that makes Deus. "It's an exclusive product for people who want to experience a new taste."

Norman Spalding

Bedminster Half Cut

ON a crisp, dry evening in the middle of January we set off on our latest crawl, a walk along the Cut, or to be precise, the New Cut.



The Nova Scotia Hotel

We started at the **Nova Scotia Hotel**, a pub by the Merchants Road swing bridge that looks over Jessop's original "Junction Lock" towards the rows of picturesque dock cottages that date from 1831 and sit on the tiny island separating the Floating Harbour from the Cumberland Basin.

We enter this pub through the "Private Bar", a small room known locally as the "Captain's Nook" on the wedge end of the pub and divided off from the "Mess Deck" by a glass and wood partition. The Mess Deck is crowded with a rich assortment of locals seated around this long maritime bar with its shuttered bay windows and mahogany bar. Many local boat dwellers and workers still frequent this friendly pub and one of the locals even looked like an old sea dog: with his grey "full set" beard and duffle coat, he could easily have been an extra from a Moby Dick film.

There are four beers and some ciders on offer and we grab a Sharp's Special and an Everard's Original before finding a seat at a table with one of the regulars, who is drinking cider with a slice of lemon. He tells us that he can remember when Courage were refurbishing the pub 25 years ago, and the cooling method in the cellar was a shallow, open pipe across the length of the cellar with running water in it.

Built nearly 200 years ago, this pub serves good pub food and gained a reputation for its North African and Mediterranean food. Visit their web site at www.novascotiahotel.co.uk for more information.

The Sharp's and Everard's were both in good condition on this Wednesday night, but we decline the Bass and Courage Best as we leave this interesting pub for our next stop – the Cottage.

As we round the end of the pub and walk past Howard's Restaurant, our new friend offers to show us a short cut to the **Cottage** through the Underfall Yard. This Underfall Yard is the site of the original dam across the river Avon, where the surplus water from the



The Cottage

Floating Harbour flowed over the dam, which was then known as the Overfall. Brunel designed a series of culverts beneath the dam in 1832 that scoured the area at ebb tide and removed the silt from the harbour – hence the local name Underfall.

Regrettably our short cut is blocked by the padlocked gates next to the large red-brick Hydraulic Engine House built in 1887 to house the steam engines that operated the lock gates, bridges, capstans and other equipment in the Floating Harbour. This area is full of industrial archaeology.

We retrace our footsteps back to Avon Crescent and follow it round into Cumberland Road beside the cut. A short stroll brings us to the entrance of Baltic Wharf Water Leisure Centre created in the late 1970s, and where friends and I spent many a summer evening launching our kayaks for a paddle around the docks. We say goodbye to our friend who is off to the Ropewalk for some more cider, and stroll down to the water. On the dockside of the wharf is the Cottage, the early Victorian harbour master's cottage that was converted into a pub as part of the leisure centre plans.

In the Cottage we choose the Beer Factory Red and Flower's Original Strong Ale, which are in very good condition. We enjoy them whilst sitting at a window table and looking out across the lights reflected on the water, towards the views of Hotwells and Clifton Suspension Bridge. The landlord tells us they always try to have a local brewery beer on, and during the increased summer trade there are four pumps serving real ales. The Cottage is quite large, smartly decorated and the food smelled good. There is a walled patio area in front of the pub for warmer days.

Heading back onto Cumberland Road we pass the new housing estates that stand on the site of the old dockside timber yards. Reaching Vauxhall Footbridge, erected in 1900, we cross over the Cut to Coronation Road and the Avon Packet.

One interesting facet of the **Avon Packet** is the numbered door entrances in the pub cellars, believed to be the front doorways of the old 1740s cottages that were buried by the excavated spoil from the Cut that was thrown up on the bank, when it was being dug from 1803 to 1809. These dwellings were built up to form a new ground floor, and in 1846



The Avon Packet

became a tavern. The name Avon Packet is believed to have come from one of the New Steam Packet Company's two ships – the "Avon" and the "Severn" – that would have steamed up the Cut past the pub on its way to the Bathurst Basin. The Courage Best is OK and the Smiles is a bit warm tonight, but the pub is also well-known and much appreciated for cider. Visit www.avonpacket.com for more information.

Crossing back over Vauxhall Bridge, it is apparent that this is a swing bridge, although we cannot ever remember hearing of it being swung open. It is full tide, and we pause for a moment to gaze downstream at the eerie glow created by the reflection of the streetlights in the dark waters along the length of the Cut. Back on Cumberland Road we walk along Sydney Row to the **Orchard** tucked away on the corner in the middle of the Albion dockside estate.



The Orchard Inn

This real ale pub is deservedly listed in the CAMRA Good Beer Guide 2006 and had Bath Ales Gem and Butcombe Gold which were both in good nick. We had a taster of Wickwar BOB, but declined having a pint, as we didn't think it was quite to our taste tonight. Well known for its ciders, the Orchard had three available – Cheddar Valley, Black Rat and Thatcher's Traditional.

We stroll down Hanover Place to the **Albion**, which is closed, so we continue along Cumberland Road. It seems a long walk without any pubs, and we notice that Coronation Road on the opposite side of the Cut appears to be much higher than the road on this side.

We pass the gateway to the old gaol, and knowing we are nearly at our next watering hole, I recount the gruesome fact associated with the first public execution here in 1821. It

Meet the Brewer - Fuller's

AT the Old Fish Market in Bristol on Thursday 16th February, this Fuller's pub was the venue for a great beer tasting session as a team from the Fuller's Brewery took us through a tour of the Fuller's history and their range of ales.

Dubbed "Meet the Brewer", it was a quite superb event, with a humorous presentation from Fuller's head brewer John Keeling and copious free samples of the draught and bottled range.

The evening kicked off with a glass of Discovery, a light fruity blonde beer of 3.9 per cent ABV, followed by the Organic Honey Dew, a light golden beer at 5 per cent ABV with tastes of honey and a zesty grapefruit finish.

Next up was London Pride – Fuller's number-one seller with 150,000 barrels of it produced a year – a 4.1 per cent ABV hoppy citrus bitter. Then came Jack Frost at 5 per cent, a malty winter beer with a refreshing finish, closely chased by ESB (that's "Extra Special Bitter", not "Egg, Sausage & Bacon") at 5.5 per cent ABV, a malty ale with a spicy hop character that has won a CAMRA Champion Beer of Britain award three times.

We then started tasting the bottle-conditioned beers. First was the 1845, brewed



Inside the Old Fishmarket during a quieter moment

(photo by Richard Brooks)

to celebrate Fuller's 150th anniversary in 1995. This 6.3 per cent ABV ale has rich fruitcake flavours with a dry but fruity finish. The London Porter at 5.4 per cent ABV has been a long awaited visitor to Bristol – a rich, smooth drink with hints of coffee and chocolate – and a rumour that it will be back in cask at the Old Fish Market for Fuller's spring beer festival.

The last two beers were the Vintage Ale – one was the 2005 Vintage and the other was the 1995 Vintage. Both of these weighed in at 8.5 per cent ABV, were mellow, nutty, malty and tasted of orange liquors. These were

superb ales, the 1995 vintage being very refined and smooth with an unsurpassed elegance – a beer to die for.

The evening was rounded off with an excellent buffet of Thai food from Thai Toms and lots of free goodies to take home.

Our thanks go to Fuller's and to Ben Reed and the rest of the staff of the Old Fish Market who helped make this a very enjoyable and memorable evening.

Colin & Pennie Postlethwaite



The Albion

turns out that 18-year-old John Horwood, who had killed his girlfriend by throwing a stone at her, was hung by the short-drop method (basically this is slow strangulation – so must be rather akin to drinking keg beers) and then his body was given to the surgeon Richard Smith for dissection.

Surgeon Smith then had the boy's skin tanned and used it to cover a book containing all the records of the murder, trial and execution! This book is in the Bristol Records Office; two others that were bound with the remainder of the skin are held at the Bristol Law Society's Library – inscribed "Cutis Vera Johannis Horwood" ("The Skin of John Horwood") in gilded letters on the covers.

Ten years later the gaol was stormed during the Reform Riots of 1831 and set on fire. The authorities had a field day with the culprits – hanging and exiling them, etc. – but it's not clear who had the Beer Concession.

Next to the goal is the **Louisiana** on the



The Louisiana

corner of the Bathurst Basin. Originally called the New Inn, it was then renamed the Bathurst when the New Cut and Bathurst Basin was dug in 1809, becoming the Smugglers when the early 19th century cottages next door and the warehouse facades were incorporated into the Merchants Landing housing development in the early 1980s. The Victorian wrought-iron balcony and pillars of this pub (reminiscent of those found in Clifton) appear to be all that's left of its past, as inside it has been gutted so many times since Courage first ripped out its heart in the 1970s that its character has gone. This large bar pub is famed for its live rock music bands upstairs, and tonight had a drinkable Wells Bombardier downstairs. Visit www.thelouisiana.net for more information.

We walk on past the Bathurst Basin, built as one of the three entrances to the Floating Harbour on the site of Trin Mills Millpond at the original junction of the Malago Brook and the river Avon. The General Hospital occupies one side of the basin: built in 1858 its ground



The Velindra

floor was designed and used as a massive warehouse for the basin.

We quickly reach our last pub of the stroll – the **Velindra** – overlooking the Cut whilst being tucked away between the end of the General Hospital and the high-rise flats, close to Bedminster Bridge. This small one-bar pub is very brightly lit, which highlights its 1960s style decoration has seen better days. The pub featured loud piped music on the night we found the Bass unexciting.

Somewhere near Bedminster Bridge was the old "James and Pierce's" brewery that was taken over by George's in 1889 – one of its tied houses being the Avon Packet – but I haven't yet identified its exact location.

Colin & Pennie Postlethwaite

Watering Holes in the Desert

news from Weston-super-Mare

All Ship Shape at The Waverley

THE Waverley on Severn Road, Weston is a pub that has received less than its fair share of the limelight in *Watering Holes in the Desert*. To put that right I paid a visit to find out more about the pub and its licensee Ron Ford.

Ron and his wife, Jenny, have been in the pub trade for twenty-two years, during which time his travels have taken him through much of Southern England. These have included running an early Wetherspoon's in Wembley, a Brewer's Fayre in Berkshire (an experience which scarred Ron so much that you won't find as much as a sandwich on offer at The Waverley) and a pub called The White Hart in Wroughton, a village just to the South of Swindon. The White Hart offered eleven real ales, which in itself would make it an attractive destination for beer drinkers. However, this was only one of ten pubs and a club in the village at the time. Apparently stag parties would come out from Swindon and attempt to go through the entire pub estate.

The Fords took over at The Waverley on 1 April 1996. At the time it was owned by Usher's brewery and sold the full range of their beers. Following the demise of Usher's it was in the hands of the InnSpired pub company and it is now owned by a company called Pubfolio.

The exterior of the pub is quite unusual – both in shape and design (see picture). Ron cleared up this mystery by

explaining that the building was originally a chapel of rest. It then became an off-licence, which I suspect must have created something of a rumpus at the time, and it only became a pub in 1974. The original chapel windows now rest in peace behind the mural-style painting of The Waverley ship, which was installed by Usher's and is a feature of the frontage. The interior comprises one room, with a nautical theme, and there is a nice garden.

Ron reports that Pubfolio do not stipulate which real ales he has to have. There are always four on offer. The Waverley has long featured Bass (4.4 per cent ABV) and Wychwood Hobgoblin (5 per cent) as permanent beers and is, to my knowledge, the only pub in the Weston area to sell Hobgoblin as a permanent beer. This is an excellent, warming, strong ale, perfect for cold evenings although the Waverley's regulars love it all year round. Until recently the other two beers were Young's Bitter and Greene King Abbot Ale. These have now been replaced by Black Sheep Best Bitter (3.8 per cent) from Masham, North Yorkshire and Shepherd Neame Spitfire (4.5 per cent). The two new beers have been received very well by the locals and the range now has a nice balance to it.



The occasional extra treat may appear – Ron put on Everard's Christmas beer, Sleighbell, in December and says that this "flew out as soon as it went on."

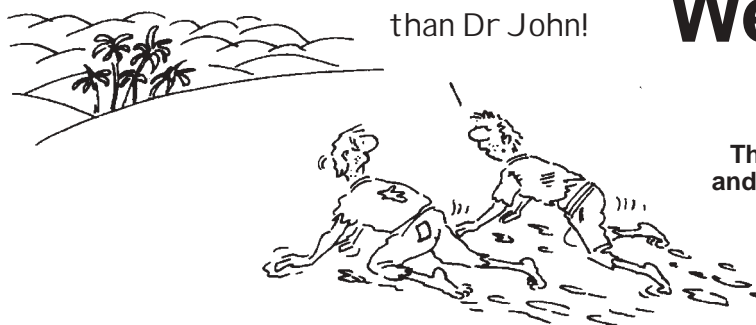
As mentioned above, The Waverley does not do any food – it also does not sell any keg bitter. Ron says that the locals only like their beer "real", so don't bother going to The Waverley for your extra-smooths and cream-flows.

I asked Ron how he would ideally like his pub to be seen. He did not hesitate – "a friendly, locals' pub." The Waverley is well supported by the local community, which does not surprise me, as it is what I call a proper pub. It has plenty of character and characters. There are no frills or gimmicks, just a nice comfortable environment where you can have a chat over a well-kept pint of good ale.

Tim Nickolls



We're more lost
than Dr John!



Weston Diary

The Weston diary and contact details can be found just inside the back page.

He's back! The return of Dr John Up the Smoke

WHEN General Electric was only a battery sub-lieutenant, I said I would write about Banwell brewing. Then a new brewery came along and I never finished the article. Newman's Brewery having moved to Yatton last November, I thought about this and jumped on the train to see if there were any introductory offers. Failing to open the newfangled train door, I finished up in London.

The trains there were a different colour but the ticket collector thought I was booked through to Yatton from some exotic place such as Crewe and I safely arrived at the *Head of Steam* by Euston Station, aka the late-lamented *Doric Arch*.

It is regarded by those locals in the know as one of the best in the area. Among the nine it tries to have on was still the pre-Fuller's days Summer Lightning (presumably a bit of late running there as it is a railway theme pub.) One has a good view of the bus one just missed due to the real cider also to be found there. Whilst waiting for the next three, one may wish to buy a copy of the new "N1 Guide to Real Ale".

Mabel's Tavern in Mabledon Place had a flavoursome Shepherd Neame Master Brew Bitter and Xmas dinners from £11.95, somewhat less than we had to pay in Weston. This used to be "The Kentish

Arms" and Mabel, who died 30 years ago, comes back to visit in the early hours.

The *Skinner's Arms* in Judd Street, which still has WC street signs from when there were such things on the streets, is Art Gecko and had an undemanding Greene King IPA to match its pre-independence decor.

On Holborn, Tim Nickolls' old stamping ground and where the local pub guide is completely sold out, the historic *Cittie of York* had something to suit all tastes: Sam Smith's OBB, nitro-keg Extra Stout, cider and lots of interesting imports. The tasty OBB is also available at the *Princess Louise*, a mere girl over 400 years younger than the 1430 *Cittie*.

Coming right up to date, there is the JDW *Penderel's Oak*, good for hiding out if you happen to be a king, which was also on the "ee by gum" trail with a nicely-balanced York Brewery Yorkshire Terrier, if one did not want the Butcombe Gold. The latter they obviously considered better as the pump had two different style clips. Food is dearer than around here but a chap in a UoB Boat Club shirt had just rowed in to join the usual Kippers in the family area.

Feeling that I might be struck down for overimbibing, I went to the busy *Harp* in Chandos Place to see if they sold them but what I found was a very worthwhile Harvey's Sussex Best Bitter and

Butcombe Gold and Smiles Bristol IPA clips. I also finally found a non-smoking area where no-one was smoking, having previously encountered everything from non-smoking areas with ashtrays in use, non-smoking cellars that were closed and the smoked herring previously referred to. The autumn "The Full Pint", which circulates in those parts, had a lot to say on smoking-in-pubs legislation, which might well provide a business opportunity to publicans wishing to attract a new clientele.

The *One Tun* in Goodge Street had the usual Young's selection enhanced by a fruity Winter Warmer as the seasonal. The pubco *Hope* in Tottenham Street had an excellent Timothy Taylor Landlord on offer with lots of sausages. These included Pork and Leek (the Gents being to the left of the bar), Venison and Wild Mushroom (understandable after being stuffed into a sausage) and Creole Smokey (probably to be banned by the legislation referred to above).

By the time I got back to Paddington, from where the trains were running, everyone at Newman's Brewery had probably gone home so, at the *Mad Bishop and Bear*, I had to buy my own Fuller's, choosing a rare cask Anniversary Ale to celebrate at the same 6.3 per cent as the bottle the last 160 years of the brewery's 350-odd-year history.

I was finally given some free beer on the train by FGW but it was in a tube so I took it home for someone else to open.

Dr John

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Weston Wanderings

With Newman's Brewery moving site I thought it would be all right
To look in on the new operation
But I finished up at a different destination

London town had not changed a lot
When by chance to there I got
With more pubs than Yatton has
A pleasant day one still can pass

However, around Weston-super-Mare
One must admit to be fair
There are some very good hostelries
That equally the serious imbibor do please

Dr John

Socials Review

WESTON CAMRA members have enjoyed some excellent socials over the past few months, visiting many pubs and sampling a wide range of great ales.

Following a mighty fine evening in Bristol city centre for our November social, when we visited six Good Beer Guide-listed pubs ranging in style from the dark and atmospheric **Highbury Vaults** to the very 21st century **Zerodegrees**, on the first Friday in December we again went beyond the Weston city limits for a trip to Portishead and Clevedon.

First port of call for our bus was **The Windmill** in Portishead. This pub has become an established Good Beer Guide regular in recent years, securing its third successive spot in the 2006 edition (available in all good book shops – and a few rosey ones). Their regular beers – Butcombe Bitter and Gold, Bass, Courage Best and RCH Pitchfork – were joined by ex-Champion Beer of Britain, Timothy Taylor Landlord. All beers were tried and there were no complaints on beer quality.

Having started at an old favourite we decided to try some venues that were new to most people. The first was **The Royal Hotel** perched on the top of Pier Road. A building with some history, having been built by Brunel. Now a very pleasant spot for a drink in civilised surroundings. Butcombe Bitter and Blond, along with Sharp's Doom Bar, were the

beers on offer.

Next up was **The Poachers Pocket** on the High Street. Friday night and very busy. Four real ales on offer – Butcombe Blond, Sharp's Doom Bar, Courage Best and Bath Ales Gem. Speaking to a couple of local regulars it seems that the Gem went on as a guest beer but was so popular that it has become part of the permanent range. This Dubious Duo reckoned that the Poachers has always served good beer but the whole pub has been turned round since the current landlord, Mark, took over about a year ago. We could happily have stayed longer but there were other delights to sample.

We made the short journey to **The Royal Oak** on West Hill. The three beers on handpumps would not set many CAMRA members' pulses racing, being Courage Best, Bass and Greene King Ruddles Best Bitter (I had quite forgotten that GK still bothered brewing this). However, the great news at the Royal Oak is that they keep a beer with the same name as the pub and in their case it is not simply a beer being artificially badged as the pub's own beer, but a genuine Royal Oak – brewed by the excellent O'Hanlon's brewery in South Devon. This is served straight from the cask at the Royal Oak. As if this wasn't a pleasant enough surprise, they also had O'Hanlon's Yellowhammer as a guest beer – also straight from the cask. Needless to say, everyone went for the O'Hanlon's beers and I

had one of my stiffest ever tasks of getting people out of a pub and back on to the bus. The Royal Oak also serves real cider from Thatcher's.

As we left Portishead, I mused on the fact that the town has often been regarded as being a bit of a desert (just like good old Weston), but we had had good beer at four pubs and the town also has the Clarence House Club on the High Street that is well regarded by many and The Ship on Down Road, which serves a top-notch pint of Butcombe Bitter. I would say that Portishead real ale drinkers are quite well off for decent watering holes.

We finished the evening at two pubs in Clevedon. The first was **The Old Inn**, Walton Road, which was pretty packed. Quite an interesting selection of beers. Aside from the ubiquitous Courage Best, they had Wychwood Hobgoblin, Badger Tanglefoot and Greene King Old Speckled Hen. Also real cider from Thatcher's. This was the first time that I had drunk Tanglefoot since the recipe was changed, with the beer being slightly weakened. I did find it rather disappointing – the original used to be one of my favourite beers. However, all again seemed happy with their beer here. The final stop for the evening was **The Salthouse** on Salthouse Road. Shepherd Neame Spitfire (rated by one of our group as the best Spitfire he had had in years), Butcombe Gold and yet more Doom Bar were the choices.

Shortly before Christmas we held our Annual Seasonal Ales Crawl (our seventh).



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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.

Golden Eagle Best Bitter 4.2% abv

Smooth and malty with a background of honey flavours offering a refreshing and citrus finish.

Harrier Lite 3.5% abv

A light golden low alcohol beer with delicate floral and fruity aroma leading to a smooth, almost sweet finish.

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

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

This popular event entails us visiting all pubs in the town centre offering a Christmas or winter beer. It would seem that some landlords do not read Pints West as our plea in the last edition for landlords offering such a beer to contact us and let us know fell on stony ground. We subsequently discovered a few pubs that could have featured on our crawl and enjoyed some new customers putting money into their tills.

However, we still had a good evening, taking in six pubs – **The Raglan, The Regency, The Cabot, The White Hart, The Dragon and Off The Rails**. Splinter groups nipped into **The Major From Glengarry** for Wadworth's Old Father Timer and **Bar Shallus** for Newman's Hoppy Gristmas.

My notes on the evening disintegrated into a soggy mess, so I cannot provide much detail on the beers. However, my main recollections are two very good Xmas ales at The White Hart, a very poor Christmas Ale from Young's at The Regency (are Young's paying more attention to their bottled range nowadays?) and two CAMRA members being disappointed at the lack of a seasonal beer at Off The Rails and jumping into a taxi to go back to The Raglan, which had been our starting point for the evening.

January saw our first visit as a branch to **The Ebdon Arms**, Wick St Lawrence. We enjoyed the six ales on offer, which included Hewish IPA and East Street Cream from the nearby RCH brewery and another local beer – Butcombe Bitter.

On the first Friday in February we embarked on another bus outing. First stop was **The Woolpack** at St Georges. A nice selection of beers here to start the evening off. These were Bath Ales Gem, Caledonian Deuchars IPA, Palmer's IPA and RCH East Street Cream. The next stop was **Claverham Village Hall**. This is located on Bishop's Road, ½ a mile off the A370 at Cleeve. This community venture is staffed by volunteers, which certainly makes you more patient when waiting to be served. The beers here were Butcombe Bitter and Brakspear's Brass Monkey. The latter beer got mixed receptions, the flavour not being to some peoples liking. We then had a short journey to Congresbury, where we began at **The Old Inn**. As with everywhere we visited during the course of the evening it was great to see a very busy pub, particularly at The Old Inn given the number of other pubs in Congresbury. The real fire here is probably an attraction on a cold night, as is the full range of Young's beers. All were sampled, including the excellent Winter Warmer and all were in excellent condition. The five-minute walk to **The Plough** provided some welcome fresh air and exercise. The Plough is a favourite of many in the area and it didn't disappoint. Barbus Barbus, a 4.6% amber ale from the Butts brewery, Hungerford, is one of my favourite beers so I was delighted to see that on offer. Also available were Bass, Bath Ales Barnstormer and Wickwar BOB. Landlord Steve Armstrong was passing

Only here for the beer?

"COME ALONG AND JOIN CAMRA!" the ads all say. Why not? I like a good pint. "Go and have a night out with your chums," my wife tells me. I didn't need telling twice. Mind you, I am banished to the spare room on my return as, I am told, real ale makes me snore very loudly.

"Problem is CAMRA is full of weirdos," I was told by my friends. Well it is, and it isn't. Yes there are some members of the Flat Earth Society who can pick up a pint and can tell you the brewer's name was Arthur, the beer was brewed on a Tuesday, and it is not as good as the Old Gas Basket Thunderer brewed in 1965 before Courage's sank their third well into the Berkshire Hills. But the rest of the crowd are quite normal, they are enthusiasts, they know and appreciate good beers, and feel that by belonging to CAMRA they are ensuring that good real ales remain.

As you go around the locale, either by foot or by minibus, you find that at each hostelry the sudden influx of bodies, most wanting half-pints, are met with surprise and usually glee by the landlord. You sup some very tasty ales, find pubs you never knew existed and chat to yet another member of your group who always has an interesting tale to tell. Even the talk of the beer quality can be very interesting, an eye-opener that makes you appreciate the brown liquid in your glass even more. You compare beer from the last establishment with beers at the new pub, you hum and ha and sometime disagree, but you do enjoy some good pints and some good company.

To me a pint is only as good as the place that serves it. That, of course, is CAMRA heresy. CAMRA's real concern, is beer quality. But to me the price of a pint includes the ale, the clean glass, the suitability of the premises, the welcome and the atmosphere. I would rather pay 30p to 50p more for a pint than save

money and stand on a filthy carpet surrounded by dirty glasses and in a cold and unwelcoming room waiting to be served. Maybe I am not the perfect CAMRA member but, even so, my voice is just one of many that add to the call for improved quality.

Our recent Christmas Ale Pub Crawl was a fine example of trying varying qualities of Christmas ales, several pubs and meeting up with good company. In the Raglan we had an excellent choice of two dark beers (real winter warmers), in the Cabot 5 Bars the choice was limited but flavourful and well served. The Regency was very busy with their Christmas Draw and not quite as friendly as usual and the Young's so-called Christmas ale was very disappointing. At the White Hart we found really tasty ale, a very nice atmosphere and a few more of our branch members already installed (they had obviously decided where the best ale that evening was to be found). From here we went to Off The Rails, not a favourite haunt of mine but the rest of our branch like it. The ales are always excellent. It is just not my choice of bar for a happy evening's supping.

In February the Weston branch went off on a tour of local villages checking out some of the pubs being considered for the Good Beer Guide. If you are reading this in Weston, are not a member, but fancy a trip around some different pubs, look out for events in the diary section of Pints West and come along. You will not be disappointed.

By going on CAMRA trips I have met some nice people, been to some great (and not so great) pubs and tasted some wonderful ales. Only here for the beer? Not really. I am here to enjoy myself, even if I must sleep in the spare room. "Another pint of your best snoring juice landlord, please!"

Dave McVittie

through the pub and told us that "a great beer will be coming on in 5 minutes." This turned out to be Bath Ales Wild Hare. Naturally we could not leave without trying this. The final stop for the evening was another favourite – **The Crown** in Churchill. Eight beers – most straight from the cask. Almost everyone went for Old Slug Porter from RCH, agreeing that this was a fine end to another very good Weston social.

We meet on the third Wednesday of each month, with the occasional extra event slotted in. Why not join us? You don't have to be a CAMRA member and you will be very welcome. See the Diary below for further details.

Tim Nickolls

Brewery news

PHILIP Downes, head brewer at Ridley's of Chelmsford prior to its take over by Greene King, is now head brewer at Wickwar.

KEYNSHAM Brewery is back up and running following the recovery of John Firth, whose heart attack put him out of action for a while. He started again by brewing Somerdale Golden, which was to be followed shortly afterwards by a stout which he thought he might call Stockwood Stout.

Weston Whispers (pub and beer news)

TWO pubs in the local area made the headlines in the Weston Mercury of 10 February. The external signage and advertising required by owners Greene King at the **Old Inn** in Hutton has incurred the wrath of the local parish council. One parish councillor was quoted as saying that "it looks absolutely awful and the brewery ought to be shot." He is taking the matter up with Greene King. Landlord Peter Clarke points out that it is difficult to let the community know what is going on inside the pub if they don't advertise events externally.

The pub was closed from 20 February until 3 March for an internal spruce up that Peter does not feel will have an adverse effect on the charm of the interior. On the all-important issue of beer quality, the Old Inn is definitely well worth visiting and has secured a place in the 2006 Good Beer Guide. There are always three Greene King beers and two guest beers, often from rarely seen microbreweries. Peter is also considering reviving the once annual Old Inn Beer Festival later in the year. Yes, please!

The other pub in the news is the **New Inn** in Wedmore, where the Mercury reports that the landlady could go to prison if she continues to play music from a jukebox in the pub. The paper says that the landlady was "caught playing music including Elton John tracks

Goodbye Yellow Brick Road and *Benny and the Jets*." Given these circumstances, my sympathies lie with the local residents.

As reported by Robin Wild in his column in the last edition of Pints West, the **Old Manor Inn** on Queensway in Worle is much improved on the beer front. Local CAMRA members report that it now offers a well-kept pint of Butcombe Bitter.

Similarly, the Wrington-based brewery has seen its Butcombe Gold being added to the permanent range in the **Windsor Castle** on Upper Church Road. This now sits alongside the Newman's Wolver's Ale, Charles Wells Bombardier, Bass and Courage Best. Don't try telling the Windsor that real ale sales are in decline.

The **White Hart** in Palmer Row continues to offer some interesting beers – they recently had the subtly named What The Fox's Hat from the Church End brewery. If you haven't been to the White Hart before, why not come to the CAMRA social being held there on Wednesday March 15th? Two beers chosen by CAMRA will be available.

Greene King Old Speckled Hen has been introduced at the **White Lion**, St James Street.

Moles brewery was one that was lined up.

I have been lucky enough in recent weeks to visit two of the finest pubs in the South West. My visits brought back into focus for me the debates that have been raging around smoking in pubs. First came the 15th century **Blue Anchor** in Helston, Cornwall. It was a cold, wet evening outside, which added to my enjoyment being settled inside the Anchor having a marvellous time in the small, back bar in front of the blazing fire chatting with locals, reading a book on the history of the pub and sipping the Anchor's very potent 7.8 per cent ABV Spingo Christmas beer. My enjoyment was spoiled when a man came in with his partner and immediately lit up a cigar. He was obviously quite entitled to. However, I am a non-smoker and I was forced to spend the remainder of the time he was there struggling to breathe, let alone be able to properly taste and enjoy my beer. Is this really acceptable? I asked myself.

A couple of weeks later I found myself at the wonderful **Bridge Inn**, Topsham, South Devon. On the door I was quite surprised to see a sign saying that smoking was no longer allowed inside the pub, apparently due to customer demand. Needless to say, the drinking experience was great and the two locals that I got talking to (both smokers) said that they did not have any problem with the ban and had not considered for one moment not using the Bridge any more. Their view was, why would they consider staying away, given that the great beers, great atmosphere and great company remained?

I write this two days after the vote in the House Of Commons that will ban smoking in pubs and, even as a non-smoker who resents going home from pubs stinking of smoke, I view the future with trepidation. What will be the impact in Weston where some pubs seem to have a large proportion of regulars who smoke? Will people really give up going to the pub for a beer and to see their friends simply because they cannot smoke inside? Will a smoker who has been playing for his pub's skittles team for the past 20 years really give up the game if he has to nip out for a smoke? Will lots of smokers really retreat to their armchairs with some cheap tins from the supermarket? Will the majority of my friends who rarely, if ever, go to pubs citing the smoke as a major reason now start going again? Will the licensees who are already saying that they may have to sell their pub really have to take that drastic measure? All questions and no answers at the moment.

Tim Nickolls



The **Weston-super-Mare Social Club** on Devonshire Road stocks Fuller's London Pride and a guest beer.

Further along Devonshire Road, **WSM Cricket Club** offers Butcombe Bitter at £1.90 a pint as a permanent beer and offers an additional guest beer. Card-carrying CAMRA members can gain admittance to the club.

In Uphill, the **Dolphin** usually has three ales on offer – Sharp's Doom Bar, Courage Best and a changing third beer. The nearby **Ship Inn** sells Newman's Wolver's Ale, Bass and an occasional third beer. Rucking Mole from the

A Round with Robin

ALTHOUGH much has been written in Pints West over the years about the great pubs of Bath, I'm writing an account of a trip some seven of us from Weston made on the 7th of January. We hoped against the odds to find one pub still serving the famous *Abbey Ales Twelfth Night* beer, but in any event we were trying out some pubs we'd not been to before, and it was also the last day for a special price bus ticket, which allowed up to five people to travel for £8.

We arrived at Victoria Park in Bath on the bus from Bristol, just a few yards from the **Hop Pole**, which we had planned to visit first. Unfortunately we found that it wasn't open until midday, so we walked to the **Royal Oak**, and found that too wasn't open. However,



You're all too early!

after the photo was taken on the steps of the Royal Oak, three of our party then went to a café for an all-day breakfast whilst the other four explored the immediate area, finding a Wadworth pub that looked like it wouldn't open for a week. Just before noon the **Royal Oak** opened its door and we were much relieved to see an excellent choice of ales. The pub was also playing some early Fairport Convention music tapes as luckily the CD system had broken. I had a *Bristol Beer Factory Red* (3.8 per cent) and a *Butts Coper* (6 per cent), from the choice of eight beers available.

Just as we were preparing to leave, the happy eaters returned from their breakfast, and joined the rest of the party at the **Hop Pole**. This pub had the whole range of *Bath Ales* beers either on draught or bottled, but quirkily only had their organic lager available in bottle form whilst the Royal Oak had it on draught. I had a good *Barnstormer*.

We hopped onto a local bus outside the Hop Pole and after being dropped off in the centre, made our way by bus to London Road, where we backtracked a little way to enter the **King William**. As it was now after lunchtime, we found tables fairly easily. The *Milk Street* beers included *Ziz-Zag* stout but I had *Mash*

Up (5 per cent).

Just along from there we went to the **Star** where we found we had missed the *Twelfth Night* by two days. I had a very nice pint of *Abbey Salvation* (4.8 per cent) and the other beers were well thought of, especially the *Bateman's XXXB*. We also had a dram or two from their good selection of single malt whisky.

As a local in the Star mentioned that the **Bell** in Walcott Street had had the elusive *Twelfth Night* the previous day we thought we'd better pop in to check it out. The usual wide choice did not, as it happened, include *that* beer, but I had the *Exmoor Exmas* (5 per cent) and a really superb *Bartram's Suffolk 'n' Strong* (5 per cent).

There is a beer in the huge catalogue by *Bartram's* that has a very long name for a beer – the *Comrade Bill Bartram's Egalitarian Anti Imperialist Imperial Soviet Stout* – unfortunately not available in bourgeoisie Bath.

No visit to Bath would be complete without a visit to the **Old Green Tree**, where I indulged in one of my favourite beers, the *Hopback Entire Stout* (4.5 per cent). Some of us stayed just long

enough to have a rare *McOtter* from the Devonian *Otter* brewery. We were then going to make our way to the King William IV in Combe Down, but after a mix up with buses, we let Steve (whose birthday it was) lead us to the **Salamander** where I had another *Barnstormer*.

As we were so close to the **Volunteer Rifleman's Arms**, it seemed a shame not to have a beer there: I had a *Moles Molecutter* (5.5 per cent), and there was a good atmosphere there, including a chess game in progress.

We then caught the bus back to Bristol, getting off at the centre as some of the group wanted to eat at the chip shop near the Bunch of Grapes. With the **White Lion** so close, I had a delicious pint of *Wickwar Mr*

Perrett's Stout there. We returned to Weston by bus after the meal.

At Christmas in Crediton, in Devon, I had a couple of trips to the excellent Good Beer Guide-listed **Crediton Inn**, where Cotleigh and Adnams beers had joined the Sharp's and Fuller's. Also to the **Great Western Hotel** in Exeter, where the manager, Raj, told me of his plans to further increase the real ales available: they only had 12 on. And I walked to the celebrated **Beer Engine** at Newton St Cyres, where they have just had a change of landlord, but the brewer has stayed on in a consultancy role. I had a half of all their home-brewed ales, but a whole pint of their Christmas ale, *Whistlemas* at 7.2 per cent, and so I was glad to catch the bus back to Crediton.

Now that the special price of £1.70 a pint at the Good Beer Guide-listed **Raglan Arms** in Weston on Wednesdays has come to an end, I'm glad to say that the quality of beer choice and taste has not diminished, and in fact I wonder why so few people took advantage of the offer. The beers remain at £2 a pint. Recently we have had the Bath Ales selection there, including *Wild Hare* and *Festivity*. The Friday night free live acoustic music continues there, by the fireside, with new faces appearing from time to time.

In the last issue I mentioned the **Regency's** odd Sunday bar food; the pickled onions are worth watching for – as Tony Curtis would have it, some like it hot! And if you're venturing into the **White Hart** in Palmer Row on a Sunday, take care when trying Lou's meat balls. At least they nearly always have two real ales to wash them down with, most recently a selection from Archer's, and Brakspear's *Brass Monkey*.

That's all for now folks. See you at the Bristol Beer Festival on the Saturday.

Robin E Wild



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Guest Beers and Beer Festivals catered for

Island in the sea

By your Nailsea correspondent
Laurie Gibney

Open all hours?

Obviously the media didn't ask the licensees in Nailsea and District what opening hours they planned following the November 2005 liberalisation of opening hours. *Pints West* researchers Mark & Jill Ashman, Pete Domett, Martyn Howell, Alan Sibley and myself, failed to find one pub locally which has changed its "regular" hours. Some pubs now are able to remain open until midnight or one o'clock in the morning, but only plan to exercise that option on special occasions and then for customers already in the bar at normal closing time.

Many thanks to this local team of volunteers who deliver about 1,000 *Pints West* magazines each quarter to thirty-three pubs and clubs, mainly in the Nailsea, Backwell, and Clevedon area with a sprinkling in Claverham, Tickenham, Wraxall, Flax Bourton, Long Ashton, Bristol and Bath. They also deliver posters, display units and membership forms, research news for this article and in January delivered 30 National Pubs Week (18th to 25th February) packs.

Apologies...

... to the Beardshaw brothers for erroneously saying there were two brothers named "Andrew". To put the record straight, Michael and Kelly run the **Drum and Monkey** at Kenn, Andrew & Margaret ran the **George** at Backwell but now run the Buttercrust Tea Rooms in Somerton, and Terry & Sharon run the **Moorend Spout** in Kingshill, Nailsea which is gaining a reputation for good food experienced by your correspondent and many, many more one recent Saturday evening.

The regular real ales and cider are Bass at £2.35, Butcombe Bitter at £2.20 and Marston's Pedigree at £2.45 a pint, and Thatcher's Premium Cask Cider at £2. Prior table bookings are advised (on 01275 855336). Opening hours are now 11.30 am until 2.30 pm and 5 pm until 11 pm on Mondays to Thursdays, 11.30 am until 11 pm on Saturdays, and 12 noon until 11 pm on Sundays.

The Queen raises her Head

Punch Tavern's **Queen's Head** in Nailsea town centre was taken over in June last year on a ten-year roll-over lease by Richard Beaton who also runs "Damien Tate Interiors" in Nailsea, fitting kitchens and bathrooms. Richard is slowly changing the focus of the Queen's Head to offer a bistro-pub atmosphere with real ale and good French and Spanish food. A "Champagne and Strawberry"

evening has already been held and a selection of cocktails introduced.

One bar has been renovated and the other bar was due to be closed for renovation during the winter. The old skittle alley, which had long seen better days, is due to provide new kitchens and a cellar. The real ales are Greene King IPA and Old Speckled Hen which were in good condition on a recent visit and are selling well (18 gallons of IPA and 27 gallons of Hen per week). Richard would like to introduce a changing guest ale when gallonage reaches six nine-gallon casks a week. Casks are put on the stillage to settle for four days, when they are then tapped and allowed to breathe for a further three days before being dispensed.

Elsewhere in Nailsea & District

The **Royal Oak** is not well known locally for its real ales, rather more for its loud music, Sky TV and young people. Jerry Fletcher noticed that Theakston's Old Peculier (5.7 per cent ABV) and John Smith's Cask Bitter (3.8 per cent) were on sale recently. A tasting team was dispatched and tried the Old Peculier, one of the team's favourites. Unfortunately it was not at its best, being drinkable but a little lifeless, except for the price at £2.40 per pint. Well done the **Royal Oak** for fielding an excellent real ale – no doubt we chose a bad evening to try it.

The **Sawyers Arms** had Bath Ales Festivity in boxes on the bar over the Christmas period. This was in addition to Bath Ales Gem and its regulars, Courage Best and Butcombe Bitter.

Welcome to Amanda Tyler who took over at the **Friendship** – assisted by Neil Knox – in mid December 2005, and farewell to Kathleen & Dave Allen who moved on. Amanda is continuing to provide Bed & Breakfast accommodation, Thatcher's Traditional Cider and a real ale, which may change from Courage Best. Amanda's previous experience was at the Britannia, Patchway and the Eclipse in Stokes Croft.

The **Star** at Tickenham, an Enterprise Inn in the care of Hugh & Kim Dash, has introduced Wolver's Ale, delivered from their local brewery, Newman's at Yatton, only seven miles away. This beer is proving popular and will alternate with Wickwar BOB, and another local ale from Dursley, Gloucestershire on the "guest" beer pump. These guests will complement the regular ales Courage Best from Yorkshire, Butcombe Bitter from Wroughton Somerset and Greene King Old Speckled Hen

from Suffolk. The Star last year replaced the children's outside play equipment and have now closed the outdated indoor play area to use that space for bed and breakfast accommodation suitable for disabled people.

Away from Nailsea & District

Only eight miles from Nailsea, in Wrington (between the A38 and A370 and South of Bristol Airport), there has been a very exciting development on the real-ale-and-cider map at **Buglers Off License** in the High Street (tel. 01934 862351). The "Offie" is owned by Sam and Joan Glenn of the **Plough Inn**, Wrington and is now managed by CAMRA members Bernadette O'Reilly and John who ran the **Moorend Spout** in Nailsea a couple of years ago. Draught real ale and cider is available as well as a growing range of bottled ales, wines and spirits.

Take along your own container to be filled or buy a four-pint container for £1 at Buglers Off License where draught ales on sale recently were Wickwar IKB (4.6 per cent ABV) and Newman's Wolver's Ale (4.1 per cent) at £1.15 per pint, also Thatcher's Traditional Cider and Screech Trad Cider from Gloucester Cider Company at £1.10 per pint. Forthcoming ales were to include ales from RCH, Abbey Ales, Moles and Cottage breweries.

Justin Bailey has been along to check the "Wrington Offie" out and was impressed by the draught ales and ciders available. He also reported a reasonable selection of bottles with more promised: "An excellent, promising start, if a bit off the beaten track".

Martyn Howell reports from Backwell ...

I visited the **Dewdrop Inn**, the **George**, the **New Inn**, the **Old Barn** and the **Star** at Tickenham, and all confirm that they have not adopted new trading hours since the change in legislation last November. The Star said they often open until midnight anyway, but I believe this is more for their food and residential customers, and they only do this selectively. It appears they are all waiting to see what else happens around their given territories and with their customer base.

The **Backwell Village Club** also built in extra opening hours to the licence but will only be using this facility selectively in line with certain social events largely at weekends, I expect. Their "Village Pump" charity Beer and

Cider Festival in support of Backwell Medical Centre's "Heart Monitor for District Nurses" was very successful and a full report should appear elsewhere in this magazine.

It is worth noting that the **New Inn** at Backwell (new to our local volunteer run as well) has aspirations to become notable as a "real ale" pub – perhaps CAMRA members should arrange to visit and check it out. The New Inn is largely tied to ales from the Beer Seller but usually carries Sharp's beers too.

Tony Fey at the **Old Barn** says he would like the support of local CAMRA members to taste his real ales with a view to getting the pub re-elected to the Good Beer Guide.

Pete Dommett Reports from Clevedon ...

I am assisting Clevedon Rotary in planning to organize a fund-raising beer festival in Clevedon late in the Summer. If anyone would like to help with this project, or in keeping me informed about real ale and cider matters in the Clevedon area for this article, please contact me, Pete Dommett by phone on 01275 873242 or by email to dommett@blueyonder.co.uk.

Lesley Butler at the **Old Inn** has Courage Best and Greene King Old Speckled Hen as regular real ales and two other guest real ales often from small West Country Breweries. The other day I enjoyed a beautiful pint of O'Hanlon's Port Stout from their Devon brewery at Whimple near Exeter, and a Cottage Brewery ale from Lovington near Castle Cary in Somerset.

Te **Drum & Monkey** at Kenn near Clevedon has retained Bass and an ale from Refresh UK brands. The Ushers Best (brewed in Devizes by Wadworth) was recently replaced by Brakspear Bitter which was slow to settle and short on shelf life, so was replaced by Wychwood Hobgoblin, both of which are brewed in Witney Oxfordshire.

The **Royal Oak** near the pier has been dispensing Butcombe Bitter and Greene King Old Speckled Hen. They have just started offering a weekly changing guest ale delivered straight from the cask to coincide with the start of the Six Nations Rugby. As a result they'll be offering ales from England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland (not sure about French and Italian brews though!). Brains SA was available for England's first match with Wales. Future beers may include Jennings Sneek Lifter and St. Peter's Golden Ale.

And finally...

The *Metro* free newspaper's Aidan Radnedge on 5th December 2005 reported "**A Beer a day could help beat obesity**". Forget the gym – having the occasional pint could be the best way to beat the bulge, suggests research from the USA and published in the *MBC Public Health Journal*. But beware, it suggests your odds of obesity are greater than teetotallers if you indulge in "binge" or "heavy" drinking at the rate of four or more drinks a day. Alcohol Concern recommends following the Government's stated safe limits.

Quote from the *Telegraph Weekend*, Saturday, 29th October 2005: It's up to beer lovers like us to help change attitudes. Apart from anything else, beer is healthy and nourishing. It is also fat-free, cholesterol-free and one of the least calorific of all drinks. Beer is so good for you it should be on the NHS as a prescribed medicine.

A half a pint of beer has about 110 calories compared to about 130 calories for a 125ml (small) glass of sparkling wine, 220 calories for a 330ml Bacardi Breezer and 284 calories for a half pint of milk shake.

Laurie Gibney

Pub update: Miners Arms, Bedminster

LOCATED just over the main Bristol to South West railway line, on the left at the bottom of Bedminster Down Road at its junction with Winterstoke Road, is the Miner's Arms.

Original parts of the pub date from around 1800 and it was once part of the Lady Smyth estate. As the name suggests, it was built to serve the miners of the South Liberty Lane Colliery, which opened in the mid-18th century and closed in the early 1920s. The colliery was behind the pub, but nothing remains of its workings, although the adjacent roads suggest that miners' cottages would have been close by.

Keith and Tracey McLoughlin bought the pub some five and a half years ago from Usher's – so yes, it's a genuine free house, a rarity these days.

The L-shaped bar features many old photographs of both the pub and colliery from around the turn of the century, some showing the tram terminus which was near to the pub.

Prominent features of the bar are two stone-built open fireplaces at either end of the bar, one hop strewn which, when filled with logs, must add to the atmosphere and be very welcoming on cold winter nights.

To the rear is a pair of settles which overlook the garden (which will be a beer garden ready for use this summer to supplement the outside drinking area at the front of the pub) and an impressive full view of Brunel's suspension bridge. It must be a spectacular sight in the evening. To the left is a



Photo by Duncan Shine, from the www.britishpubguide.com web site

separate pool room which is undergoing refurbishment, and will be very impressive once finished.

The pub caters for a mixed age clientele and warmly welcomes families. Sport and music feature prominently. Besides the two pool teams, there are two darts teams and a football team sponsored by the pub – the Miner's Arms Rangers. All the big sporting events can be followed on the Sky Sports big screen. Thursday night is quiz night, Friday night and the last Sunday of each month is live music, to suit all sorts. A major talking point inside the pub is the 40-year-old parrot (Norwegian Blue?) – no dead parrot sketch jokes please, he's very much alive and bites!

And so to the beer. The permanent real ale is Courage Best (in excellent condition on my visit), but Keith has recently added a regular

guest ale. In recent weeks offerings from Smiles (Holly Hops) and Cotswold Spring (Old Codger) have been available. Keith intends to secure other guest ales over the coming months.

With the coming of the new relaxed opening hours trading is noon to midnight Monday to Wednesday, noon to 1.30am Thursday to Saturday and noon to 12.30am Sunday. Happy "hour" is noon to 5.30pm Monday to Thursday, when Courage Best is only £1.60 a pint. How many places can you get a pint of real ale for that price?

Although parking can be a problem, Parson Street railway station is only a five-minute walk and city centre buses pass the door.

The Miner's Arms is well worth a visit and I can guarantee you will get a warm and friendly welcome.

On a personal note, this was the pub where I bought my first drink in 1962 as a 16-year-old under-age drinker – a whole half-pint of Brown Ale (Courage, Watney's, Usher's, Charrington's – who knows?). It's so long ago and I've been on the slippery slope ever since!

Ray Holmes



Belgium – the Aladdin's Cave of Beer

READERS of the Swallows and Amazons books may recall an adventure called *We Didn't Mean to go to Sea*. This piece should really be called *I Didn't Mean to Write This Article* because it was planned by Andrew Swift – but Belgian hospitality is almost as overwhelming as the beer, and by the end of perhaps our best day in Belgium, I was left with the clearest memories of what went on – so here I am!

We were first introduced to Belgian beer in the Bell in Walcot Street, Bath, when a friend, hearing we were spending New Year (2003/4) in Bruges, gave us helpful hints and ordered us a couple of Bush beers – the 12% variety. Armed with this insider knowledge, and, of course, Tim Webb's *Good Beer Guide, Belgium*, we set off. We arrived on December 30th, and headed for Bruges's most famous bar – the **Little Bruges Bear**. And a good thing we did – it was closed for the rest of the holiday. Yes, it's famous, and yes, it's full of foreign tourists, but it's still unmissable. And that was our introduction to the massive range of Belgium's beers.

Our next visit was in August 2004, when Andrew was researching his book about Bath and the Great War, *All Roads Lead to France*. We had hoped to stay in the **Palace Hotel** at Poperinge, but it was closed for its holidays, and we went to the **Belfort**. It has a pretty good range of beers – but it's not the Palace! We were still rather dubious about the unfamiliar taste of some of the beers – notably the lambics – and we were steering very clear of the fruit beers. Cherry and raspberry flavoured beers – what next! But despite having to fit our beer tasting around historical research, we managed to visit to the beer warehouse at Ploegsteert (known as Plug Street to the British Tommies). It's on the Rue d'Armentières and is run by a company called Vanuxeem. It is an Aladdin's cave of beers and you should allow plenty of time to browse, before you even start making your selection. Amazingly, many locals were coming in and buying Fosters and Kronenbourg, but the Belgians insist it's the French who do that. Among the beers we bought (fortunately only one bottle) was one called Vigneronne, which includes a flavour of white wine. Tim Webb is enthusiastic, awarding it 4/5 stars. We, when we came to taste it, were decidedly unenthusiastic. But we were quite adventurous in what we chose, and this was clearly having an effect on our taste buds.

We returned this January, partly to thank people who had helped us, partly to sell books, but mainly for the beer. This time we managed to get in at the Palace at Poperinge, before it closed to give the owners a short break. Guy and Bea Osteux-Beernaert are wonderful hosts – this is definitely the place to stay for beer-lovers. Guy is always ready to advise and suggest new beers to try, and Bea oversees a restaurant which serves local delicacies. We recommend the rabbit casserole. They also run a beer festival in October – but

the hotel is already completely booked for that weekend, although they suggested somewhere else where we might stay.

This time we were more ready to try almost anything – our cunning plan was for Andrew and I each to have something different, so that we could taste each others. We soon discovered that beers such as Rodenbach Grand Cru and Mort Subite Gueuze, which had tasted so strange when we first went, were now among our favourites. We also braved the fruit beers, and discovered to our surprise that we quite liked them. We were still relying on Tim Webb's book, but he is a purist, and we feel is unduly severe on some of the beers, while our experience in one bar that he recommends was curious to say the least. (Guy and Bea laughed merrily at our story – they knew the landlord well) but the guide was invaluable in searching out beers and bars, not least because many bars have limited opening times.

Our most memorable day started in a bar which is not in the book – and in our view it should be. It's in Ploegsteert, and is the **Café le Ploegsteertois**, run by the Heughebaert family. André had been very helpful in

brewers. (The name means plough-share, which, according to a French website, is also the meaning of Ploegsteert.) Tim Webb rates them as average, but when we later had a beer tasting for Tim Bethune (of the Old Green Tree) and John Whinnerah (of the Royal Oak), Tim Bethune was very taken with the brune.

On our way back to the hotel, we decided to stop at a small village called Loker, where the **Heksenstoel** (Witches' Seat) is a bar highly recommended by Tim Webb, and rightly so. By this time, I was suffering from caffeine poisoning. I might have been fit to drive, but was feeling decidedly ill. So I reverted to the low alcohol (3.4%) Liefman's Fruitesse. To say Tim Webb doesn't like this range is putting it mildly, but Guy Osteux-Beernaert clearly does not agree – he serves it at the Palace, and Bea uses it to flavour her delicious duck casserole. All I can say is, that it was wonderfully refreshing to one more than satiated with coffee. We ate here – the food is excellent, and the locals were pouring in for their Sunday night meal. We also came away with a free bottle of Moinette Brune – the landlord's gift for simply letting him know he was in the Guide.

Another day, another bar – and, in Belgium, there's always another beer to choose. The **Labyrinth**, in Kemmel, has a more limited range, but, as Tim Webb says, all good beers, not to mention good, reasonably priced food. And if you have younger members of the family in your party, they will love the games at each table, and the toyshop, Krinkelde Winkel, out in the courtyard.

In January, many of the Christmas beers were still available. My favourite remains Bush de Noel, with its warm spicy flavour – but at 12 per cent one is probably enough. Then there are Trappist beers. Here we suffered a disappoint-



Andre Heughebaert, Kirsten and Andre's wife at the Cafe le Ploegsteertois

describing the effects of the Great War on the area, and we were delighted to let him have a copy of the book, and some photographs. Needless to say, the free beers started arriving. I had one, Bon-Secours Blonde, produced by the Caulier brewery. Tim Webb says it has improved to become ordinary. We feel it's probably improved again to become not at all bad, but at 8 per cent, I as driver called it a day after just one and turned to coffee instead.

Finally extricating ourselves from there, we went on to **L'Auberge**, run by Claude and Nelly Verhaeghe, at the monument at Ploegsteert Wood. More beers (and more coffee for me) appeared. Here, Andrew was introduced to a beer now being brewed for the Vanuxeem warehouse, Queue de Charrue, which comes in blonde, amber and brune, under the name of Ploegsteert Brewery, although the beers actually come from other

ment. We were keen to visit the Abbey at Westvleteren, from which comes what some consider the world's best beer. We were told it was hard to find. It certainly is – we never did discover it, although we drove around the area looking for anything that might look like an abbey, or the café bar where the beer is sold.

It was only when we got home, well-stocked up after another trip to Vanuxeem, that we realised that the taste of Belgian beer needs to be acquired. At our beer-tasting, where we hoped to persuade Tim and John to stock some of our favourites, we were surprised that they did not always like beers that we now enjoy – Rodenbach Grand Cru, or Duchesse de Bourgogne, for example. So if you haven't tried Belgian beer before, prepare to be surprised, and perhaps even disappointed at first. But keep trying – it's well worth the effort.

Kirsten Elliot

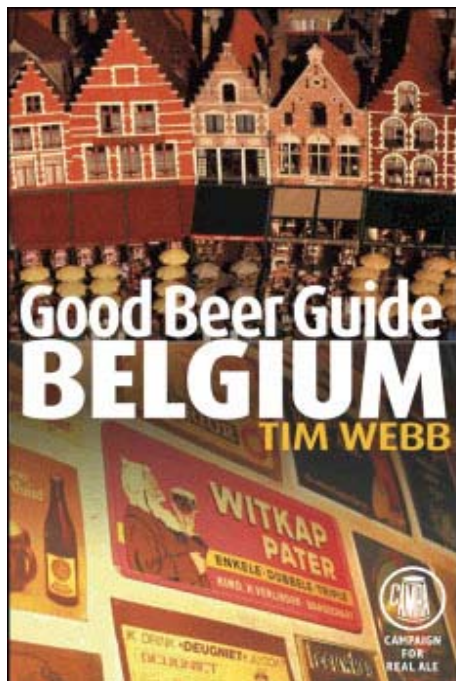
The new Good Beer Guide to Belgium

Vince Murray reviews the recently published 5th edition of Tim Webb's comprehensive guide to all aspects of drinking in Belgium.

LATE 2005 saw the launch of the latest edition of the Good Beer Guide to Belgium by Tim Webb – a labour of love which led to him winning the much coveted Guild of Beer Writers "Travel Bursary" award for writing about foreign beer.

When I reviewed the fourth edition in 2003 I stated that, apart from some good maps, the book was the only guide you needed if visiting Belgium for the first time. That is even more true of this new and much improved edition.

The book continues to offer the most comprehensive listing and descriptions of all known Belgian breweries and their beers (around 800), and of the best 600 places to try them in. The lists have been subject to considerable change since 2003 as, in much the same way as in Britain, the brewing and pub/bar industries in Belgium are constantly changing. Many breweries have disappeared or been taken over and many new ones have sprung up. New cafes serving big ranges of beer are "discovered" and some others lose their way. Keeping on top of this must be a



massive challenge for Tim. I know that he maintains a database via his extensive contacts in the beer world, constantly seeking and receiving feedback from all those willing to offer it. Whenever I plan to visit Belgium I

advise Tim, who then provides me with up-to-date information on the area I am visiting, and a request to check out a few "leads" that he has been unable to do personally. I am aware of quite a few others all around Europe, and even from the USA, who do the same. Tim does not rest – as soon as the book is out he is updating the information for the next one. Tim always "credits" his sources in the book, although he caused much amusement in the latest book when a credit went to Phil Cotham (former branch chairman of Bristol CAMRA but not known to be active on Belgian beer) that was meant for Phil Cummings – who took it all in good humour!

So what has changed with this edition? Most obviously, Tim decided to drop Holland from the guide and concentrate purely on Belgium. This has made space for extra interesting chapters, longer descriptions and many more pictures, in colour for the first time. The sections on advice for travellers on how to get the best from their visit are much expanded. Good advice is offered on travel options both to and within Belgium, where to stay, what to eat and sights to see. For the first time a full calendar of regular beer festivals and beer-related events is offered. Also much expanded are the sections on how and where to buy beer to bring home (my boot returns full every time) and where to buy Belgian beers in the UK. Suggestions for the latter are very much welcomed by Tim.

In the introduction Tim says: "This is a guide with attitude, we do not do cheery-beery". He is as good as his word and the book is chock full of witty remarks and wry humour. If he does not like a beer, a brewery or anything else it is abundantly clear. I find this attitude very refreshing – what use is a guide book that doesn't guide you away from things that you should avoid? The book is particularly critical of the worrying trend of brewers – especially but not exclusively the larger ones – to "dumb down" their products with cheap ingredients and by cutting corners. Once great beers that received the coveted five stars previously, now get the full critical treatment and mediocre rankings. Quite right too. On the subject of ratings, this is still the only mainstream guide that I have read that is brave enough to rate beers this openly. Rankings range from five stars ("one of the world's great beers") to one star ("not worth getting your wallet out for") and are extremely useful when faced with a bewildering list of 300 or more beers to choose from.

There is a very informative chapter on the different Belgian beer styles and another on the art of making beer. A savage assault is launched on "global beer makers", especially InBev, which makes fun reading, albeit with a very worrying and serious underlying message. Then, as it should be, the remaining two thirds of the book are given over to the independent breweries, and the cafes that serve their beers.

If your only experience of Belgian beer is to have tried InBev products such as Hoegaarden, Leffe and Stella Artois, then you have missed out on what all the fuss is about. Believe me, use this book to seek out and sample the real Belgian beers and you will never drink those beers again. You really should not contemplate visiting Belgium without it.

Vince Murray

*Good Beer Guide to Belgium by Tim Webb
Published by CAMRA books £12.99
From CAMRA, 230 Hatfield Road, St Albans,
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VOTED BEST PUB IN BRISTOL BY 'VENUE' MAGAZINE DECEMBER 2005



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

Kent's Best in Chipping Sodbury

Dear Sir,

Thoroughly enjoyed the December issue in general, but the *Shine on Chipping Sodbury* article by Duncan Shine in particular. Only two of the pubs I know carry Pints West, the Bell in Old Sodbury and the Grapes, which was visited. Unfortunately neither can supply me with a copy to replace the one my missus sent to her pals in Guildford. Can you oblige please and forward a copy?

I've been an ale drinker and Pints West reader for several years, but think perhaps I have missed a joke somewhere along the line. In the issue where you sample the beer in the Grapes – my local as it happens – you mention there being “a pint of ‘Kent's Best’ from an unnamed brewery.” My limited knowledge of ale suggests a clue in the name and immediately I think of Shepherd Neame, established 1698 and Britain's oldest brewery. I checked and it does say that on the pump clip. Surely sum mistake? Or am I missing some old insiders' running gag? Otherwise good all-round magazine.

Cheers,

Nick Gillett,

Chipping Sodbury.

Duncan Shine replies: Thanks for your kind words Nick. I thoroughly enjoyed my trip around Chipping Sodbury, and found some really good beer there. Sadly, the Grapes was one of the later pubs I visited, so both my eyesight and my memory were a little, er, unfocussed by that stage. Thanks for the information on Kent Best!

Quoyloo

Dear Steve,

Two things:

1). I enjoy Pints West but can't always find it in Somerset . . . subscription cheque enclosed.

2). I'm sure that you what you love the most – after a good pint, of course – is nit-

picking letters from anoraks with no life to speak of . . . thought so!

Issue 68 (Winter 2005/6) had a review of the 28th Bath Beer Festival from Kerstin Elliott, in which she mentions “. . . the Orkney Brewery, based in the wonderfully named town of Quoydoo.” Well, correction fluid at the ready here because a) it's Quoyloo, and b) that's no town, it's not even a village, it's a couple of buildings amongst acres of greenery!

You may guess, I visited the place (some years ago) and can give you too more snippets: i) the brewer, Roger White, claimed to be teetotal (sad!) and ii) perhaps their most popular/notorious brew is “Skullsplitter”. This doesn't necessarily refer to the morning after, but rather to an early-ninth-century chieftan of Orkney (earls, they called them) Thorfina Turf-Einarsson: the Skull-Splitter. Surprisingly perhaps, they've never made use of a later chieftan, Einar the Belly-Shaker!

I'll try to get out more in the new year.

Yours etc,

Anthony Gdula,

Stolford,

Brigdwater,

Somerset.

Another plea for mild

Dear Steve,

Way back in summer 2005 you asked “What do you reckon of mild?” Way back before then I put a letter to yourself 2004/2005. “Plea for mild” talking of the Black Sheep out at Aztec West, Almondsbury. That house of Daniel Thwaites. Calling on CAMRA Bristol branch to visit and introduce Thwaites Mild there. Steve, mate, I call on you again.

Dennis Richards,

Stoke Gifford,

South Glos.

If only we did have such power. You could try showing them your letter published here and appealing to their better nature. We hope you succeed.

The Good Guide Guide 1

Hello Steve,

Pints West has at last reached the far corners of civilisation here in South Dorset. I always enjoy your magazine, which contains so much of interest. Even though I visit Bristol all too rarely, I find it most interesting. I am sad that Smiles, whose Exhibition (aka Heritage) I always thought was a super ale, is no more. I was there two years ago writing a feature and marvelled at the traditional nature of the brewery.

I was particularly interested in the critique by Kirsten Elliott as I have for 15 years recommended pubs for the Good Pub Guide (GPG) and have for some five years been part of the West Dorset group that puts entries in the Good Beer Guide (GBG). As a CAMRA activist for 25 years and a food & drink journalist for 40 years, I have seen a lot of pubs and a lot of guides.

Contrary to Kirsten's closing remarks, I

have been occasionally disappointed by pubs recommended in both guides. The problem is the long production schedule which means that it will be six months – and possibly over a year – since whoever wrote the entry was there. The very next day, the landlord may have left, the kitchen caught fire, the lease was sold to a big fizz company or any one of a number of fundamental (and detrimental) changes.

It is of the nature of CAMRA members that many like simple back street boozers. That's why so many appear in the GBG! Now I like good ale and don't mind the surroundings too much. However my wife is rather more choosy and likes to see a carpet on the floor, comfortable chairs and cleanliness. Some CAMRA members will berate that view, but there's no doubt the standards – actual and expected – in the pub trade have generally increased upwards in the last ten years. Our pubs have become more like restaurants and somewhere where families will patronise. I know some CAMRA members hate the smell of chips when they're drinking beer, but the reality is that few pubs can survive on just wet sales these days. This is specially true in rural areas, where the drink-driving laws have curtailed most. So I'm very happy to recommend a country pub that is effectively a restaurant, as long as it serves good real ale.

I see the GBG and the GPG as essentially complementary: as the writer says, it is wise to have both and to realise they are different. Many of the same pubs actually appear in both! The GPG makes no pretensions about being a beer guide and I know some contributors do not even mention the beers on sale, cask or keg. I myself always mention the real ale on offer and have never recommended one which does not sell good real ale.

What makes a good pub is a question as endless as the perfect pint. I recognise there has historically always been a certain sniffiness about the Good Pub Guide. I think both are superb publications and as the writer says, you will then be so well informed you cannot fail – unless the wonderful pub somebody surveyed six months ago has changed hands...

Fraternal greetings from deepest Dorset.

Michel Hooper-Immins

(by email).

See Kirsten Elliott's reply opposite.

The Good Guide Guide 2

Steve,

Once again enjoyed the latest (Winter) issue of Pints West, and read with interest “The Good Guide Guide” article and its lament at the fact that both guides ignore the King William in Bath.

I last visited the King William in 1979 when I still lived in London and recall it as being a good, basic street-corner local. I drank Mendip Special Bitter on that occasion. Having lived in Bath since 1999 I had not revisited the King William so a return visit was clearly called for.

Four real ales were available – Palmer's



Copper Ale, Cottage Win On The Dogs, Milk Street Beer and Milk Street Zig Zag Stout. All were in good condition but not to the extent of potentially replacing any of the current entries. The establishment itself has become more of a bistro than a pub, with a number of reserved tables and people ringing to make further reservations while we were there.

My partner and I were both hungry and decided we would sample the 'Guardian recommended' food. Having spent a few moments perusing the blackboard above the bar we were informed by the barmaid that this was only the evening menu, though she agreed that it did not say so.

We resorted to the printed menu at the tables. Amongst a host of posh nosh, only two items (being vegetarians) were available to us and we plumped for 'Ploughman's Russet' at £7 each.

Whilst awaiting our lunch, a sign stating 'Snug and Toilets' caught my eye, both of which seemed a good idea, since maybe the Snug was a bit more like a pub and the toilets were a good idea in any case! Down the stairs there were three doors, one to the toilets, one padlocked and one wedged shut. I questioned the sign on my return and the barmaid confirmed that the Snug was indeed down there – "but it's locked." No further information was forthcoming.

Lunch arrived, and we agreed that we had seldom seen a more lonely ploughman's lunch. A single slice of bread, some leaves, two pickled onions, some chutney, a very small sliver of stilton and a slightly larger sliver of cheddar. Oh, and the 'Russet.' Russet apples are small and brown. This was a large green and red apple. Had better for half the price.

When the barmaid came to clear our plates and ask if everything had been OK, we acted in a very non-British way and expressed our dissatisfaction at the choice (for us) and the value for money the meal had represented. She agreed that there was little for vegetarians and expressed the view that it was the cheese that made it so expensive, but since there was far less cheese than on any ploughman's lunch we can remember (would probably have cost less than £1.50 in any of the posh cheese shops in Bath) this didn't really make any sense.

Whilst she was pleasant, friendly and helpful at all times, the underlying message seemed to be "this is our commercial decision, and if you don't like the prices, don't eat here." We don't, and we won't. There was no suggestion of any sort of recompense which, in our experience, establishments with a good sense of customer service usually provide. We left highly dissatisfied.

So, if you just want a reasonable, and unusual, beer or two in a bistro, go to the King William. If you want to eat, have a small appetite, don't care about value for money and are not vegetarian, go to the King William. We may pop in again for a quick beer, but we'll be eating in one of the many good value pubs in the city first.

Simon Hall,
Bath.

See Kirsten Elliott's reply.

Response to letters re *The Good Guide Guide*

I'm delighted that my article comparing the Good Pub and Good Beer Guides stirred up interest. Mr Hooper-Immins and I are mainly in agreement. Like him, I have been disappointed by the odd pub which appears in both guides, but this is unusual, and I also put this down to the production schedule mentioned in his letter. But, as I said, CAMRA publishes updates in its monthly national newsletter (*What's Brewing*), and even puts up amendments on its website, so readers can be warned of changes. Perhaps the Good Pub Guide should take note!

However, I disagree that a carpet is a sign of civilised living – I think we've all been in a pub where your feet stuck to the carpet or, worse, where the carpet gave off, to put it delicately, an unwelcome odour. I agree that there is no excuse for lack of hygiene. But I suggest that many a back-street boozer is cleaner than some pubs with pretensions of grandeur. And if we are looking for comfort, then I'm not sure that the latest thing in trendy pub furniture will guarantee you anything superior to your old-fashioned padded seating and the well-crafted oak stool.

Above all I strongly disagree that a restaurant should be a requirement. Many pubs successfully combine the two without compromising the pub's identity as somewhere where the locals can pop in and have a drink. But others have simply become food outlets where you can be made to feel very unwelcome if you are not eating. Both guides are supposed to be guides to pubs – not restaurants.

Which brings me to real ale. I'm sorry, but I do not think the Good Pub Guide has got to grips with the real ale revolution, despite your correspondent doing his best – and three cheers to him for that. Any publican who can't – or won't – put on at least a couple of well-kept ales does not deserve to have his pub in a pub guide.

Mr Hooper-Immins says that he recognises "there has historically always been a certain sniffiness about the Good Pub Guide." Not on my part – I think it does what it sets out to do quite well. I just feel there is room for improvement, and that each guide could learn from the other. However, as he says, both are indeed superb publications, which tower above the competition.

Now we turn to Simon Hall, and his comments about the King William. Let me say straight away that I have no shares in the pub, but, with the Pulteney Arms, it is one of our locals so I know it well. Fair comment is one thing, but I feel that Mr Hall was very unfair. He says himself that he last visited it in 1979 when it was "a good street-corner local." When it closed in 2003 it was rather different – those locals who had stayed on did so in defiance of fights and drug-dealers. That Charlie and Amanda Digney have turned the place around at all is remarkable – that it has become such a

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success in such a short time is a small miracle. Its popularity means that tables get reserved. I am baffled by Mr Hall's dismissal of the beers that were on. I went while this selection was available and as ever they were well-kept. Cottage Brewery's *Win on the Dogs* was my favourite, on that occasion, but Blindman's, Milk Street, and Palmer's breweries are often well represented. As a CAMRA member, I'm more than happy.

So we turn to the food. First of all, I should point out that the Guardian was recommending the restaurant upstairs – Mr Hall and his partner remained in the bar – where, by the way, the blackboard has, to my certain knowledge, always quite clearly stated it is the menu of evening bar snacks. At lunchtime, the menu is on the table. The food is cooked to a high standard using best quality ingredients, where possible from a local source, and comes from a proper oven, not a microwave.

Two or three veggie dishes out of ten or twelve snacks and main courses (rather than a host of "posh nosh") is not, to my mind, a bad average for a place that lays no claim to be vegetarian. However, he was clearly disappointed with what he got. I would maintain that he got a proper ploughman's lunch, rather than the overblown plateful which now turns up all too often.

The two "slivers" of cheese that he got were the best quality Cheddar and Stilton which probably accounted for £3 or £4 of the £7 – not the £1.50 suggested by Mr Hall. Yes, top cheeses can set you back quite a lot, as I recently had cause to discover – but the taste is worth it.

As for the Russet that Mr Hall claims wasn't, because it was large and red and green instead of small and brown, I suggest he goes to the Garden Action website (www.gardenaction.co.uk then navigate to Fruit Finder, Apple, then Egremont Russet Apple), where he will find a picture of some Egremont Russet – some looking distinctly large and red and green.

However, Charlie agrees that the comments about the snug being locked were absolutely spot on and he's going to do something about it.

Whatever Mr Hall may think, I, and many others who live locally, applaud the rebirth of the King William. You are welcome there if you just sit at the bar and drink orange juice, have a few beers with your mates, or sit down to the "posh nosh", while reading the pub's supply of daily newspapers. Mr Hall is entitled to his opinion, but he is very much in a minority.

Kirsten Elliott

Pub news

● The new licensees at the **Bell** in Kingsdown, Paul and Emma Ryder, have made the pub completely non-smoking, over a year before it becomes compulsory. The pub is now open all day, and the three real ales may now be accompanied by lunchtime and evening meals.

● **The Carpenters Arms** at Wick has had a new paint job, and is now selling Stella Artois Bock. Not a real ale, of course, but a darned site more interesting than your average lager. They also have Bass and Courage Best on tap. ● Toad's (formerly 31 Corn Street) has had another change of name and is now **Que Pasa**. Not far away in King Street, Bar Med has now changed its name to **Mu-mu's**, while on the waterfront beside At-Bristol, the **Baja Bar** has been added to the scene. Sadly, none of these establishments appears to offer real ale.

● Sad to report the demolition of the **Glasscutter** in Hengrove to make way for some 'exclusive' one- and two-bedroomed apartments.



The Glasscutter

● Several pubs are currently sitting closed with no signs of reopening, including the **Enterprise** in Bedminster, the **Cross Keys** in Hanham, and the **Happy** (nee Fighting) **Cocks** in Hengrove.

● The **Elephant** in St Nicholas Street has reopened, with Mike Greenhalgh at the helm. No word yet as to whether he intends to continue to offer Courage Directors and a guest ale.



The Elephant

● The **Cross Keys** in Hanham has closed, and is boarded up. The **Western Coach House** is also closed, but the lease is on offer from Admiral Taverns so we hope someone will

take it over. It's next to a busy road, and has a large garden and children's play area, so someone must be able to make it work.

● Also available to run as a business is the superb cider pub, the **White Swan** in Downend. The sign in the window suggesting it would soon reopen as the Blue Oyster bar appears to have been mischievous, but the lease is available for a pub with a considerable amount of goodwill.



The White Swan

● Planning permission to turn the **Duke of York** in St Werburgh's into flats has been withdrawn. The withdrawal is on the grounds that 'alternative arrangements have been made' so we're not sure what that means for the long-term future of this characterful and cosmopolitan watering hole (which had great quiz nights!).

● The **Inkerman** in St Pauls, which has had a troubled recent history, is currently closed for refurbishment. There seems to be a lot of work going on there, so with a bit of luck it will be open again soon.



The Inkerman

● The **Bristol Tavern** in Stokes Croft is still boarded up, and not much seems to be going on there.

● The proposed demolition of the **Mail Coach** to make way for the new Merchant's Quarter development has now taken place.

● Two pubs in Clifton have become among the first in the West to be featured in the **Google Earth** project. For those who don't know, **Google Earth** is a piece of software, from the search engine people of the same name, which allows you to view aerial photos of anywhere in the world, zooming in on major cities, roads, oceans etc. Well, if you go to the web site at earth.google.com and download the free software, you'll find you can zoom in on



The Mail Coach

the roofs of the **Royal Oak**, and the **Lion** in Cliftonwood, and see full details of both pubs.



The Royal Oak

● And to end on another positive note, the **Seven Stars** in Redcliffe (next to the Fleece & Firkin) is now offering a superb selection of real ales. When a CAMRA volunteer visited recently, there was Bath Wild Hare, Bristol Beer Factory Red, Butcombe Brunel 200, Hop Back Entire Stout, Wadworth 6X and Wickwar Station Porter all on tap. Many of the brews will change regularly, and this pub will make an excellent addition to the thriving real ale scene in that part of Bristol, along with the Bridge, the Cornubia, the King's Head and others. Look out too for their "Cider Sundays" on the last Sunday of each month. Ciders come from all over the country and are reasonably priced at £2 a pint, and they also have live music during the day.



The Seven Stars

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.

Bath news

● Bath's longest-serving landlord, Mervin Thomas of the **Long Acre Tavern** on the London Road, celebrated 30 years at the pub on 11 February.

● The **Pulteney Arms** in Daniel Street, once a Good Beer Guide regular, but missing for several years, has made a welcome return to form under new landlord, Ash McMorris. Ash, who worked as a barman at the pub in its heyday, took over at the end of last year, and wasted no time in smartening the place up. He has no plans to make any major changes; the rugby memorabilia and gas lighting will stay and the famous chip butties are back! Young's Bitter, Wadworth 6X, Bath Gem and Fuller's London Pride are the regular tipples, plus guest beers. Check it out on the web at www.pulteneyarms.co.uk or better still call in.

● The **Chequers** in Rivers Street reopened after a major refit at the end of last year. A selection of real ale is available.

● The GBG-listed **King William IV** at Combe Down has a new landlord. Graham Hyde, a pub landlord in London for 20 years before moving to Combe Down to run a newsagent's at Combe Down, took over the pub at the end of last year.

● By the time you read this, you'll probably have missed the three-day Winter Beer Festival at the **Royal Oak** on the Lower

Bristol Road. Not to worry, though – to quote the landlord, John Whinnerah, visiting the Royal Oak is like going to a beer festival every day of the week. The beers, virtually all from microbreweries, are constantly changing, and with ten handpumps and discounts for CAMRA members, it's easy to see what he means. More beer festivals are planned for later in the year.

● One of the most eagerly awaited events for discriminating beer drinkers in Bath is the annual tapping of **Year Old Mr Perrett's** at the **Old Green Tree**. While year-old beer is nothing out of the ordinary in Belgium, and was common in England until the early nineteenth century, it is almost unknown here today. Landlord Tim Bethune says that keeping beer for a year will only work with a strong beer like Mr Perrett's Traditional Stout, which weighs in 5.9 per cent. The beer has to be left undisturbed; if it were to be moved, sediments would rise, and with no active finings to carry them to the bottom again, the beer would stay cloudy. Thankfully, that was not the case when the annual unveiling took place a couple of weeks before Christmas. Mr Perrett's, a regular fixture at the Old Green Tree, is a splendid beer by any standard, but the year-old version is, for those lucky enough to sample it, a taste experience like no other.

● Less than twelve months after the **Viaduct** closed, the village of Monkton Combe has lost its other pub – at least temporarily. The **Wheelwright's Arms**, which only changed hands last August, has closed for a major refit

after being taken over by the Colony Bars company, run by local businessman David Munn. The Grade II-listed building will be internally refurbished and is expected to reopen in April. Despite a promise to serve real ale and retain a local atmosphere, several letters criticising the move, including at least one from a CAMRA member, have appeared in the Bath Chronicle, mingling praise for the licensees who took over last year with fears that the pub is set to go upmarket and turn into a gastropub.

● Closures: the **White Hart** in Batheaston seems finally to have shut its doors, while the **Roundhouse** at the top of Stall Street, only revamped a year or so ago, has also closed, amid rumours that a sandwich-bar company are interested in taking on the lease.

● The **Chequers** at Box, near Bath, achieved national fame when it appeared on the Channel 4 property programme *Relocation, Relocation*. Four years ago, the residents of Box formed the Save the Chequers Action Committee, to stop the pub being turned into housing. Since then this historic old inn has stayed closed, but Wiltshire Planning Committee have refused to review their decision that it has to remain a pub. The couple from London who appeared in the programme were looking for a Wiltshire pub, and also looked at the GBG-listed Great Western in Corsham. Unfortunately for the residents of Box, they eventually plumped for the Bell Inn at Great Cheverell near Devizes.

Andrew Swift

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The Lost Pubs of Bath



Andrew Swift & Kirsten Elliott

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The Lost Pubs of Bath

IN a follow-up to *Bath Pubs* and *Awash With Ale*, Andrew Swift and Kirsten Elliott undertake a series of excursions in search of Bath's lost pubs, from humble alehouse to grand coaching inn, and from long-gone hostelrys such as the Retreat and the Folly to recent casualties such as the Garrick's Head and the Hat & Feather.

With over 500 illustrations, *The Lost Pubs of Bath* is the essential guide to over 500 lost pubs. It costs £15 from all good bookshops or direct from Akeman Press, 58 Minster Way, Bath BA2 6RL (telephone: 01225 310364; email: info@akemanpress.com). Postage and packing is free within the UK.

Pints West has the trilogy of books to give away. To win, jot down the answers to the following questions and send them (with your address) to Pints West Competition, Garden Flat, 6 Royal York Villas, Clifton, Bristol BS8 4JR, to arrive no later than 15 May.

1. In which year was Abbey Ales founded?
2. What recently won a CAMRA Best New-Build Pub award.
3. Name a Hopback pub in Southville.
4. Which brewery makes Tawny Bitter?
5. Which beer from Bath Ales recently won a CAMRA award?
6. Dawkins Taverns has the Miners Arms in St Werburgs and which other pub?
7. What are the names of the two Wickwar pubs?
8. How many pubs does Butcome Brewery have?
9. The head brewer at Wickwar was until recently head brewer at Ridley's before it was taken over by whom?
10. Which brewery has Fuller's recently taken over?

The answers to the last competition were: 1 Cornwall, 2 Alan Morgan, 3 Old Green Tree, 4 Royal Oak, 5 Raven. The winner was Mr R Shephard of Trowbridge Road, Bradford on Avon.

New Year in Norwich

I HAVE waxed lyrical in previous editions about the pleasures of drinking real ale in Norwich, which I regard as comfortably the best city in the UK for quality and variety of beers and pubs.

Approaching the recent festive season I spotted an opportunity just too good to miss. Whilst “surfing” the net looking for ideas for future trips, I found myself on the website for Travelodge hotels, who were offering a selection of “Saver” and “Supersaver” deals on many of its huge number of hotels in the UK. I noticed that a brand new hotel was about to open in late November 2005 in central Norwich.

Checking out the rates I was astonished to see that most nights were being offered at **£10 per night per room**, sleeping up to three people! I was even more amazed to see that this included New Year.

A couple of clicks later I had secured a double for my wife and I for three nights from the 30th December for the princely sum of £30 – prepaid and non-refundable. No breakfast included, but you can’t quite have everything! The rooms are all *en suite*, with TV and hot drink-making facilities, and a café bar on site. A couple of phone calls later and six friends had all done the same. New Year sorted!

I had a long weekend due in early December, so Marilyn and I decided to “do a recce” of the hotel. We drove to Norwich on the Saturday (about a five-hour run) and stayed until Monday. I only managed to get the “Saver” rate of £26 per room per night for this one – hardly expensive though. We arrived to discover that our hotel overlooked two Good Beer Guide-listed pubs – the **Champion** in Chapelfield Road (about six changing beers) and the **Coachmakers** in St Stephens Road (four beers including guests), and less than five minutes’ walk from three more. It was also about two minutes’ walk from the main shopping area. Nice location!

One of the main reasons for the advance trip was to ensure that we would be able to get in somewhere good on New Year’s Eve. An earlier email to the Fat Cat (current National CAMRA Pub of the Year for the second time) had led to the discovery that it is the only day of the year that it doesn’t open. The manager gave me some suggestions for other venues though. The **Trafford Arms** in Grove Road (about ten ever-changing beers) was one of the nearby pubs from the hotel and they gladly sold us eight tickets for their party at £5 each – surprisingly 100% refundable on the night in beer.

We then got down to some proper drinking and Christmas shopping for the rest of that weekend. One tip I can offer is to seek out a copy of *Norfolk Nips* (local equivalent of *Pints West*) in the pubs. It is enormously useful in picking out any up and coming pubs not yet in the Good Beer Guide (GBG) – the two

publications and an A-Z are all you need. We discovered four excellent free houses that we would otherwise have missed that way. More of them to come.

New Year arrived and brought with it heavy snow to East Anglia – giving us a treacherous drive for the last 60 miles but we arrived safely. The snow then cleared a few hours later! Having worked up a thirst the men decided to check out the nearest pubs first, having left the womenfolk to their shopping spree. The first port of call was the **Freemasons** in Hall Road – not in the GBG but *Nips* advised that it was worth checking out. This pub used to be called the Billy Bluelight and was a Woodforde’s tied house – it is now totally free and offering a big selection of independent beers in a much altered and modernised building. Directly opposite is the **King’s Arms**, now owned by Bateman’s, but selling six or seven guest beers in addition to four or five of theirs. A very good value sandwich was also had here. On to the Trafford Arms, before meeting up with the girls at the Coachmakers. A pleasant start but just the beginning . . .

The evening started at the **Reindeer** on Dereham Road about ten minutes’ walk from the hotel. This formerly famous brew pub is now owned by Elgood’s and offers their range plus a few guests – two on our visit rather than the multitude suggested in their *Norfolk Nips* advert. We next visited the **Duke of Connaught** in Livingstone Street, which acts as the brewery tap for the local Winter’s Brewery – sadly we seemed to catch it a little off form that night.

From there it was a short five-minute stagger to the **Fat Cat**, in West End Street – we had delayed our arrival here because we know it is virtually impossible to leave before they chuck you out! It may have something to do with the **25 to 30** real ales always on offer, including about 20 changing guests! In addition, a huge selection of foreign beers are available on tap and from bottles. The pub seems to be busy whenever its open, despite being tucked away in a quiet residential area.

New Year’s Eve was now upon us and we decided on a very leisurely stroll around the northern part of the city centre, taking in a few more pubs during the afternoon. From our hotel the walk took us through the shopping area and past the impressive old castle and on to the cathedral. Directly opposite is the **Wig and Pen**, in St Martins at Palace Plain – described accurately as a “village pub in the city centre”. About six interesting guest beers were supplemented by quite enormous lunchtime snacks and meals at fair prices.

About 200 yards away in Wensum Street is the **Ribs of Beef**, an excellent riverside pub serving about eight or nine changing beers. Whilst I am sure that the local CAMRA

branch have their reasons, it seemed odd that this pub had been left out of the 2006 Beer Guide whilst a distinctly average Wetherspoon’s in the same street was in.

Keeping on down Wensum Street away from town it becomes Magdalen Street. Here lies the **King’s Head**, a totally free house run by a couple of local CAMRA members and offering up to 14 ales from local and more distant microbrewers (thanks to *Norfolk Nips* we avoided walking straight past as it is too new to be in the GBG yet). An excellent pub, where conversation is the norm rather than any other noisy distractions.

A further ten-minute walk took us to the **Shed** in Lawson Street, another new venture. It is owned by the Fat Cat and is home to their own brewery. About 12 beers were on including an excellent selection of guest beers, and four house brews. The plan was to finish the afternoon a couple of streets away at the **Duke of Wellington**, in Waterloo Road, which has only a mere 20 real ales to offer at a time! Unfortunately for us they were closed to prepare for their New Year’s Eve party so it was back to the hotel for us.

We arrived at the **Trafford** at 7.15 to find that it was already busy and seats were at a premium. It had very much the feel of a locals’ pub to it, with very few of the younger generation. The speed at which guest beers were changed was impressive with the range at the end of the night bearing little resemblance to that at the start (a few pubs could learn from that).

An entertaining written quiz was distributed which was a good way of slowing drinking a bit. Later on, song sheets were distributed with old party “classics” to sing along to. It was a very enjoyable evening spent in a proper pub, in a wonderful atmosphere and with great beer – thanks to all at the Trafford for that.

New Year’s Day came and most of the shops were closed as were quite a few of the better pubs. Marilyn took the sensible decision to stay in bed and watch TV, while the rest of us headed off about 2pm to the final sector of the city that we had yet to explore, around the station to the east of the centre. The **Coach and Horses** in Thorpe Street was first up where I set a new record by making a half last over an hour! This is the brew pub of the Chalk Hill Brewery. Excellent food supplements the full range of their beers plus a guest. Strangely it was Theakston’s Best, having been Courage Best last time I called in. The question has to be – why choose those when such a huge range of great beer is brewed locally?

Exiting via the back door and turning left we came to the **Rosary Tavern** in Rosary Street a lovely little boozer with a good selection of about eight beers, including interesting guests.

A couple of streets away, in St Leonards Road is the **Jubilee** – with a sign saying “9 real ales” – we had neither the time nor the stamina to go in sadly. We instead headed for the **Ketts Tavern** in Ketts Hill, a former Beer Guide regular that *Norfolk Nips* had advised was back on form with new owners. It was excellent, with a roaring log fire and about ten interesting beers.

We strolled back to the hotel, after literally being led up a dead end dark alley by the riverside (nice one Paul!) via the Ribs of Beef. For the final session it was a curry in a restaurant next to the Reindeer followed by a last couple of hours in the **Fat Cat**. Marilyn managed to join in this time! We never did get to the Duke of Wellington, nor the **Nelson** near the Fat Cat (six beers), the **Alexandra**, Stafford Street (Chalk Hill plus guests) or the **Beehive**, Leopold Road. Maybe next time?

The thing that puts people off going to this most excellent city from Bristol is the distance and the awkwardness of the journey. Well fret no more – Air Southwest are launching a new cheap air service April 2006 with fares from Bristol to Norwich seemingly set at £19 each way, inclusive of taxes and charges – an absolute bargain (see web address below). You no longer have an excuse!

Vince Murray

Websites:

Travelodge - www.travelodge.co.uk

Air Southwest - uk.airkiosk.com

The Fat Cat Norwich - www.fatcatpub.co.uk

Then there were twelve...

WHEN a pub enthusiast identified only as RWC produced his first guide to “**The Classic Basic Unspoilt Pubs of Great Britain**” in 1994, it included 32 entries. Two years ago, when he produced the eleventh, and final, edition, the number had dropped to twelve.

It has to be said that RWC’s criteria are very stringent. Pubs in the first edition that failed to make it into the last include the North Star at Stevenon in Oxfordshire, the Seymour Arms at Witham Friary in Somerset, Tucker’s Grave at Faulkland in Somerset, and the Drewe Arms at Drewsteignton in Devon, all of which I’ve visited since 2004 and would certainly rank as basic and unspoiled.

There was one pub still on the list – and on CAMRA’s National Inventory of Historic Interiors – that I’d been meaning to try for ages, however, and in mid-February I finally got round to it.

The Red Lion at Ampney St Peter, just out of Cirencester on the Fairford Road is a gem. An early evening visit to this most atmospheric of watering holes was like dropping into somebody’s parlour, being asked to take a seat and then served the best pint of Timothy Taylor’s Landlord I’d ever

tasted. John Barnard, landlord here since 1978, was happy to explain how he managed to keep it in such superb condition, letting it settle for two weeks or more after it arrives from the brewery.

For the rest, this quote from the excellent Gloucestershire Pubs website by a seasoned visitor to the Red Lion will give an idea of its unique charm: “To many pub goers, the Red Lion has a number of shortcomings. It serves no food at all. There is no background music, loud or soft, there is no fruit machine flashing and bleeping in the corner. No pool table dominating part of the pub. No karaoke evenings. No satellite TV. There is no bar festooned with keg beer and lager fonts. In fact, there is no bar at all, drinks are served from the corner of one of the two small rooms across a bench seat.

“However, to the more discerning, the pub is a rare gem, a time warp of peace and conviviality where little has changed for generations. The Red Lion has been a labour of love for the excellent landlord for over 20 years, and the beer is always in superb condition.”

Quite so. The pub is only open at night, except at weekends, but, with lighter nights around the corner, an evening trip out to this wonderful pub, through the glorious Gloucestershire countryside, is a pilgrimage well worth making.

Andrew Swift

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REFRESHINGLY HOPPY BEERS

Cooper's Arms, Highbridge – a further update

PINTS WEST readers may have been alarmed at the news in the Spring 2005 edition that the Cooper's Arms, a long-standing Somerset free house and supporter of independent brewers, particularly high-gravity beers from RCH brewery and elsewhere, had been sold to, horror of horrors, Scottish & Newcastle (S&N). Yes, a "pubco" (pub company)! They may not have been too surprised to hear rumours of the beer menu being dumbed down and variable beer quality. By the time of the Summer 2005 edition of Pints West, these initial reports of doom and gloom seemed to have been somewhat premature – attributable, amongst other things, to a change of operating regime and initial teething problems with a new cellar system – and there were positive signs of recovery. I can now inform Pints West readers that, just over a year on from the hand-over, the Cooper's is back on top form again.

Following my move from Yorkshire to Somerset in 1985, the Cooper's rapidly became a firm favourite of mine. The lager-drinking landlord, John Hayes, hit on a formula that worked well for him and the local real ale drinkers. Six top-quality real ales were always available as chalked up on various blackboards: Fuller's London Pride (the best-seller), Cooper's Best (an inexpensive house beer) and four guest ales. These guests were normally high-gravity (4.5 per cent ABV and above) beers such as Abbeydale Absolution; Adnams Broadside; Archers Golden; Berrow Topsy Turvy; Glastonbury Golden Chalice; Greene King Abbot Ale; Harviestoun Schiehallion; Hop Back Summer Lightning; Kelham Island Pale Rider; Ringwood Fortyniner and Old Thumper; RCH East Street Cream, Double Header and Firebox, etc. Indeed, the Cooper's was effectively the unofficial tap for the nearby RCH brewery. In addition to their regular ales, a large quantity of their winter special Santa Fé was taken each year and there were special blends exclusively for the Cooper's such as Firefork, Double Cream, B4 Special, B5 Special and B52.

However, nothing stays the same indefinitely, and John Hayes retired from the licensed trade in January 2005 after more than 20 years at the helm of the Cooper's. During this time, he was runner-up on several occasions in the Somerset CAMRA Pub of the Year competition and, in his final year, he was presented with a "long-service" award by Somerset CAMRA in recognition of his unstinting efforts to promote the cause of real ale. In keeping with this single-minded approach, he was determined that his beloved pub would remain a mecca for real ale in this part of Somerset following his departure. So, imagine our surprise when he sold the Cooper's to S&N. Although he reassured us that intended to maintain the focus on real ale and had no major plans to change the place, the cynics amongst us had visions of bland big-brand beers taking over and the pub becoming



more food/family oriented.

When he first arrived, the new landlord, John Sinclair, confirmed what his predecessor has said about keeping faith with the real ale tradition of the Cooper's. However, the initial signs were not good. Although there were more real ales available than previously, there were no RCH beers and the range was dominated by widely available beers such as Courage Best, Courage Directors, Greene King IPA, Greene King Old Speckled Hen, etc. In addition, the beer quality was variable. This was not what the regulars had been accustomed to and, inevitably, stories began to circulate of yet another fantastic real ale pub being ruined by a pubco (as depicted in the Spring 2005 edition of Pints West). I have to admit that I stopped going to the Cooper's for a while, but I did maintain an interest in ongoing developments.

The news in the Summer 2005 edition of Pints West was more hopeful with one of the regulars from the John Hayes era, Ian McLaren, and John Sinclair, writing in to put the record straight after the bad press earlier in the year. The basic message was that the initial teething problems following the hand-over had been overcome and RCH beers were available once again. Readers were invited to try the beers for themselves rather than rely on second-hand reports. Later in the year, news of a beer festival were circulated via the Bristol CAMRA website. The list of beers promised was sufficient to whet my appetite and so, one Saturday last November, I returned to the Cooper's, by train from Temple Meads, for the first time in several months and it was just like renewing an acquaintance with an old friend (albeit one that had received a very sympathetic make-over since our last meeting). Many of the regulars I used to drink with were upstairs in the Function Room working their way through 25 fantastic real ales on tap together with two real ciders. I managed to sample, in increasing order of strength, the following beers: RCH Steaming Santa; Oakham Bishop's Farewell; Wychwood Dog's Bollocks (a fine golden ale despite the name); RCH Double Header; Fuller's ESB; RCH Firebox; Caledonian Edinburgh Strong, and Theakston Masham Ale. Although a beer festival is not necessarily the ideal occasion to judge the quality of a pub, the impression I got from the regulars was that the Cooper's was punching its weight once again amongst the

heavyweights of the local real ale scene and it warranted further attention.

I returned again earlier this month early one Friday evening, having arranged to have a chat with John Sinclair and Ian McLaren. Chalked up on the blackboard when I arrived were eight real ales as follows: Butcombe Brunel 200 IPA; Caledonian Deuchars IPA; Caledonian Wild Cat; Fuller's London Pride; Harviestoun Schiehallion; RCH Double Header; St. Austell Tribute, and Theakston Old Peculier. I managed to sample four beers and they were all in excellent condition. Such was the fantastic condition of the Double Header, judged on its visual appearance alone, that Ian was compelled to join me in a pint. John, a Guinness-drinker, explained to me that as an Enterprise Inns tenant, he (and his regulars) has approximately 60 guest beers to choose from each month in addition to supplement the two permanent fixtures of Deuchars IPA and London Pride (still the best-seller). There are normally between seven and nine beers on tap at any time, with RCH East Street Cream, Double Header and Firebox featuring regularly. Ian commented that they now had a greater range of beers to sample under the new regime and the regulars were enjoying the opportunity to expose their taste buds to new beers from far and wide. John went on to explain the problems he had faced when he first took over a year ago. Not only did he have a hard act to follow, he had technical problems too. The new cellar system took a while to settle down and he had to get in the S&N technical experts to identify and solve a long-standing yeast-related problem in the pipes in the cellar that was affecting the quality of the beer. The initial bad press he received in the early days had not helped matters either.

Looking around the place, not a lot has really changed. Yes, there is a slightly different range of quality real ales available, but more of it than before. The subtle décor changes, both inside and out, were much-needed. Other than that, there are still the superb filled rolls available at lunchtimes and sport is still shown on the big screen during major events. John has plans to make some minor adjustments to the bar area and to make three draught real ales available upstairs in the Function Room.

So, all in all, a good result for real ale drinkers in this part of Somerset and those travelling from further afield as Highbridge station, on the Bristol/Taunton line, is literally next door. Although I am not one for championing the cause of pubcos, the Cooper's proves that they can get it right. I for one will now be spending more time there and regretting lost opportunities over the past year. Perhaps you ought to try it for yourself and thank John Sinclair for building upon the success of John Hayes?

Dave Graham

The festival challenge

BEER festivals are a piece of cake: turn up, take the tasting notes from the glass and plan your campaign over that first half. But how about organising one . . . for the first time? That was the challenge faced by Martyn Howell and John Merriman, chairman and vice-chairman respectively of Backwell Village Club, whose beer festival, "The Village Pump", took place in late November 2005.

Founded in 1877, the venerable BVC needed a push into the 21st century in terms of its relationship with the villagers, who saw it as a male watering-hole insulated from the world. It was struggling to get quality and variety into its guest beer range without charging members the earth and, in these modern times, it could always use a few more bob. Martyn and John saw one way of tackling these problems in the idea of a beer and cider festival. Getting both members and outsiders involved was essential, as was a *purpose* for the event. They asked friends in the local medical centre what they could use that wouldn't require an income stream for ever more; the answer was a portable blood pressure monitoring machine which gives health care professionals a full 24-hour picture of a patient's heart performance. As senior partner Dr David Cox points out, "It's as much about knowing what's unnecessary or even harmful so you can stop it!" It was decided that 50 per cent of the net profits

would go towards the purchase of this machine. After that, the name "Village Pump" was obvious, at least to John's copywriter wife Sue: it's an organ of the body, a place where village people meet, and of course a vital tool in dispensing beer and cider – except of course when it all comes from the barrel!

"We took a good deal of advice from clubs which had themselves 'taken the plunge'," explains Martyn, "and their advice was, in the main, spot on." A happy exception was the warning that breweries would be unwilling to donate beer and cider. The Backwell team's experience was that once they stressed the charitable nature of the festival, not to mention that as a successful independent club they had custom to give to brewers of popular beverages, they had plenty of offers. In fact, 18 of the 20 beer firkins were unconditionally given, and every barrel was sponsored by a local business. The same applied to printing of posters, tasting notes and tickets, not to mention fruit juices for the drivers, racking for the barrels and a buffet for the Patrons' Reception on the Saturday night. "With the regrettable exception of a few local breweries the support was fantastic", says Martyn. "On a practical note, getting the financial risk taken out early was very reassuring in this first attempt at a festival," says John Merriman, "and all that support meant we could realistically go for a big fund-raising target." The final

figures aren't yet in, but it looks like the doctors will get their £1,500 'machine that goes ping'.

And what of the other aims of the "Pump"? Over the four days we must have had more than 200 different people coming to the event – some several times. "The gross of commemorative glasses just flew out of the door," says Martyn, "but equally important to us was the pleasure of seeing so many new faces – both male and female." It's nice to discuss with a couple enjoying a drink together that there's more to the Backwell Village Club than hairy blokes playing beer and skittles! "And what of the beers and ciders?" I hear you ask. Well, Palmer's – both IPA and Tally Ho! – proved popular, as did Archer's Sky Rocket, Wrecked from the Isle

Port of Call access

A READER of Pints West, John Stinchcombe from Southville, wrote in to say that he was concerned about a pub that is joint Pub of the Year 2005, namely the Port of Call in Clifton (near the Downs).

Although he'd been to the pub a few times in the past and always found the beer to be wide ranging and excellent quality, he'd on occasions found the pub to be apparently closed with a note on the door stating "regulars/locals only".

We have spoken at length with the landlord Roger Skuse and he regrets problems that his sign may have caused. He wishes to stress that he never turned away anybody who entered and asked for a beer. He explained that the sign was to deter large groups frequenting the Blackboy Hill and Whiteladies Road area from coming in and taking over the pub. He has a lot of regulars who like to dine too. He was trying to keep tables for them.

Roger has reworded the sign, which now states: "The Port of Call is quite a small pub and gets very busy at weekends, so we are unable to accept any large groups without prior arrangement. Regulars, diners and CAMRA members are welcome at all times, and should access the pub via the rear entrance through the beer garden."

By way of apology for the misunderstanding, Roger is inviting John Stinchcombe and his wife to a free meal and a beer to make up for their experience.

So, if you not in a large group and you turn up at the pub at a weekend – perhaps attracted by its inclusion in the Good Beer Guide or because you heard about its Pub of the Year award – and you see the sign on the door, do not be deterred; just nip round the back and enjoy the warm welcome.

SP

of Purbeck, and the Bristol Brewing Company's Gold. There was no doubting the continued taste for Sharp's, Hop Back and Wadworth's brews. On the cider front the new boys – Mole's Black Rat and a selection from the Weston's range – made a positive impression. "Once the bulge in the cellar created by the festival has passed, we'll be arranging a New Year guest range with some new brewing friends", says Club Steward, Paul Creed.

As we discovered, however much research and planning you do, organising an inaugural beer festival takes time, persistence, and a huge amount of energy. Still, we reckon that it's probably like giving birth: painful and thoroughly exhausting at the time, followed by a great feeling of achievement. And, of course, in a few months' time, we'll have forgotten our hard labour and be ready to do it all over again!

All in all, there is plenty for Backwell Village Club to get pumped up about!

Sue Merriman



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Diary



Diary of the Bristol & District branch of CAMRA, the Campaign for Real Ale.

- **Sunday, 5th March:** GBG selection meeting, Horts City Tavern, Broad Street, central Bristol. Start 12.30pm.
- **Wednesday, 8th March:** Branch committee meeting at the Cornubia, Bristol 8pm.
- **Wednesday, 15th March:** Bath Ales Brewery visit. Depart from the Cornubia, Bristol 6.45pm.
- **Wednesday, 22nd March:** Branch meeting, Horts City Tavern, Broad Street, Bristol 8pm.
- **Tuesday, 4th April:** Pub of the Year trip. Depart from the Cornubia, 6.45pm.
- **Wednesday, 12th April:** Branch committee meeting at the Cornubia, 8pm.
- **Tuesday, 18th April:** Matthew's Brewery visit. Depart from the Cornubia, 6.45pm.
- **Wednesday, 26th April:** Branch meeting at Horts City Tavern, Broad Street, Bristol 8pm.
- **Saturday, 29th April:** Trip to Highgate brewery. Depart from the Cornubia, 8am.
- **Wednesday, 10th May:** Branch committee meeting at the Cornubia, 8pm.
- **Tuesday, 16th May:** Explorer trip. Depart from the Cornubia, 6.45pm.
- **Wednesday, 24th May:** Branch meeting, Horts City Tavern, Broad Street, 8pm.

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.



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Weston diary

- **Wednesday 15 March – Beer and Skittles at The White Hart, Palmers Row.** Our annual evening to find the least inept skittler in the Weston CAMRA sub-branch. For a friendly game accompanied by two real ales from micro-breweries, come along to The White Hart. We will start at 8.30pm sharp.
- **Wednesday 19 April – Off The Rails,** 8.30pm.
- **Friday 21 April – Trip to the Maltings Beer Festival, Newton Abbot.** Travel arrangements to be confirmed. Over 200 real ales from South West breweries.
- **Wednesday 17 May – Axbridge/Cross Crawl.** Bus route 826, which leaves Marine Parade at 19.53.
- **Wednesday 21 June – Highbridge and Burnham On Sea Crawl.** We will catch the 18.27 train from Weston. Arrives Highbridge 18.38. Group travel arrangements will apply. There are trains back at 22.13 and 23.19.

Non-members welcome at all of the above events.

Weston contact

Tim Nickolls – 01934 644925 (eves)
or email tim.nickolls@virgin.net

THANKS TO THIS ISSUE'S CONTRIBUTORS

Pennie Postlethwaite
Colin Postlethwaite
Norman Spalding
Freya McLuckie
Erica McLuckie
Richard Brooks
Margaret Evett
Pete Dommett
Martyn Howell
Sue Merriman
Duncan Shine
Laurie Gibney
Dave McVittie
Dave Graham
Andrew Swift
Vince Murray
Kirsten Elliott
Alison Bridle
Phill the Pint
Robin E Wild
Tim Nickolls
Roger Protz
Ray Holmes
Julian Dyer
Terry Evett
Pete Bride
Bob Ford
Dr John

Editor: Steve Plumridge

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

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Current rates are:

6cm x 6cm	£34	6cm x 8cm	£43
9cm x 8cm	£56	9cm x 12cm	£78
19cm x 12cm	£156	(£250 on back page)	
Full back page £400			

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

or by email to steve.plumridge@bristol.ac.uk

Published by the Bristol & District Branch of the Campaign for Real Ale, February 2006 ©

Next edition: end of May 2006 (probably).

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CAMRA Good Beer Guide: suggestions for future entries, and comments on existing ones, can be made to our GBG Coordinator, Vince Murray, 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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Pints West on-line and in colour

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. Recent editions are in colour.

Matthew's Brewery

WHAT is the industry that most young men want to work in? Computers (or perhaps more recently media studies)?

Stuart Matthews studied computers, carried out research in computers and worked in computing for many years. But June 2005 brought about a change as fundamental as you can get. Comfortable heated offices were exchanged for the rigours of the brewing industry with Stuart founding the Matthew Brewing Company, our newest local brewer.

So what is it that causes such a sea change? In Stuart's case there was no single reason. He had always had an interest in home brewing though this was more associated with country wines than with beer. But he found himself working away in Romsey, heard about the progressive beer duty and was offered the use of a small industrial unit near Peasedown. These set his mind on thoughts of change. He also has a good friend who brews, Richard Sutton from Pictish Brewery no less, and so he arranged to spend a few days helping Richard at his brewery.

As a consequence Stuart settled on the idea of opening his own brewery and, with the Peasedown option no longer available, he has leased 2000 sq ft of comparatively new tin shed just north-west of Timsbury village. This small unit is on an industrial estate that stands on the former Hayeswood Colliery which closed around 1862. The pump engine house still stands and is now a private house. Stuart moved into the unit last August and set about the building works that were required for the installation of a five-barrel brewing plant.

The brewing equipment is new and reconditioned plant that was supplied by



Johnson Brewing and it was installed during October 2005. The plant is fitted with thermostatically-controlled chillers which helps with consistency of the product and frees up time for Stuart to spend on the other essentials of running the business.

Meanwhile Stuart had been busy experimenting with his home-brew kit and he pitched in as soon as the plant was ready scaling up his trial runs. Regrettably the first brews were not ready for the October CAMRA Bath Beer Festival so were launched at the Royal Oak in Bath on 14 November 2005. The two beers available at the launch were Brassknocker and MBC2.

The beer list is now four-strong and is as follows.

Brassknocker was the first. Stuart was very pleased how this scaled up from the trials on the home brew equipment. The beer is a 3.8 per cent golden ale with surprising amounts of flavour and aroma imparted by the Challenger, Cascade and Styrean Goldings hops. This beer is a cracker!

MBC2 did not scale up so well so Stuart did not name it. However, it has now been perfected and has been badged as 'Bob Wall', a 4.2 per cent best bitter. The hops include Challenger, Cascade and UK Goldings. I have only met one person who refused to drink it, thinking that it was named after a prominent local politician. He was wrong. It is named after the gable wall of a colliery pump house where the arm of the beam engine protrudes, so more fool him.

These two beers are the Matthew's regulars. Four seasonal beers are planned and the first two are already on the market. These are Pit Pony and Davy Lamp. Pit Pony is a 5.5 per cent stout flavoured with Fuggles hops and a complex mix of malt and roast barleys. Davy Lamp is another favourite of mine and is a 5 per cent wheat beer with 50/50 wheat and barley malts and flavoured with Hallertauer hops. Look out this spring and summer for the new offerings.

Boxes of beer were available for Christmas and on sale through a local pub. Stuart hopes to be able to make sales direct to the public from April this year.

So what about the future? Stuart feels that bottling beer is likely to be a number of years away. He sources his hops from Farams and his malt from Warminster. One of his plans is to obtain local barley and have it specially malted at Warminster. Another intention is to install a handpump at the brewery: beer does taste different served through a handpump, he said, and he would like to make sure that the flavours that he is developing match the method of serving.

Having stood chatting to Stuart for the best part of an hour in near freezing temperatures I asked him, 'Any regrets?'

'Absolutely none.'

Best thing that I have heard for a long time.

Phill The Pint

The Bristol Treasure Island Trail

A CHARACTER associated with more than one of Bristol's pubs is **Long John Silver**, and, although there aren't any CAMRA *Pubs in Time* plaques to record his association with them as yet, there is now a **Treasure Island Trail** to guide you round the old rascal's watering holes. It's the brainchild of Mark Steeds, landlord of the **Beaufort Arms** at Hawkesbury Upton, who has not only produced a book, packed with stories of Bristol's most enterprising but rascally sons and the city's links with Treasure Island, but is also campaigning to have a statue of Long John outside his old pub, the **Hole in the Wall**.

The launch of the book took place on 8 December at the Clifton Bookshop. A cask of Long John Silver beer from Wickwar – along with a parrot – were in attendance. The book contains illustrations by Mervyn Peake from the 1949 edition of *Treasure Island*; Mervyn Peake's son, Sebastian, was also at the launch to talk about some of the stories behind them. A great evening was had by all. The book costs £4.95 and is available in all good bookshops.

The photograph shows Mark Steeds holding one of Mervyn Peake's illustrations for *Treasure Island*, with Ray Penny of Wickwar Brewery on the left.

Andrew Swift

