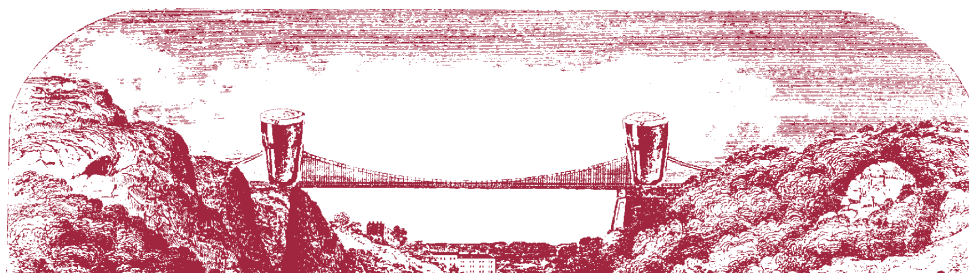




CAMPAIGN
FOR
REAL ALE

AWARD-WINNING



No. 70
Summer
2006

CAMPAIGN
FOR
REAL ALE

www.camrabristol.org.uk

PINTS WEST

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

Save Albert!

Bristol Beer Factory heads fight in attempt to save historic pub and music venue from 'a fate worse than death'

ONE of Bristol's favourite pubs and music venues, the recently closed Albert in Bedminster, has been bought by a property speculator and is to be lost if planning permission is given for its conversion to residential or other uses.

George Ferguson, chairman of Bristol's independent brewery, the Bristol Beer Factory, said, "It is a scandal that pubs such as these that lie at the heart of our communities and which contribute so much to the cultural life of Bristol should be allowed to be victims to the whims of speculators. We have made our willingness to buy it and rejuvenate it known to the vendors, but I gather from the agents that the purchaser intends to apply for planning permission for its conversion that, if granted, will lose it to community and Bristol's jazz scene for ever."

While the Albert is threatened by permanent closure, Bristol Beer Factory will be widening its campaign to stop the loss of historic pubs across the city.

The brewery's manager, Simon Bartlett, went on to say: "It is bad enough that the majority of our pubs are now in the hands of the all powerful pub companies, but it is an outrage if our planning laws cannot defend them against such



Photo by Richard Brooks

speculation. This tendency to turn everything into bijou flats is becoming a disease. What we need is mixed and thriving communities such as we have been fostering around the Tobacco Factory. We know we have strong support for this view and would like to give every encouragement and support to the City Council to stop this economic vandalism. If there is a willing buyer ready to save a pub such as this it should weigh heavily on the planning decision."

Head brewer, Chris Thurgeson, added: "We feel very strongly that such a famous – even legendary – pub should be

kept going. It would be criminal to lose such a great pub with such a great history. The area is crying out for a venue of this type and it would be such a shame for it to be turned into flats or any other use as so many of our community pubs have been recently."

The Bristol & District branch of CAMRA, the Campaign for Real Ale, agrees. Branch chairman, Richard Brooks, said: "We wholeheartedly support this bid to re-open a popular pub that was widely known for its live music, rather than see yet another conversion to residential property."

Through his involvement with both a local brewery (the Bristol Beer Factory) and live entertainment (the Tobacco Factory) and his status as an award-winning architect – not to mention his appearances on Channel 4's Demolition programme – George Ferguson would seem to have all the credentials we could wish for as someone to successfully breathe life back into the Albert."

For more information, or to pledge your support, please contact the brewery by telephone on (0117) 9026317 or by email to enquiries@bristolbeerfactory.co.uk.

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Bristol & District CAMRA branch members had a great time when they visited the Matthews Brewery on 18th April 2006.

They were well looked after with plenty of jugs of Matthews ales and even some bread that had been home-made using one of the Matthews beers.



Some people like to take home souvenirs from these trips (with the agreement of the brewer of course).

I've been assured that this rather suspect looking package did in fact contain hops!

*Richard Brooks
(words and photos)*

CAMRA celebrates milestone membership on its 35th anniversary

A RECORD 80,000 people have officially joined up to the Campaign for Real Ale – the highest number of members since the consumer organisation began in 1971.

This year CAMRA celebrates its 35th anniversary and is overjoyed to announce that its aims and objectives have never been as widely supported as now.

CAMRA Chief Executive Mike Benner said: “CAMRA has gone from strength to strength and achieved some incredible successes in the last three and a half decades thanks to the hard work and dedication of all those involved.

“CAMRA volunteers work tirelessly throughout the year to promote real ale, cider and the traditional pub and ensure they have the healthy future they deserve.

“Welcoming our 80,000th member is a real milestone for CAMRA and we are absolutely delighted, but we still would like more people to join us to make sure consumers of real ale will always have a powerful voice to speak on their behalf.”

History

CAMRA was formed in 1971 after six large national brewers (Allied Breweries, Bass Charrington, Courage/John Smiths, Scottish and Newcastle, Watney and Whitbread) set about replacing cask ale with inferior pressurised keg beer in the UK.

During a holiday in Ireland four friends – journalists Michael Hardman, Graham Lees and Bill Mellor, along with brewery employee Jim Makin – bemoaned the dreadful standard

of beer back home and decided to set up the Campaign for the Revitalisation of Ale.

The first annual meeting was set up in Nuneaton in 1972 and 20 people turned up. By the time of the second AGM in 1973 there were more than 1,000 members on the books, and the name of the organisation was changed to the more pronounceable Campaign for Real Ale.

Successes

- ✓ No new ale breweries were set up in the UK in the fifty years before CAMRA was founded. There are now around 400 new brewers producing real ale, part of a massive real ale revival.
- ✓ CAMRA lobbied the government to introduce Progressive Beer Duty which has helped hundreds of small brewers to compete with larger brewing companies.
- ✓ CAMRA members have successfully defeated several brewery take-overs.
- ✓ In the last couple of years CAMRA was instrumental in ensuring the introduction of more liberal licensing laws introduced in England, Scotland and Wales.
- ✓ CAMRA got brewers to declare the strengths of their beers, and are close to success in seeing listing of beer ingredients.

CAMRA today

- ✓ The largest consumer organisation in Europe, boasting 80,000 members in 200 branches across the UK. CAMRA was given supercomplainer status in 2005, enabling it to have grievances over measures such as market

dominance investigated by watchdogs within 90 days.

- ✓ CAMRA hosts beer festivals across the UK, including the Great British Beer Festival which will be held at Earl's Court from August 1st to 5th 2006.
- ✓ Organises National Pubs Week, the National Pub of the Year competition, CAMRA Pub Design awards, and several other important events in the beer calendar.
- ✓ Publishes several highly successful books and guides, including the Good Beer Guide edited by Roger Protz.
- ✓ Continues to campaign against brewery take-overs and consolidation in order to preserve consumer choice.

The future

In addition to campaigning against brewery consolidation and encouraging sales of real ale, cider, and perry:

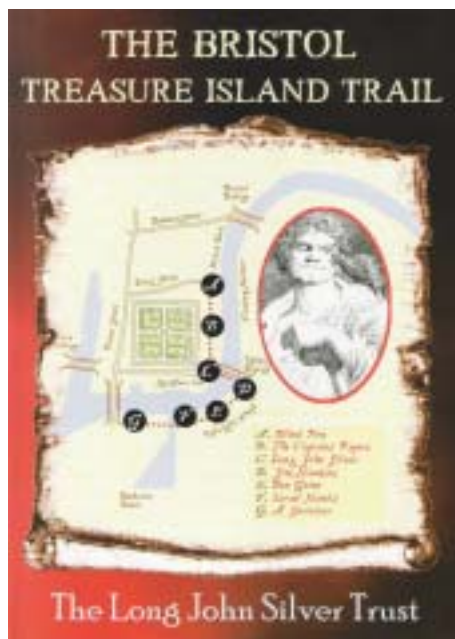
- ✓ CAMRA continues to campaign for a full pint and to close legal loopholes that allow bars and pubs to serve less than 100 per cent liquid.
- ✓ CAMRA wants to see national planning guidance in place to require local authorities to introduce policies to retain community public houses.
- ✓ At the moment a pub can be converted for a change of use without the need for planning permission. The law must be changed so any change of use resulting in the loss of a pub requires planning permission.
- ✓ Excise duty must be reduced to encourage people to visit the pub and stem the flood of cheap alcohol crossing the English Channel.
- ✓ CAMRA will continue to lobby the Government to retain Progressive Beer Duty.

Treasure Island Pub Crawl

A MOTLEY crew of Bristol CAMRA members, ‘Shipmates’ from Keynsham, and supporters of the Matthew, met at the **Kings Head**, Victoria Street, for the inaugural Treasure Island Pub Crawl on Thursday evening, May 18th. The idea of the event was to demonstrate the part Bristol's brewers, pubs, pirates and privateers played in Robert Louis Stevenson's decision to set Treasure Island here.

After leaving the Kings Head we went to the **Seven Stars**, the **Llandoger Trow**, the **Famous Royal Navy Volunteer**, the **Hole in the Wall**, the **Ostrich** and finally the **Golden Guinea**. It all took just over two and a half hours, with a variety of brews and views on offer.

It was generally thought that more should be made of our surviving pubs, and that we could perhaps follow London's lead, where there is a ‘Dick Whittington Real Ale Trail’ (a series of six different trails under the Whittington umbrella covering different parts of London). A ‘Long John Silver Real Ale and



Cider Trail’ was proposed for Bristol, possibly covering Whiteladies Road, Gloucester Road, Bedminster, St George, etc., as well as the Floating Harbour.

Bearing in mind that Silver, with his fictional Bristol pub the Spy Glass, is probably the most famous pub landlord ever, we thought he would be eminently suitable. What do Pints West readers think?

If anyone else would like to come on an informative and hopefully entertaining evening around some of Bristol's remarkable survivors (pubs like the Seven Stars and Golden Guinea deserve more patronage) what about Thursday 6th July? Numbers will be strictly limited, so please book your places by emailing mark@beaufortarms.com or writing to The Long John Silver Trust, c/o The Beaufort Arms, High Street, Hawkesbury Upton, South Gloucestershire GL9 1AU.

If that date doesn't suit (or has passed by the time you read this) please make contact to express your interest anyway.

To find out more about the Treasure Island Trail (and the book) have a look at the web site at www.longjohnsilvertrust.co.uk.

Mark Steeds

Brewery news

CHRIS Thurgeson, head brewer at the **Bristol Beer Factory**, had a surprise hit on his hands when he decided to revive a beer style most people (most people who can remember, that is) associate with Ena Sharples and Minnie Caldwell.

Milk Stout, whose ingredients include non-fermentable lactose, derived from milk, making it sweeter than your average stout, was last brewed by the Ashton Gate Brewery before it was taken over and closed by George's in 1931. George's continued brewing Milk Stout, using the same logo, and it remained one of their most popular brews for many years.

Eventually, though, it disappeared, a victim of "changing tastes." Now it has been revived by the Bristol Beer Factory (which occupies the old fermenting block of the Ashton Gate Brewery), using the old logo, to give us an idea of what we've been missing all these years. Launched at the Bristol Beer Festival, it quickly won a firm following, with requests for it to become a regular fixture.

The May edition of CAMRA's *What's Brewing* supplement, *Beer*, highlights another long-lost beer style – Home Brewed – a Bristol and Somerset speciality, which finally disappeared in 1991 when George's bottled Home Brewed was axed. Reading about this premium double brown ale – so popular for so long – it is difficult to resist the conclusion that, like milk stout, home brewed is ripe for revival. With so many top-class micro-breweries in the area, and drinkers increasingly keen to try out different beer styles, let's hope it isn't too long before home brewed returns.

One of the less well-publicised aspects of the Brunel 200 celebrations were a number of beers brewed to honour the great man. Although the chances are that Brunel, being French and also a bit of a toff, was more of a

wine drinker than a real ale enthusiast, the building of the Great Western Railway generated one of the biggest booms in the history of beer consumption, as tens of thousands of navvies poured into the West Country. A description of a typical navvy in the *Bath Chronicle* in November 1839 concluded with the observation that "he knows no other pleasure or domestic comfort than is afforded in a public house or beershop, brawling or drinking with his companions after the toils of the day." It is appropriate, therefore, that the anniversary should have been celebrated by the brewing of special beers.

First came **IKB** from **Wickwar**, a terrific malty bitter weighing in at 4.5%. It was brewed not only to celebrate Brunel's 200th birthday, but also the brewery's move across the road to larger premises in the old Arnold Perrett Brewery, next to the Bristol and Gloucester Railway line, built, like the Great Western, by Brunel. IKB has proved so popular that it has been introduced as a guest beer across the Wetherspoon's pub chain. It was also chosen to celebrate the launch of *The Ringing Grooves of Change*, a new book on the building of the Great Western in Bath and Wiltshire, at the Museum of Bath at Work on 9 April (details of the book can be found at www.akemanpress.com).

Next came **Butcombe Brunel**, a 5% ABV premium bitter, which has been available, among other places, at the café next to the SS Great Britain.

Then came **Brunale** from the **Bristol Beer Factory**, set up by George Ferguson in the old Ashton Gate Brewery in 2003. The fifth beer to be brewed at the Beer Factory, and the first to appear in bottles as well as in casks, Brunale (4.6% ABV), is a dark and eminently quaffable beer, which put in a guest appearance at the Bristol Beer Festival. Pieminister's Tristram Hogg has also used Brunale to produce a new line of steak and ale pies as a tribute to the man with the stove pipe hat.

Finally, there was **Isambard Kingdom Brown Ale**, a dry hoppy 4% bitter from the **North Cotswold Brewery** in Stretton on Fosse, which, as far as I am aware, has yet to find its way down to these parts.

Only weeks after the closure of **Gales** in Horndean, Hampshire has lost another of its top breweries. **Cheriton Brewery**, established




Bristol's Lord Mayor and Lady Mayoress toast the launch of Brunale with Pieminister's Tristram Hogg, George Ferguson, Brewery Manager Simon Bartlett, and Head Brewer Chris Thurgeson

in 1993 next to the Flowerpots Inn in Cheriton, quickly established itself as one of the top microbreweries in Southern England. Award-winning ales, including the superb Village Elder (overall silver medal winner at this year's Reading Beer Festival, and national gold medal winner in 2003) and Digger's Gold (a national bronze medallist in 1998), have built up a loyal following. The reason for the sudden announcement is unclear, although the *Hampshire Chronicle* reports that the brewery's three owners are going their separate ways.

Almost a century after the **Nailsworth Brewery** was taken over and closed, brewing has returned to Nailsworth in the teeth of official opposition. After campaigning against the plan to open a brewery, the town's mayor declared, when a licence was finally granted, that it was "a shameful day for the residents of Nailsworth." It is only fitting that the first beer to be brewed by Oisín Hawes at the new brewery should be called "**The Mayor's Bitter**"! Weighing in 4.2% ABV, and brewed with water from the brewery's own well, it can be found in pubs in and around Nailsworth. It can also be bought in polypins direct from the brewery, which is next to the **Village Inn** and open for visits most Saturdays from 11.00 to 3.00. (www.nailsworth-brewery.co.uk)

Brewing is also set to return to Stroud within the next few weeks. The **Stroud Brewery** (nothing to do with the old Stroud Brewery which merged with Cheltenham & Hereford Breweries in 1958 to form West Country Breweries Ltd.) has been set up on the site of the old Phoenix Mill Foundries in Thrupp. The first beer will be called **Budding**, after Edwin Budding of Thrupp who invented the first lawnmower in 1830. (www.stroudbrewery.co.uk)

Andrew Swift



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Pub news

The **Swan** in Winterbourne has been through several changes of management over recent years. Delighted to report that the current incumbents are offering excellent pints of Wickwar BOB and Butcombe Bitter.

Perhaps a little out of the Bristol & District Branch range, but well worth a visit is the **Cross Guns** at Avoncliff with its terraced garden leading down to the River Avon. Box Brewery beers are regularly available here, as well as Butcombe and Theakston Old Peculier. Avoncliff is on the train line from Bristol Temple Meads to Portsmouth, and the pub is fifty yards from the platforms. It also sits right beneath (yes, *beneath*) the Kennet and Avon Canal.

Delighted to report that the **White Swan** in Downend is open again and doing well. Bass and Courage Best on tap, plus an excellent pint of Taunton Traditional Cider.

A couple of local leases were up for sale as we went to press. The **Globe** in Frampton Cotterell, a current Good Beer Guide entry, is available for a capital outlay of £275,000, while the **Plough and Windmill** in Bedminster is available under different terms for £95,000.

The **Parkhouse** in Bedminster has recently undergone a major refurbishment. Sadly, both the **Plough** and the **General Elliott** in the same area remain shut. The lease is available for the **Bell** in East Street, too.

The **Western Coach House** in Frampton Cotterell, closed for a while, is now the subject of an application to turn it into flats, while the **Happy Cocks** in Hengrove is to become a residential home for the elderly.

A pleasant change in Thornbury sees the **Barrel** trying to move away from its erstwhile laddish and frankly slightly intimidating reputation. Gone are the pool tables, juke box, dartboard and ear-splittingly loud music. In their place is a pleasant and friendly bar offering Wells Bombardier and Wickwar BOB on draught.

A new **Sports Café** has opened in Baldwin Street on the site of Creation (or Ritz's, or Busby's, or the Gaumont Cinema depending upon your age). Fifty TV screens, sixteen pool tables and every sports event you could ever wish for in this triple-storey theme bar. Sadly, no real ale. I think, given the size of the venue and the sheer numbers of people that are expected to visit (especially during the World Cup), I'm sure they could turn over enough for one or two handpumps of real beer. Maybe one of the local breweries could get in touch with them.

Sad, but not surprising, news of the **Albion** in Hotwells. Closed for many months, it is now the subject of a planning application to turn it into three town houses.

Better news of the **Pied Horse** in St George, a historic building on the main road into the city. Now free of tie, they are offering at least three guest beers at any one time. Beers from Bath Ales, Butcombe and Wickwar have all been spotted lately.

Similarly, the **Printers Devil**, that tiny pub by Gardner Haskins, has broken free of a long association with strict ties that started with Usher's of Trowbridge and went through various manifestations of Courage ownership before finally escaping earlier this year. Three guest ales here too, with an emphasis on small local breweries.

The **Windmill** on Windmill Hill has been reopened by the same people who have the **Pipe & Slippers**. It is covered in detail by Colin and Pennie Postlethwaite elsewhere in this issue of Pints West.

The **Kings** in Lawrence Hill and the **White Hart** in Whitehall have both closed. The Kings is for sale while the White Hart is available to lease.

The **Kings Arms** in Brislington has now chosen Bristol Beer Factory No. 7 as its resident ale, with a number of guests supporting it.

The **Clifton Wine Bar** in Clifton has always, despite the name, served an excellent pint of Wadworth's beers. However, they have now added occasional guest beers to the roster. A recent one was St Austell Tribute from Cornwall.

Duncan Shine

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.

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Shine on the World Cup

Picture the scene. Despite forty years of hurt, you still believe that this is going to be England's year. Finally, against all the odds, and despite Wayne Rooney's metatarsal, and the lack of a Plan B, the Three Lions will ring out as David Beckham hoists the Jules Rimet Trophy – still gleaming – high above his perfectly coiffured head. But the question is, where are you going to go and watch the drama unfold, without being forced to drink fizzy lager, creamy smooth coolflow washing machine effluent or some vodka and lychee alcopop?

At this point you catch sight of a shambling, slightly jaded figure draped in a Cross of St George flag and wearing a red shirt with Walcott on the back. He clears his throat...



Horts

Now, gentle reader, I am acutely aware that football is apt to polarise opinion. For some people the World Cup is a must-see event that they have been eagerly awaiting throughout those long dark couple of weeks since the Football Season ended. For others, football is an abhorrent excuse for millionaire thugs to behave like animals while a load of much poorer thugs ruin the entire month for everyone else.

It's a matter of what you like. Some people like football; some people prefer cricket or rugby. Some people love a quiet pint and some good old conversation uninterrupted by the chattering Cyclops we call television. Some people love dressing up in women's underwear, though I thought we had agreed that it's purely a comfort thing and certainly not worth mentioning in a publication that will be read throughout the pubs and clubs of Bristol.

So, football fans should treat the following



The Old Fish Market

recommendations as places well worth a visit during the World Cup, while non-football fans might want to consider these good pubs to visit once the furore has died down. Readers who don't like football OR good real ale and traditional cider really need to ask themselves why they are reading this when they could be at home making chutney or reclassifying their stamp collection.

Of course, the life of this issue of Pints West will take it well past the end of the World Cup, so if you are reading this after July 10th, I'd just like to say how brilliant it was to see England win the World Cup against all the odds. Who'd have thought Wayne Rooney would have got fit enough to score the winner in the final, eh? On the other hand, you may be reading this in a dentist's waiting room in 2011, in which case congratulations on finding the one remaining dentist still open; and I'm sorry that all the pubs mentioned in this article have either been converted to flats, or have been taken over by *The Global Megabeer Corporation*. If you can still find a decent pint, please remember not to drink and teleport.

The shambling, slightly jaded figure clears his throat, more insistently this time, as if to say, "I cleared my throat over four paragraphs ago. Any chance of getting to the pubs?"



The Royal Oak

Because the 2006 World Cup is being broadcast by the BBC and ITV, pubs do not have to have a Sky or Setanta subscription to show it. So pretty much any pub with a telly will be showing FIFA's world showcase. What we've tried to do here is set out pubs which are both well-suited to watching the football en masse, and well-versed in the art of serving a good pint.

First up is **Horts** in Broad Street. As well as a large screen for watching the action, there are still up to as many as eight real ales (Young's plus guests) plus two traditional ciders from Thatcher's (Cheddar Valley and Traditional). As you head down Broad Street, this is the David Beckham of pubs. It sticks resolutely to the right hand side, from where it offers superb service.

Sadly, there are many pubs and bars in Bristol which will make a great play of showing the football, but will be the Peter Crouch of pubs: about three storeys tall, but ultimately uninspiring and unable to control

bouncers.

Another pub in the centre worth a visit is the **Old Fish Market** in Baldwin Street. Offering the full range of Fuller's beers plus occasional 'guests' such as Gales HSB. (Guest? Hostage more like!) Again, a large screen is available. This is the Jamie Carragher of pubs: so solid and reliable that you forget it's a relative newcomer to the scene.

Head up to Clifton and there are two pubs to mention. The first is the **Royal Oak**. Continuing to sell four or five real ales, including two from Sharp's, the Oak normally shows more rugby than football, but will be showing the England games. The Oak is the Owen Hargreaves of pubs. It always gets selected for inclusion in this publication, but no-one quite knows why.



Racks

Also well worth a visit in Clifton is **Racks** in St Pauls Road. More than one screen on which to watch the games, and London Pride and Bristol Beer Factory Number 7 to drown your sorrows. Racks is the Joe Cole of pubs: very low centre of gravity but, skilfully managed, an absolute cracker.

Another strong recommendation is the **Inn on the Green** just up from Horfield Common. As many as ten or more real ales at a time, always in tip-top condition, plus traditional ciders. Large screens will provide an excellent view of the action here, too. This is the Steven Gerrard of pubs: so obviously brimming with quality that there was never any question of leaving it out.

Not far from the Gloucestershire County Cricket Ground is the **Annexe**. The Annexe has a barn feeling to it, which lends itself well to watching football, and also offers a choice selection of four to five real ales. Happy at the back of the Sportsman, the Annexe is the Ashley Cole of pubs: a consistently strong



The Inn on the Green

Dark days for brewing in Hampshire

CAMRA has slammed the decision by London brewery Fuller, Smith and Turner (Fuller's) to close Gales brewery in Horndean, Hampshire. The brewery was closed in March.

It was a shock for drinkers in Hampshire when Fuller's announced it was to acquire George Gale and Co for £91.8m in November. However, after the announcement was made, Wessex CAMRA branches leapt to defend the brewery by setting up a campaign including a website and petition that attracted more than 5,000 signatures in a short time. They also campaigned through the media.

There were obviously concerns regarding the future of the Gales brewery once it had been acquired by Fuller's. However, Hampshire drinkers, and those beyond the county who enjoyed Gales beers, hoped that the brewery would survive, albeit as part of the Fuller's business. After all, the Gales web site referred to the brewery as being "successful".

Sadly, Fuller's were having none of it. Commenting on the decision, CAMRA Chief Executive Mike Benner said, "This is a black day for the people of Wessex who fought so

hard only to be let down so badly.

"We are appalled at Fuller's decision. Thousands of supporters rallied behind the Wessex branches of CAMRA when a Save Gales campaign was launched. Fuller's justified the closure by saying it expects to save around £3 million. This is a small amount to gain in return for destroying a century and a half of Hampshire's heritage and dealing a blow to all fans of Gales beers."

Drinkers in Hampshire are incandescent with rage at the closure. Below are some of the comments of Gales drinkers. They are all genuine remarks from regulars in a "Gales" pub in Havant.

- "Gales is part of our history and our heritage. How can you claim it will be the same now it's brewed on the A4 in Chiswick?"
- "I can't believe the Gales sold out without securing the brewery's future first."
- "They said they'd only start brewing Gales beers in Chiswick once the taste had been matched. The HSB already tastes like ESB. They've killed my pint!"
- "I've lived in Horndean for 40 years. How can someone take away all our heritage and

way of life just to put a penny on the share price?"

● "Historic breweries like this should be protected by law. How can the authorities just sit back and watch it close. It's a profitable, viable brewery; and I don't see how Hampshire County Council can sleep at night having let this happen."

● "Well done Gales and Fuller's – in one swoop you've just killed local brewing in Hampshire, ruined 300 pubs and ridden roughshod over 150 years of heritage."

● "I think they should change the names of the beers. Horndean Special Bitter should become Chiswick Average Bitter, etc."

You can sense the mood of drinkers from the comments above. Brewers make no friends by taking over another brewery and certainly not by closing down one with so much history. As well as the brewery, Fuller's acquired the Gales estate of pubs – over 100. Let's hope that these at least are treated the way they should be – kept open as local pubs for the local community.

Pete Bridle

Quotes collected by Duncan Shine



The Annexe

performer and an automatic choice for many years.

One of the best things about watching the World Cup in a pub is the sense of community and belonging you get from sharing the ups and



The Standard of England

downs with a large but friendly group of like-minded people. For this reason, I would recommend the **Standard of England** in Southmead. Still serving a very good pint of Bass, along with Taunton Traditional cider,



Cotham Porter Stores

and with a large open-plan bar and large screen. The Standard is the Aaron Lennon of our collection: a surprise selection out of left-field but nonetheless well worth its place.

Given that England are playing, it would be remiss of me not to mention a pub in St George. The **Pied Horse**, now free of tie, sells three regularly changing real ales and is a real football fans' pub. The Rio Ferdinand of pubs: has been off form recently, but is coming good at just the right time.

The **Cotham Porter Stores** remains one of my favourite pubs in which to watch any sport. A drop-down screen at the back shows the action, while the excellent range of traditional ciders (best pint of Cheddar Valley in Christendom) and the wonderfully friendly regulars just make this place a joy. The Cotham Porter Stores is Gary Neville: frankly a bit ugly to look at, and certainly an acquired taste, but there's no denying the quality is there.

Unlike our Sven, we are delighted to include a selection from the South West of our area. The **Raglan** in Weston-super-Mare is a



The Pied Horse

welcome addition to the squad. Not only is there an 8-foot screen for watching 22 grown men run around chasing a bit of leather, but there will also be as many as half a dozen real ales on throughout the tournament (and beyond). The Raglan is the Theo Walcott of pubs: not many of us know too much about it yet, but from what we've seen so far, there is a spark of magic there that just might make it the star of the tournament.

The above are just a handful of the pubs suited to watching the World Cup while enjoying a decent pint of real ale or traditional cider, and space has prevented me from mentioning many, many more. So, the following 'stand-bys' can consider themselves the Jermaine Defoe of pubs: very unlucky not to be included — the Ship in Keynsham; the Griffin in Bridgegate; the White Harte in Brislington; the Colliers in Kingswood; the Black Swan in Westbury-on-Trym; The Richmond Spring in Clifton; Lloyds No 1 by the docks; the Portwall Tavern in Redcliffe.

COME ON ENGLAND!!!!

Duncan Shine

News from Bath

THE RAVEN in Bath was recently named Bath & Borders Pub of the Year. Formerly known as Hatchett's, and absent from the Good Beer Guide for several years, the Raven reopened after a complete refit in October 2004 as a traditional free house. With five pumps in full-time operation, over 200 guest beers have appeared since then. The pub even has its own beer – Raven – a dark, malty 4.7% ABV brew from Blindman's Brewery near Frome. Although very popular, there are plans to replace it for the summer with a lighter beer. This is going to be called Raven's Gold and will be a 4% beer, also brewed by Blindman's. It should be available (exclusively) at the Raven by the time this edition of *Pints West* is published.

Food at the Raven is traditional as well, with pies from Pieminister in Bristol and local Raven Ale flavoured sausages served with mash and gravy. A selection of cold pies has been introduced for the summer. Quiz and music nights are well established at the pub, and a 24-hour Marathon Bike Ride, organised by the landlord, Tim Perry, is planned. Another of his projects is a campaign to have the Somerset & Dorset railway tunnels under Combe Down reopened as part of a foot and cycle path. More information about this can be found at www.twotunnels.org.uk.



Raven, brewed exclusively for the Raven by Blindman's, has proved extremely popular

One of Bath's most historic pubs got local, regional and national press coverage in April because of the impending smoking ban. One of the **Star Inn's** most cherished traditions is complimentary snuff, kept in a row of tins above a bench known as "death row." Snuff isn't covered by the ban on smoking, and it is likely that drinkers in need of a nicotine fix, who don't fancy nipping outside, will be tempted to try a pinch or two of the brown stuff. It's ironic that, by clinging on to a tradition that has all but died out elsewhere,



Jill Forsey and Tim Perry of the Raven with the award for Bath & Borders CAMRA Pub of the Year

the Star may prove to be one step ahead of the game when the ban comes in, and inspire others to copy their example.



The Ram in Widcombe

All change at the Good Beer Guide-listed **Ram** on Claverton Street. Simon Wynne, who has been at the pub for over 14 years, initially as manager but since 1993 as leaseholder, has handed over the lease. The farewell party, on Sunday 7 May, saw the popular Widcombe watering hole packed to the gunwhales as three local bands entertained the regulars.

Sam Weller's on Upper Borough Walls, which closed last spring and was boarded up until late last year, reopened in early April after an extensive refit. The new landlord is Mike Hoskins, who ran the Saracen's Head in Broad Street for 13 years. First impressions are that the new Sam Weller's is much brighter than it was when it closed, with a range of real ales (Gem, Old Hooky, London Pride and Timothy Taylor's Landlord on a recent visit) on offer. Dating back to 1739, Sam Weller's was originally known as the Full Moon. It is open till 2am every day except Sunday.

The **Garrick's Head**, next to the Theatre Royal, was also closed for nearly twelve months, and was allegedly destined to become



The new look Sam Weller's

a champagne bar aimed at the hen-party market. It has now been given a new lease of life as a real ale pub by Charlie and Amanda Digney. Their previous track record – transforming the King William on London Road from a run-down street corner boozer to one of the city's top real ale pubs – bodes well for the future. Occupying one of the most historic houses in the city – built for Beau Nash and a pub for over 200 years – the Garrick's Head features not only top-quality food but also a constantly-changing selection of real ales from local breweries. On a recent visit, Blindman's Buff, Palmer's Gold and Glastonbury Lady of the Lake, all in excellent condition, were on offer. Burrow Hill Cider is also a regular fixture.



Charlie Digney behind the bar at the new-look Garrick's Head

Food is now available at the **Royal Oak** on the Lower Bristol Road every day except Saturday from 12 to 3 – traditional pub grub with a roast on Sunday. The pub garden should also reopen sometime this month.

The **Roundhouse**, on the corner of Stall Street and Cheap Street, closed earlier this year and is currently unoccupied. There are rumours that it may become a sandwich bar. Originally a wine merchant's, by the 1840s it was a pub called the Abbey Wine Vaults, selling Guinness Stout and Burton Ale from the wood and in bottles. It was rebuilt in 1897 by Major Davis, the City Architect, when it received its current elaborate frontage. During a makeover in 1985, a large – and extremely obtrusive – spiral staircase was installed near the door without planning permission. The subsequent wrangle with the planning department continued for several weeks, and the pub remained shut until they eventually agreed it could stay. Another extensive makeover, with a minimalist décor, took place in 2003.



The Roundhouse

Although not noted for real ale, the closure of the Roundhouse marks the loss of another part of Bath's pub heritage.

The refurbishment of two Bath pubs has been accompanied by renamings: the Midland on James' Street West is now the **Metropolitan**; DYMK in Westgate Buildings is now the **Cork & Bottle**. The Midland opened around 1870 and took its name from the Midland Railway, who opened a station nearby at the same time. The station, later known as Green Park, closed in 1966, and is now a supermarket car park. DYMK is probably the shortest-lived Bath pub name in living memory. Until February 2004, the pub was known as Smith's after a wine merchant's that operated from there in the early twentieth century. Before that it was the Spirit Vaults. Its renaming as DYMK marked its transformation into a gay bar (the initials standing for Does Your Mother Know). The reasoning behind the current renaming is not known.



The Great Bath Pub Crawl outside the Star Inn

The Great Bath Pub Crawl returns for the 2006 season on 9 June and runs until mid-September. As a recent review in *Venue* magazine pointed out, "this is not a falling-over-being-sick sort of pub crawl, but a historical tour of the city, along with plenty of amusing and interesting anecdotes along the way. The tour lasts about two hours, with drink stops at the beginning and end, plus one or two in the middle. The guides include Andrew Swift and/or Kirsten Elliott, authors of three brilliantly researched and funny books about Bath's pub heritage." Couldn't have put it better myself! A brand-new website, with loads of new pictures and information, should be up and running at www.greatbathpubcrawl.com by the time you read this. The tour runs every night of the week throughout the summer, starting at Lambrettas (Good Beer Guide-listed in 2004) on North Parade. All the pubs visited are selected for the range and quality of their beer. Cost is £5 a head; drinks are not included in the price. Finally, if

anybody would like to try their hand at being a guide on the tour, the organisers are currently looking to recruit. If you have acting or guiding experience, or just like talking to people and are enthusiastic about pubs and beer, email info@greatbathpubcrawl.com or phone 01225 310364.

Andrew Swift

New pub for Abbey Ales

ABBEY ALES, Bath's own brewery, is taking over the **Coeur de Lion** in Northumberland Place, reputed to be Bath's smallest pub. Abbey already owns the **Star Inn** on the Paragon, which is run by Paul Waters – and keeping it in the family, the Coeur de Lion will be run by Paul's brother Julian, formerly of the Midland.

Alan Morgan, managing director of Abbey Ales, said: "The pub is temporally closed and will hopefully re-open next week after some redecoration. I really feel that the Coeur will be a good outlet for Abbey Ales and I am sure Julian will do as good a job as Paul is doing at the Star. At Abbey Ales we are always looking for pubs but we feel that they have to be special and the Coeur fits the bill perfectly."

By the time you read this the Coeur de Lion should be open again.



THE STAR INN



Worth a Visit!

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

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

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

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Popular Meet & Greet Evening



ON Thursday 11th May the Bristol & District branch of CAMRA held a "meet and greet" evening for some of our North Bristol members. The purpose was to encourage some of the local CAMRA members who have never been to a branch function to come along and meet some of the active branch members.

This was held at the Inn on the Green in Horfield and members in the surrounding area received a letter from the branch about the event. The evening went well with around twenty "new" faces and a pleasant time had by all. Perhaps some of these people may now decide to join in with the regular activities of the branch, such as our monthly meetings and surveying trips. The Campaign needs you!

Richard Brooks (words and pic)

More happenings in Bath

About 18 months ago Jill Forsey and Rod Humphries dropped into Bath and they made a splash. They took over Hatchett's and created the **Raven** and with the able assistance of Tim Perry who manages beer matters it has already been awarded the accolade of CAMRA Bath and Borders Pub of the Year for 2006. The *Bath Chronicle* carried a whole page spread with a splendid picture of Tim receiving the award on Tuesday 2nd May from branch chairman James Honey and social secretary Denis Rahilly. I was very frustrated with myself that I missed the ceremony but immensely pleased that the Raven has achieved so much in such a short time. For more information see Andrew Swift's article.

Andrew reported last quarter that the **Old Green Tree** has laid down some Wickwar Mr Perrett's for consumption just before next Christmas, having had a whole year to mature. Such a good idea deserves to be repeated elsewhere, and so it is. The **Royal Oak** is trying it, experimenting with Butt's Coper and with Moor Old Freddy Walker.

Quite a lot has happened and is happening at the **Royal Oak**. The Oak ran its Winter Beer Festival from Thursday 23rd to Sunday 26th February with the promise to have more than 40 beers. What they delivered was 43 from various micro-breweries across England and Wales. The brewery list included many locals plus Abbeydale, Bartrums, Beowulf, Buntingford, Country Life, Cropton, Cwmbran, Darwin, Dent, Fernandes, Heskett Newmarket, JW Lees, Otley, Otter, Robinsons, Sarah Hughes, Springhead, Titanic and Wessex.

I missed most of the festival because "she

who must be obeyed" (SWMBO) dragged me off to visit friends. All was not lost though since the visit did give me an opportunity to sample the excellent Good Beer Guide-listed **Six Bells** in Alton (where everyone including the landlord seems to be called Phil, or Phill). There was the added bonus of finding the **Naked Grape** in Alresford. This proved to be a very special off-licence with more than 70 bottle-conditioned ales from Hampshire micro-breweries available at £6 or £7 for four. Furthermore they organise the bottling for Cheriton just so they can stock those ales. Included were White Star, Cheriton, Triple fff, Hogs Back (OK, I know it's Surrey, but only just), Hampshire, Ichen Valley, Ringwood, Suthwyck, Ballards, Oakleaf and Stumpy's. The boot of the car was groaning and so was SWMBO. (P.S. I have since heard a rumour that Cheriton has stopped brewing.)

Anyway, having missed one festival it is my plan to ensure that I do not miss the summer event that the Royal Oak has set to coincide with their folk festival on 13th to 16th July. John Whinnerah has got as far as compiling his hit list for beers which is intended to include some unusual breweries such as Lovibond, Saltaire, Stroud, Nailsworth, Stewarts and Hopstar. The aim is for a list of around 30 ales.

Becky is organising the musical events and is planning around 15 to 20 acts including Radio 2 prize-winners and pub sessions where everyone is welcome to join in. The intentions are to share the profits with a local eco charity called Envolv. Anybody wishing to sponsor the event or offer other services can contact Becky at the Royal Oak on 01225 481409 or 07887 653247.

By the time that the festival is on the

garden will be open. I met the gardeners in the bar the other day looking quite glum because (their words) they were spending all their profits at lunchtime and in the evenings over the bar. Actually I am assured that the garden will be open before this is published.

Hopstar beers are quite regular at the Royal Oak since one of the team comes from Bath and regularly visits us from the dark northwest, invariably loaded down with barrels. There are few pubs around England if any that get this service from them. Recent news is that Hopstar won best of festival at the CAMRA Salisbury Winter Beer Festival. There are rumours that the award will be made on neutral territory somewhere half-way between Salisbury and Lancashire. Well all right, at the Royal Oak.

The Volunteer Rifleman's Arms was closed for a week at the beginning of March. Yet another refurbishment but this one is good. The cellar has been refurbished with the introduction of temperature control. The pint of Dorset Durdle Door that I had there while delivering the Pints Wests was in absolute cracking condition. Get down there and support Paul and his crew.

Just outside Bath things are moving as well. The owners of the **Cross Guns** at Avoncliff just outside Bradford upon Avon have found that the **Box Steam Brewery** beers are so popular at their pub that they took over the brewery on the 9th May. Hopefully there will be more to report on the matter in the next edition of Pints West.

Elsewhere in our district the **Jolly Sailor** in Saltford has changed hands and is now in the ownership of Carl and Laura Say. Carl and Laura (from South Africa and New Zealand) formerly ran pubs for Smiles and Young's but have now struck out on their own; I last met them in charge at the Lock Keeper in Keynsham. Estate agents are for ever espousing the virtue of location; well this one has got it in abundance. The pub is tucked away at the end of a dead lane but right beside the River Avon and a lock. It is very pretty and fortunately fairly well-known by walkers and cyclists. For those of us who have someone to drive us down there the car park is quite large.

Carl and Laura have not had to do much – a bit of flooring, some paint and some re-glazing – but they are now well into their stride. They tell me that the first thing they decided to do was to drop the prices of the food. There are four hand pumps there with Butcombe and Courage Best as regulars and two for guest beers. I think that Carl is receptive to ideas so get down there and suggest away.

The Jolly has a 24-hour licence but is generally open 11am to 11pm (12pm Friday to Sunday). There are aspirations to have music at the pub and a board at the door proclaimed regular series of Friday night bands.

Phill the Pint

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Cider at its best

Announcing the winners of the National Cider and Perry Championships 2006

THE CAMPAIGN FOR REAL ALE recently announced the winners of its search for the best real cider and perry in the UK.

The winners are:

Cider: Hecks Kingston Black (Somerset)
Perry: Seidr Dai (Cardiff)

Gillian Williams, CAMRA's Director of Cider and Perry campaigning, said: "Commercial ciders are enjoying something of a boon at the moment thanks to lavish advertising, but it should not be forgotten that exceptionally high quality real cider is still being made all over the UK. Just squeeze the juice out of the fruit and leave to ferment naturally. At its best it is a wonderful drink allowing the true fruit flavour to come through to the full.

"Nowhere is this more evident than in the high quality premium products that have won this year's competition. CAMRA is delighted that consumers will be rewarded with a cider and a perry which are testament to the skill, experience and craftsmanship of their producers."

Judging of more than 120 real ciders and perries took place at the Reading Beer and Cider festival over the course of the May Day bank holiday weekend.

Judges described the overall winning cider,

Hecks Kingston Black, as having a "ripe fruity aroma matured in oak casks providing a complex rich experience. This cider lingers on the tongue and makes it burst into flower."

On being told that his Kingston Black cider had won gold, Andrew Hecks of Hecks Farmhouse Cider said: "It's marvelous, we had no idea we were likely to win. I would like to thank the family and all our customers for their help over the years."

The Hecks family has been producing cider since 1840 and has been established as cider producers in Street for 110 years. Their winning cider is made using Kingston Black apples grown locally in their own orchards.

The gold award winning perry, Seidr Dai, was described thus: "Having a very pleasant, fruity, earthy aroma. A mellow, delicately balanced perry which is slightly sweet. This is a very drinkable, more-ish perry which would complement many types of food."

Dave Mathews of Seidr Dai was also overjoyed on being told that his perry had won and said, "I thought I would spend the rest of my life chasing this award and I can't believe it has happened. I would like to thank all the people who help us make our cider and perry."

Seidr Dai is a newer producer based in

Wales, where cider is seeing a revival with the assistance of the Welsh Perry and Cider Society of which Dave Mathews is Chairman. Seidr Dai, which was founded six years ago, specialises in the production of perries and ciders from fruit grown in Wales. The winning perry uses a pear called Hellens Early which is grown in local orchards.

CAMRA is also pleased to announce that the national bottled cider champion is Steve Hughes of Llandegla, Wrexham, North Wales for his Rosie's Triple "D" cider.

The Apple Tree

The **Apple Tree** in Philip Street, Bedmister is to close on the 31st May. Our sources have confirmed that the landlords have stated that it will remain as a pub, but details are sketchy at the moment.

Readers may be aware that the Apple Tree is one of the most characterful and unspoilt pubs in Bristol, notwithstanding the fact that it is probably the smallest pub in the city. Its impending demise could therefore be very disappointing for cider drinkers in the city, dedicated cider pubs being few and far between in Bristol, and there's no question that the Apple Tree has always been one of the best, and a regular haunt on the branches cider saunters. We would hope that the landlords take cognizance of this when deciding what happens next.

We intend to have a social at the Apple Tree on Tuesday, 30th May, starting at 7pm.

Richard Walters



Brewing excellence from the Heart of Somerset since 1979

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

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 amaran 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

Inn on the Green – Pub of the Year

WE are delighted to announce that the 2006 CAMRA Bristol & District Pub of the Year is the Inn on the Green.

The award completes a remarkable transformation for the pub since its takeover in 2003 by Oliver Bainbridge.

Every year, every CAMRA branch in the country democratically selects a pub of the year. Nominations are made based – of course – on the consistently high quality real ale, but also on other criteria such as a good atmosphere, a welcome for locals and visitors alike, and also the quality of other facilities offered. All branch members are given an opportunity to vote for the nominated pubs, and this year the Inn on the Green deservedly came out on top.

In *'The Last Guide To Avon's Ale'* – published in 1996 – the Royal George, as it was then called, was described thus: "Basic friendly local with cosy saloon bar. Busy evenings with visiting darts, pool and skittles teams". The only real ale on offer was Courage Best Bitter.

Fast forward ten years and the place is unrecognisable from those unremarkable days.

Now, there are three distinct areas as you walk in: a quiet, comfy lounge to the left; the main bar area in the middle; and the 'games' area to the right, with pool tables and a large screen for watching the match. There is very much a sense of community about the place these days.

But this wouldn't be Pub of the Year without a serious commitment to good quality



Oliver picture on the day of their recent festival

beer. As you enter, a dazzling array of handpumps greets you, with Bass, London Pride and Sharp's Doom Bar pretty much regulars, but as many as nine additional guests are on offer. Many of these are from local independent breweries, though there is also the odd 'vagrant' from further afield. Most importantly, the range of real ales has built steadily over Oliver's three years at the helm, which has allowed him to ensure sufficient turnover of his beers to keep them in tip-top condition.

There are also a couple of traditional ciders, from Sandford in Somerset: Thatcher's Traditional and Thatcher's Heritage for the discerning apple-fiend.

Congratulations to Oliver and the team at the Inn on the Green.

Runner-up: the Crown at Churchill

If the Inn on the Green is the Johnny-come-Lately of real ale pubs, this year's runner-up is the Steady Eddie. The Crown at Churchill has been a finalist many times in recent years. It went on to become the winner in 1999 and was also runner-up in 2005.

It is a testament to Tim Rogers' constant hard work that this pub, tucked away up an unmade road on the fringes of the branch's catchment area, is nonetheless never far from members' minds when they think of good ale and a warm welcome.

The Crown was also mentioned in *'The Last Guide...'* and, even in 1996, it was described as having "a wide selection of consistent quality real ales, mainly from South West regional brewers". Thankfully, some things never change, and the Crown retains that simple, cottage-style charm while never failing to deliver top quality ale.

Congratulations once again to Tim and the team at the Crown.

Duncan Shine



Milds in May



CAMRA promotes Mild in May to give a boost to a beer style that is full-flavoured, refreshing and perfect for Spring.

Mild is a beer that is less hopped and usually (but not always) of a lower alcohol content than many other styles. It gets much of its flavour from malts or roasted barley and is both distinctive and tasty.

Some Milds are brewed seasonally and so the best time to find them is in May. As in previous years, we were asking licensees to stock at least one Mild during the month and take advantage of the free packs from CAMRA that could be used to promote it.

Despite a resurgence in popularity amongst real ale fans, Mild is still a rare find in many parts of the country, and so CAMRA dedicates the month of May each year to this refreshing real ale alternative to lager. This year there was exciting local news as three of our breweries, Wickwar, Abbey Ales and Cotswold Spring, took the giant step of actually brewing some Mild ale.

Cotswold Spring have produced Old Sodbury Mild (ABV 3.9%), an unusual Mild made with oats, rye and dark malts, flavoured with English Bramling Cross hops, and having

blackcurrant notes in the aftertaste. The first brew of this had already sold out to the trade, so here's hoping they make another. Old Sodbury Mild was due to make an appearance in the Cornubia in Bristol.

Abbey Ales based in Bath also resurrected their Mild. Managing director Alan Morgan said, "We will be brewing our 4.0% ABV dark Mild again this year as we are more than happy to support the CAMRA Mild in May promotion. Many pubs in Bath were fortunate enough to get their hand on some of this, including the Old Green Tree, the Volunteer Rifleman's Arms and the Star Inn.

Wickwar have produced their more traditionally styled Penny Black Mild at 3.9% ABV, and pubs stocking this included the White Lion in Bristol City Centre, the Lamplighters in Shirehampton, the Knights Templar at Temple Meads, and once again the Cornubia. Wickwar were also offering beers to the trade from Lancaster Brewery during the month of May, including Lancaster Mild.

By the way, Penny Black is a rather fitting name for this beer, the managing director of Wickwar being a certain Mr Ray Penny (geddit?).



Costwold Spring brewer Nik Milo pouring some of his Mild for branch members to try on our visit to the brewery during May

Richard Brooks

A Mild Passion

YOUR scribe, Laurie Gibney, is an unashamed supporter of mild ales and this year has 'found' a number of milds in the Bristol area, with the help of a team of 'helpers on the lookout for milds'. By the time you read this copy of Pints West, May – CAMRA's Mild Month – is likely to be a fading memory, so there may be little mild left in the local pubs ... unless you create a demand and keep asking for milds!

As mentioned in a separate article, **Wickwar** recently brewed a new traditionally-styled mild called Penny Black, **Cotswold Spring** introduced Old Sodbury Mild, and **Abbey Ales** brewed their succinctly named Mild again.

The **White Lion** on Bristol City Centre stocked Wickwar's beautiful Penny Black, which was launched there early in May. I also tasted Tower Brewery's Mild at the White Lion but found that more like a dark bitter; also in that category was (Fuller's) Gales Festival Mild at the **Fish Market** in Baldwin Street, Bristol.

Wickwar's Penny Black was also stocked by the **Lamplighters** at Shirehampton, the Wetherspoon's **Knights Templar** at Temple Meads and at the **Cornubia** in Temple Street, which also planned to stock milds throughout May including Severn Vale Monumentale Country Mild, Dark Star Over the Moon, Cottage Black Prince, Cotswold Spring Amber Mild, Icen Honey Mild, and Buntingford Strong Mild.

The **Bag O'Nails** in Hotwells, another keen supporter of such CAMRA initiatives, also planned to stock several milds over the month of May, but details were not available to me as I wrote this.

There was an unconfirmed sighting of the rare beast "Mild" at the **Elm Tree** in Hanham. The **Commercial Rooms** had Caledonian Dr Rob's Magic Potion – not a jet-black mild but a traditional Scottish 60/- mild ale – which was one the milds in the May Festival held at Wetherspoon's and Lloyds No. 1 pubs. The others were Hampshire Mayhem and Banks Chocolate Mild.

The **Victoria** in Clifton's Southleigh Road was putting two guest milds on. This is a back-street pub, though reasonably large, with a good choice of real ale, and fine wines. One of the milds was Cain's Dark Mild 3 and the other was Mathews 40 Yard, which is perhaps really a bitter brewed with mild malts. That beer was also stocked by the **Hillgrove** in Kingsdown. Both of these pubs are Dawkins Taverns which support micro-brewers and Mild Month.

Downton Chimera Maroonmaker Mild, was available at the **Hope & Anchor** in Jacob's Wells Road in Bristol and at the **Windmill** at Portishead, which also stocked Scatter Rock's Meadow Mild.

On a recent Bristol CAMRA all-day trip to the West Midlands, my wife Mary and I enjoyed Batham's Delph Brewery Mild at Brierley Hill, and I enjoyed Sarah Hughes Dark Ruby Mild (a particularly strong one 6% ABV) at Sedgley, and Highgate Dark Mild at Walsall.

The **Cornubia** has occasional milds throughout the year, but I only know of one pub in Bristol which has a mild ale regularly on the bar, and that is the **Ship Inn** in Lower Park Row which has a resident Theakston's Mild at 3.6% and also, for strong dark ale supporters, Theakston's Old Peculier at 5.7%.

Across the road lives another dark ale, **Zerodegrees** Black Lager, but I will be looking out for the new superb Milk Stout from the Bristol Beer Factory that was launched at the Bristol Beer Festival in March.

Apologies for the "mild" digression ...

Laurie Gibney

(With thanks to the team of "helpers on the lookout for milds" which included Richard Brooks, Phil Cummings, Roger Dixon, Tony Durbin, Jerry Fletcher, Duncan Lintern-Burke, Andrew Pike, Steve Plumridge and Norman Spalding.)

Pub news

THE **Seven Stars** in Bristol, just next door to the Fleece & Firkin, is once again open (having closed suddenly in March) and under new ownership.

It is now a free house, with Abbey Ales Bellringer as the permanent beer, and two changing beers from local breweries such as Bath Ales, Moles and others. The range of beers may extend to five or six in the not too distant future. They are keen to respond to their customers' wishes and welcome suggestions for beers to get in. Bottled ciders are planned, with possibly one on draught.

SP



Chimera India Pale Ale

Voted Beer of the Festival Bristol 2005
Silver medal winner at the
Beauty of Hop Competition June 2004

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who also brew Chimera Gold, Chimera Red,
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Malt, Hops, Yeast & Water!



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Meeting the Smiles brewer

AT the end of 2004 it was announced that the Smiles Bristol Brewery had gone into administration and that production was transferring to the Highgate Brewery, Walsall.

As of today the Smiles brand still exists and you can still find Smiles beer in pubs. On 18 May, at an event hosted by the Smiles Brewery Tap in Bristol, we had the opportunity to meet the brewer, Neil Bain, who has been with Highgate for over ten Years.

The evening started with Neil giving a presentation on Highgate brewery, the brewing process and the ingredients used. There were also samples of the current versions of the Smiles range including Best, Zing and Heritage.

Neil took questions from the floor and following the presentation there was a quiz on pop music and beer names. This was won by a group of students from the Bristol University Real Ale society (BRA) an organisation that is affiliated with CAMRA. Their prize was bottles of Highgate Old Ale.

On the whole this was a pleasant and informative evening, although the tricky question remains as to whether Smiles brewing will actually return to Bristol at any point, or will the Smiles brand only exist as part of the portfolio of



a larger brewery?

The pictures are of Neil Bain giving his presentation, and of Bristol & District Branch Chairman Richard Brooks debating the issues with Neil Bain and Bob Norton of Highgate.

Richard Brooks

Pub news

SINCE going free of tie back at the end of December, Marianne White, manager of the **Hillgrove** in Kingsdown (one of the Dawkins estate of three pubs) reports seeing customers enjoying the range or real ales more and more, and says they have formed great relationships with independent breweries such as Matthews, Cottage and Hidden.

She says: "I am really enjoying the research and development of our stock list that is now a big part of my job. We now sell bottled RCH ales East Street Cream, Pitchfork and Firebox so that customers can continue enjoying good beer in the comfort of their own home after we've closed. Students are especially delighted that they no longer have to resort to the usual take-out lagers."

Marianne also commended CAMRA's Nation Pubs Week initiative, a promotion of pubs each February in which the Hillgrove took part. She reported a massive £2,000 increase on their average weekly takings and declared: "A real achievement for all involved – we look forward to the next one!"

Work on the pub's courtyard garden has started in earnest, and this should be open sometime around July.

SP

Ask for one at the bar.

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 FREEHOUSE NEXT TO THE OLD CLIFTON POOL

My first brewery visit

EARLY on Saturday 29 April I found myself standing outside The Cornubia waiting to board a minibus to take us to Walsall to visit not one, not two, but three breweries! I recognised a few faces, plenty I didn't. We left promptly at 8am to be at the **Batham** brewery for a 10am start and arrived in plenty of time to enjoy the sun before Mr Batham joined us.

As this was my first visit to a brewery I wasn't really sure what to expect. We split into two groups: one to tour behind the scenes, the other to stay and drink beer. I opted for the tour first because despite having been up since 5am it was still a little early for beer for me. We tramped upstairs to rub hops and taste barley. As we moved through the brewery we heard about the brewing process, the tricks of the trade and plenty of family history. While I'd never been in a brewery before the smells took me back to my childhood when my Dad owned a homebrew shop. Lovely!

For such a relatively small brewery, it took us a good hour to get round and we'd definitely all worked up a thirst by this time. We swapped places with the other group and took the opportunity to sample the Best Bitter. It was light, hoppy and refreshing. If you ever get the chance to go to Batham's, take a look at the cask they use for dispensing the beer after the tours. It's got glass ends so you can see what the brew of the day looks like before it gets into your glass. Pretty alarming at first, I



At the gates of the Highgate brewery

can tell you. Of course, all it is hops (from the dry hopping) and the yeast sediment – nothing to worry about really, but fascinating to see.

After the second tour finished we moved to the brewery tap, The Bull and Bladder, so named because part of it used to be a butchers' shop. Many of us took the opportunity to try the other Batham's brew, Mild Ale, while some of us stuck to the Best. A sandwich or pork pie to keep our strength up and then we were back on the bus.

The next stage of our trip round the Black Country was a surprise. Some people had correctly worked out that we were heading to **Sarah Hughes** in Dudley. Some of us took the opportunity to sample the Dark Ruby (often called Dark Ruby Mild, but it doesn't actually say that on the clip) while others

(myself included) took a look round the brewery. Even smaller than Batham's, but based on the same tower principle, it didn't take us too long to look round leaving us time for a leisurely drink, all served in dimple mugs!

The third and final brewery was another tower brewery but on an entirely different scale. This was **Highgate** brewery, situated at the end of a residential cul-de-sac. By now, if we hadn't been at the beginning of the day, we were all familiar with the brewing process and it was great to see it all on this scale. We definitely worked up a thirst on this tour: we had five-storeys of brewing to get through. After this we were able to try a number of different ales all brewed on site, including Smiles Best. Having only ever pulled pints behind the bar of The Cornubia it was interesting to use the swan necks, but I soon got the hang of it. We had a great spread of bread, cheese, pate and all the trimmings while we rested our feet and quenched our thirst before heading back down to Bristol.

The journey back went remarkably quickly, mostly because we were all asleep! There was time for a quick stop in The Cornubia for a Hereford Organic from the Spinning Dog brewery and then home.

I had a great day out, met a group of friendly beer drinkers (not that you ever meet unfriendly beer drinkers!) and experienced three wonderful tower breweries. I'd strongly recommend that if you ever get a chance to go on one these trips organised by Bristol and District CAMRA, go! Many thanks to everyone who made the day so enjoyable, and made me feel so welcome. Thanks also, to Norman for organising the day and Neil and Mr Batham for guiding us round the breweries.

Helen Featherstone

New CAMRA book celebrates beer with food

THE CAMPAIGN FOR REAL ALE has recently released a book entitled **Good Pub Food** by Susan Nowak and Jill Adam, its definitive guide to fine cuisine and excellent beer.

Good Pub Food emphasises the unique relationship between "real food and real ale", a perfect partnership which many in the pub industry are converting to and promoting in their businesses.

Author Susan Nowak said: "There are 600 entries UK-wide featuring the pubs serving excellent food and, equally important, excellent real ale within this guide. Apart from food, the emphasis is on beer rather than wine, and this is still the only guide where a pub qualifies for the quality of its ale as well as its food."

The foreword to Good Pub Food has been written by Michelin-starred celebrity chef Jean-Christophe Novelli, who recently opened his own first gastro-pub, the White Horse in Harpenden, Hertfordshire.

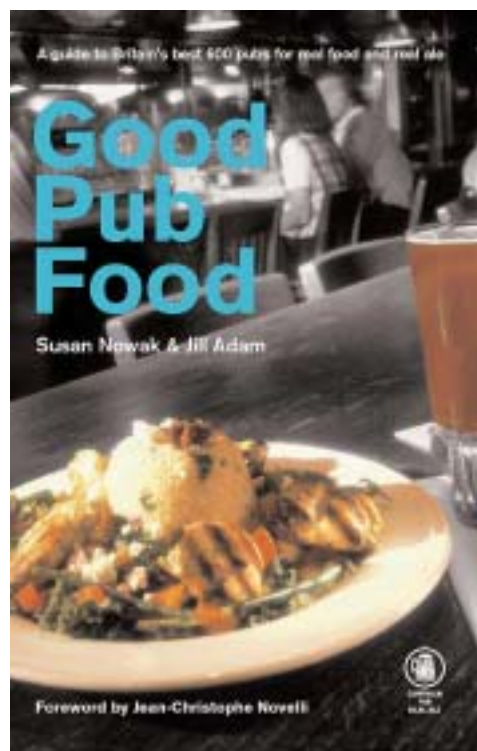
This is the sixth edition of Good Pub Food and it has been seven years since the last edition. Susan Nowak says pub food has gone through an incredible revolution in that time.

Some of the topics that are included are the rise of the gastro-pub and celebrity chefs, pubs using local produce, cooking with beer and pairing beer with food and the unfortunate occurrence of poor food for children in pubs.

Susan said: "The very best news since Good Pub Food last appeared is the explosion of pubs now sourcing fine local produce – the publicans who go that extra mile to cut food miles.

"So many beer recipes were donated by publicans for this guide that we can't fit them all in. Try them, you'll find them much more inventive than the standard steak and ale casserole."

Good Pub Food – priced £14.99 – available from good book shops, or from CAMRA by calling 01727 867201 or visiting the web site at www.camra.org.uk.



Watering Holes in the Desert

news from Weston-super-Mare

Weston Whispers (pub and beer news)

AS mentioned in the "A Round With Robin" column, the **Anchor Inn, Bleadon** surprised and delighted us by organizing a four-day ale, cider and music festival over the Easter weekend.

The surprise was mainly due to the fact that the Anchor has never been regarded by local CAMRA members as being particularly interested in real ale. However, it has been under new management since October and Dave, the new man at the helm, seems keen to support real ale. The regular Bass is now supported by a guest beer. On my two visits this has been Sharp's Doom Bar, but there are pump clips behind the bar from Skinner's, RCH, Smiles and Newman's breweries. A third beer may be added for the summer months.

And, of course, Dave was inspired to organize this first festival. Speaking to Dave afterwards he was pleased with how things had gone, albeit the weather was pretty poor for most of the weekend which did not help. In fact, he is already planning a second festival over the August Bank Holiday weekend.

One or two people grumbled to me over the £2.50 cost of a pint, but personally I felt that this was perfectly acceptable when you consider that there was no admission fee and there was live entertainment during all sessions. On Good Friday I much enjoyed a great set by local legends The Fallen Apples as well music from the DJ who had a fantastic collection of 60's reggae records. If my little toe wasn't broken, I may well have shown my stuff on the dancefloor (enough to make anyone gag on their pint). However, I should be fit for the World Cup.

Dave reported that Exmoor Beast and Wolf's Granny Wouldn't Like It were the two most popular beers, evidence that you shouldn't believe the twaddle that some peddle that people don't like dark beers.

Dave has also taken over the **Castle in Kewstoke**, previously owned by Tom Newman of Newman's Brewery fame. It continues to stock Newman's beers. I have not visited it since it changed hands, but Dave says that he wants to make it more like a pub – essential if it is

going to get enough people in to be able to offer real ale in good condition.

On the subject of Newman's, Woolly Mammoth has been replaced on the roster by Mendip Mammoth, which will be launched "at the summer equinox." This will be a 4.3% ABV bitter – no more details at present. The new brewery at Yatton is undergoing further alterations and there is a possibility of the beers appearing in bottled form.

The **Ancaster** has given up the ghost and no longer sells real ale. Happily, the nearby **Waverley, Weston Cricket Club** and **Weston Social Club** are all making sterling efforts and deserve people's support.

The occasional interesting guest beer is popping up at the **Ship, Uphill**. There have been recent appearances by beers from Blindman's, Otter and Moles.

The **Criterion** on Upper Church Road has introduced RCH Hewish IPA as a permanent beer.

Tim Nickolls

A Legionnaire writes

Watering hole in a desert?

I had three quarters of an hour to waste in Clevedon town centre. Thinking I would have a pint of the local brew I decided to go for a search.

I knew from a previous visit that the nearest pub, the Bristol Inn, only had Courage Best so I thought I would try the Clock Tower a little further down the hill. Courage Best and Bass pumpclips and neither was available.

So round to the Wagon and Horses, only Courage Best and Bass but again none on offer. So back to the Bristol Inn. "Pint of Best please."

"Sorry mate, we are between batches."

Half of Guinness from the warm pump was the best they had!

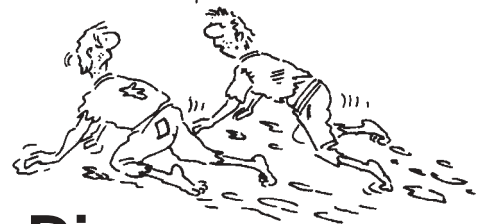
I had noticed lots of good things to eat at the Bristol Inn and as I was in Clevedon for the evening as well I went back that evening hoping to eat something.

"Sorry mate, we stop food at 5.30."

Somehow I don't think it was my day!

Dave McVittie

It wouldn't have seemed like a desert if he'd ventured a little further and gone to the Royal Oak or the Old Inn



Weston Diary

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



RCH Brewery

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Lucky thirteen

IN the Spring an old man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of railway stations. At least, in the year of Brunel 200 it does.

Weston-super-Mare has had thirteen railway stations. Not a lot of people know that. Even fewer want to.

However, it is of considerable interest that the more important station sites were chosen with rail ale in mind. Now, just three stations remain, principally to provide transport for pub-crawls in Yatton, Bristol and Somerset and to a variety of beer festivals. Most important of all, the latest Weston-super-Mare central station is known throughout the civilized world for its CAMRA oasis, the watering hole known as **Off the Rails**.

When I was a younger man in the early 19th century, springtime travelers could stay at the turn-of-the-century Reeves' or Rogers' (now the Royal) Hotel, which had a most illustrious start as a cider house that later sold beer from May and Castle's Worle Brewery. There was also the 1820 Bath Hotel, which obviously had all mod cons. Although owned by the Wookey family, it was certainly not a bit of a hole and made a mint of money, so becoming the Imperial. Such associations continued down the years and it was eventually owned by one HE Penney.

Worle supplied Weston with its nutritional necessities. Of these, the beer was first brought on foot as a weekly firkin carried on a pole by two strong men. By the time it arrived, it was probably Old Ale and so a handcart was later pressed into service and then a donkey cart.

Brunel improved the ale supply chain with two broad gauge stations that released the donkey for beach work and increased beer supplies to Weston at a time when 10,000 new beer houses had been opened nationally over the previous decade. In June 1841, he arrived in Bridgwater with the Bristol and Exeter Junction Railway. This had stations at Nailsea (and Backwell), Clevedon Road (Yatton), Banwell (Puxton and Worle) and then Weston Junction for Weston-super-Mare and its population of just over 2,000.

Weston was thus on the map as a seaside resort with a rail link before most of the others and it became a town the following year. Brunel was aiming for, no doubt, the parish of St Thomas in Exeter. To get people there, more stations were opened at Ashton (Bedminster) in 1854, Parson Street in 1927, Long Ashton in 1926 and (Flax) Bourton in 1860. Clevedon joined in 1847. Clifton Bridge, Pill, Portbury and Portishead came along in 1867, with Ashton Gate in 1906, Ham Green Halt in 1926 and Nightingale Valley Halt in 1928. Congresbury, Sandford (and Banwell) and Woodborough (Winscombe) arrived in 1869 and Wington, Langford, Burrington and Blagdon in 1901.

Those with nothing better to do than keep count may have noticed that, so far, Weston

only seems to have had three stations. However, it acquired a goods station in 1862, which seemed to be for shipping out pots rather than shipping in fine ales to fill them. Hopefully, some of the pots went to either the Steep Holm Inn or the Flat Holmes Inn for those who preferred aquatic transport.

For some reason the need was then felt to move the main station from its cosy plantation on Station Square site 9 feet away from the Railway Hotel, aka Anchor, Quantocks, Carriages, Jack Stamps and Bar Shallus. By that time, this too had all mod cons, with John Bath there. There were also Thomas Locock's Victoria and William Hay's Plough to provide a bit of variety, along with several others in Regent Street, Anstice Terrace and Railway Parade, as well as the White Hart.

The central station first migrated in 1866 on the broad gauge to a point near to the goods station and, more importantly, the Bristol and Exeter, or present Town Crier. It was also nearer to the Town Hall Courthouse. An early version of the Locking Road excursion station appeared at the same time, to cater for thousands of ale drinkers from Bristol, the West Midlands and other less important parts of the Empire.

Possibly due to the copious ale supplies, the population of Weston had grown to over 8,000 by 1861 and so, in 1865, the newly formed Weston-super-Mare Brewing and Malting Company bought the Worle Brewery, ready to help celebrate the opening of the new stations. However, new equipment was not installed until 1867, brewing did not restart and the company was wound up in 1868. In 1879, Worle Brewery was converted into the Weston-super-Mare Sanitary Laundry, famed for its pristine barmaids' aprons. 1867 was by no means a failure on the ale trail as Birnbeck Pier opened to provide a large bar for the arrival of Welsh miners on an average of three paddle boats a day. Some of these gentlemen never reached the shore on these booze cruises that overcame any licensing restrictions there may have been back home in the valleys. They were most welcome.

Weston was not only well laundered but also well provided for on the ale front. In 1872, the offices of Thomas and John Castle's Banwell Brewery were in the Market Place. Weston folk, then numbering over 10,000, still went shopping in Banwell. The more observant reader will have noticed that Banwell had railway stations named after it without actually having had one anywhere near the village. Perhaps its original brewery would have survived if it had had a rail link and Bristol Water would not have compulsorily purchased the spring and millstream used for brewing.

Weston station finished up where it is now in 1884, as the narrow gauge General station, although broad gauge trains still ran on the main line. The final station site may well have been chosen as suitable for having its very own Good Beer Guide pub that did not involve crossing any broad or narrow gauge streets to get to it. It may also have been influenced by the appearance of temperance hotels surrounding the earlier sites.

In those days, the train journey from London to Bristol took about three hours and it was about another half hour to Weston. Plus ça change. Also in 1884 and less understandably, the Worle station name boards were moved from Wool Pack, West Wick territory to an ale-free zone outside Worle village. This did not even have the tram service that Weston received in 1902 to save valuable drinking time on pub-crawls.

But that is only seven stations, I hear you cry. However, there was also Colonel Stephen's Weston, Clevedon and Portishead Light Railway, which reached Clevedon in 1897 and Portishead in 1907. It started from Ashcombe Road, handy for the Ashcombe Hotel, and went on to Milton Road Halt, a bit early for the Borough Arms, and Worle (Moor Lane and Town), near the New Inn, aka Woodspring. As if these were not enough, Bristol Road Halt was added in 1912, a bit early for the Nightjar. Still only eleven stations but Weston Milton came along in 1933, handy for the Borough Arms, aka Heron.

Weston Airport opened in 1936 and there was nothing else until the present Worle station reappeared on the main line as Worle Parkway in 1990, perhaps at the request of a commuter called Baker and supported by the Summerhouse and the latest Courthouse. This final station may be too short for the intended purpose but no one is perfect.

Dr John

Weston Wanderings

**The 2006 BBF was the best ever
But train travel from Weston never
Meets our special imbibing needs
In getting us up to Temple Meads**

**Network Rail obviously has something
Against our local annual weekend fling
The Drove Road bridge it was in 2004
And in 2005 the track was up, what a bore**

**Saturday again was on the buses in 2006
So, Friday Festival sessions we had to fix
First Group's new franchise shiny bright
Needs late trains every Saturday night**

Dr John

A Round with Robin

AS I come to write the 17th *A Round With Robin*, my researches led me to an article by Rich Neale in *Pints West* 53 entitled "A Year of Festivals". This piece does not attempt to go as far as that article did, as it only covers the festivals I've attended in April, with various companions from the Weston sub-branch. Nor is it intended to be a "what I did on my holiday" article, but a critical view of the beers and atmosphere of those festivals.

However, let me start with a warning – *attendance at beer festivals can be infectious!*

Let me tell you about what happened when Mike Coleman and I visited the **Bridge Inn** at Topsham on the last day of the Wessex Trains franchise – the 31st of March. Mike had provided the courtesy tickets which he got by completing one of the Rail Ale Trails. On the train from Exeter we met two chaps going to the Bridge Inn who were holidaying in the South West "ticking" the Good Beer Guide pubs. One of them, Steve, from the Hitchin branch of CAMRA, had been to 90 beer festivals in the last year – that's nearly two a week!

We sampled beers at the Bridge Inn and also on that day at the **Redwing** at Lymptstone, another excellent pub with a good selection of ales. Back in Exeter we tried beers at the **Great Western Hotel**, the **Imperial** and the **Well Inn**. We also had a short visit to the Exeter Food & Drink Show and sampled some of the beer there, being very pleased with the new bottle-conditioned *Peregrine Stout* from *Cotleigh*.

The first festival in April was at the **George Inn** at Middlezoy on Good Friday, where last year three of us had walked there from Bridgwater, returning by bus. That had been on the Saturday, but this time there were six of us and no buses available. So having availed ourselves of beer (notably the *Thwaites Blooming Ale*) and breakfast in the **Carnival Inn** at Bridgwater, we hired a six-seater cab to take us to Middlezoy, and we walked back following the Parrett Trail taking in the **Thatcher's Arms** at Moorland and the **Boat and Anchor** at Huntworth, a distance of about 11 miles. The new landlord of the George had arranged the beers on gravity in the skittle alley, with a few on handpump at the bar. The programme listed 14 ales but there was an extra beer – *Gem* from *Bath Ales*. Beers from the South and West dominated, but there was also *Vicar's Ruin* from *Church End*, Warwickshire, and *Landlord* by *Timothy Taylor* from Yorkshire. I only had seven half-pints, my favourites (on the day) being the aforesaid *Vicar's Ruin*, and the *Hedgemonkey* from *Glastonbury Ales*.

On Easter Monday I walked to the first **Anchor Inn** beer festival at Bleadon which had been going for the previous three days. However, all the beers were still just on, and a most amazing selection from the length and



breadth of England including *Hadda's Headbanger*, *Wolf's Granny Wouldn't Like It*, the *Hot Cross Bunny* from *Northumberland* brewery, and *Gateshead Golden*. There was a total of 15 ales on gravity dispense, two in the pub, and five ciders, and the photo shows two of the staff, both who enjoyed the ale; it was most refreshing to find a lady not yet turned 19, who actually preferred real ale to any other drink. My favourite there was the *Hot Cross Bunny*, very fruity but a dry finish.

Only three days later I was in the **Bag O'Nails** in Hotwells for the lunchtime session of their Spring beer festival. As it was the Thursday, the first day of the festival, there were beers from the day before which weren't on the list that needed trying before the listed beers could be put on. It's not really as complicated as it sounds; it just meant a bit more choice! These extras were splendid beers: *Mauldon's Mid Winter Gold*, *Clarke's Classic Brunette*, *Keynsham's Stockwood Stout*, and best of all the *Sparko* from *Rebellion*. From the listed beers the *Rugby Twickers*, *Surrey Hills Gilt Complex* and *Shaws Spring Song* were tried and I wished I'd had the time to revisit the Bag everyday during the festival as there were another 25 ales I'd not tried on the list.

This reminds me to say thank you to the organisers of the Bristol Beer Festival. I only worked there on the Saturday, and it was once again an experience not to be missed; the *Sarah Hughes Dark Ruby* was the best I've ever tasted as it came from the firkin on Saturday evening.

Having survived over a week without a beer festival, I made my way by bus to Winscombe and then walked the Strawberry Line Heritage Trail disused railway to Cross where the **New Inn** were celebrating their third weekend festival. From 20 beers, and disappointingly only two ciders, there was a good mixture of light and dark ales, to be enjoyed in the sunshine of the garden with views over the Axbridge moors towards Wedmore. There were some of my favourites to try, for example the *Bath Ales Wild Hare* and *RCH Double Header*, and, new to me, the excellent *Coastguard* from *Dorset* at Weymouth and the

Old Sarum from the *Hidden* brewery. There was some controversy over the two beers *Cottage Black Prince* and *Corvedale Katie's Pride* – you either loved 'em or hated 'em! There was no such problem with the *O'Hanlons* beers.

The following day I walked from Temple Meads to the **Inn on the Green** at Horfield by a route that took me through St Philips and St Judes, skirted St Pauls, passed though Ashley Down passing the now closed (alas) Ship Aground, and thence to Horfield, without stopping at any pubs en route!

There, in the very crowded pub (it was just before the local rugby started) I met with "Gunner Graham" Teague who had thoughtfully reserved us seats halfway between the bar and the garden where the racks for the 38 barrels were placed. I won't list all the beers sampled, but will mention the favourites there: *Orkney Dark Island*, *Oakham's Bishops Farewell*, *Butts Barbus Barbus*, but all surpassed by the almost local *Pig's Ear* from *Uley*! After leaving there we called in at the **Wellington** for a great pint of *Barnstormer*. If *Bath Ales* can't get it right who can, and they did – as good a pint as you'll get.

Well that completed my selection for April. I won't dwell on the **White Lion** "Old" Ales" festival in March, except to say, let's have another one next year! I am looking forward to the festival on 8th July at the **Canal Inn** at Wrantage near Taunton, when once again Bryher Simmons will be entertaining us as we make our way through 15 real ales and the Belgian beer bar. On my last visit at the beginning of May they had *O'Hanlons Firefly*, the local *Blackdown Ditchwater*, and a superb pint of *Otter* on gravity dispense.

Further into the future our local CAMRA Good Beer Guide-listed pub the **Raglan Arms** in Weston-super-Mare will be having its first beer festival on the August Bank Holiday weekend along with some stunning music from local bands. Some unusual beers are promised by Gary along with some award-winning favourites. I hope to see you there.

Robin E Wild

News from Bath Ales

A Bitter taste of Success

At the recent SIBA South West beer competition, Bath Ales SPA (3.7%) won the first prize for bitters with an ABV below 4%. SIBA South West is the Society of Independent Brewers in the South West of England so to gain one of their awards is a real accolade. SPA was also judged to be the Reserve Champion of all the of beers entered into the competition, a remarkable achievement for a low strength ale. SPA is Bath Ales' co-founder, Richard Dempster's favourite beer. It's wonderfully fresh, hoppy and full of citrus flavours, ideally suited to the hot days of summer.

To add to SPA's success, the brewery's organic beer, **Wild Hare** (5%) was awarded bronze in the strong ales category for beers with a strength of 5% ABV and over.

There have already been confirmed sightings of **Rare Hare** (5.2%). This is an old fashioned premium ale with a distinctive dry finish on the palate. It can sometimes be found alongside Bath's other award-winning beers at the brewery's pubs, as advertised in this news letter.

They're having a laugh!

The Hare on the Hill in Kingsdown is having a series of Silent Comedy events on Monday evenings, commencing at 9 o'clock.

The refurbished **Swan at Swineford** is now open with a good range of beers and first class food. It's well worth a visit. Planning

consent has been given for development of car parking and garden facilities.

Bristol CAMRA's joint Pub of the Year for 2005, the **Wellington in Horfield** is staging a festival over the end of May bank holiday weekend (probably all over by the time you read this).

The owner of Good Beer Guide regular entry, the Bridge Inn, has rescued the **Eldon House** in Lower Clifton Hill, Clifton from a major pub company. Rab has been refurbishing the pub and has already introduced a range of real ales, featuring a number of Bath Ales' beers.

A Day at the Races

Not the Marx brothers but a genuine day at Bath Races on August 25th sponsored by Bath Ales Brewery. Details of trips will be posted at all the brewery's pubs in Bath and Bristol. Last year's event was a great day out so this year is sure to be popular, so book early.

Other summer events featuring Bath Ales include the Ashton Court Music Festival in Bristol on the 22nd and 23rd July, the WOMAD festival from 28th to 29th July in Reading, and the Bristol Organic Festival on the Harbourside at the start of September.

I would once again like thank Bath Ales for their invaluable help and support in making this year's Bristol Beer Festival such a success. The brewery once again demonstrated its support for CAMRA locally by

Butcombe Brunel

BUTCOMBE BRUNEL, a 5 per cent IPA, made its appearance late last year as the official beer for Brunel's 200th anniversary – a year long celebration of Brunel's achievements. It proved to be so popular that brewing for the cask ale market was extended into April, a month longer than originally intended. Butcombe will be bringing it back as a regular winter beer from October to March.

The bottled version of Brunel, which was made available earlier this year, has also been well received and will continue to be on sale throughout the year at various outlets, including Butcombe's brewery shop.

Margaret Evett

providing help in setting up and taking down the stillage and bar.

I have been the CAMRA Bath Ale's Brewery Liaison Officer (BLO) for many years and have enjoyed the task of being the first contact with such an eminent body of men (and women). I have now passed this BLO job onto another member so look out for a new by-line in future Pints Wests.

For further information about Bath Ales beers and pubs, how to organise a tour of the Bath Ales brewery in Warmley, and the opportunity to buy all the brilliant Bath Ales, visit their web site at www.bathales.com.

Steve O'Shea



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

The Hop Pole

Upper Bristol Road, Bath (opposite Victoria Park playground)

The Hare on the Hill

Dove Street, Kingsdown, Bristol

The Merchants Arms

Merchants Road, Hotwells, Bristol

The Salamander

John Street, Bath

The Wellington

Gloucester Road, Horfield, Bristol

The Bridge Inn

Passage Street, Bristol

The Swan

Bath Road, Swineford

Casks and beer boxes available for parties and functions
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www.bathales.co.uk



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THE OLD CROWN

Kelston, near Bath
01225 423032

RING O'BELLS

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

THE SWAN

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PRIDE IN EVERYTHING WE BREW

Warminster Maltings - still in the forefront of the British malting trade

FLOOR MALTINGS are, it seems, in terminal decline. Tower maltings can be quicker and are certainly cheaper, needing far less space and manpower. There are now only two dedicated floor maltings in England – Tuckers and Warminster, and I am now lucky enough to have visited both.

If you have never been to one before, then Tuckers, which has decided to boost its income by going down the tourist trail, is probably the one which will make the process more obvious. Warminster Maltings does not do regular tours, although group visits can be arranged. Andrew Swift and I went as members of the Brewery History Society. We were keen to go for a number of reasons, chief among which was the fact that most local real ale brewers are using their malt.



Chris Garratt and the author admire a floor of organically-grown barley while the rest of the group catch up

Warminster was once a town full of malthouses, and the one in Pound Street was founded in the eighteenth century, but rebuilt in 1879 by the then owners, Morgans. A young man came to work for them who was to change the barley-growing and malting trade forever. His name was Edwin Beaven, a farmer's son who had left school at 13. He realised that one problem with malt was the inconsistency of the barley, which varied from farm to farm in type. Was it possible to breed a barley that would run genetically true? After years of research, he developed Plumage Archer, which was introduced in 1905. It ruled supreme for 50 years. Beaven kept researching, and the room devoted to his work shows him visiting farms at home and abroad, and also his system of test beds. He finally earned an honorary doctorate from Cambridge University for his work.

So famous were Morgans that they were finally acquired by the Guinness family for their London brewery. For fifty years this was a successful partnership. But it is never wise for a company to have one single customer. In 1994 Guinness decided to close the maltings. Head Maltster Chris Garratt was faced with being thrown out of work. Fortunately, Chris led a management buy-out, and the maltings were saved. Their future was



The old buildings are being restored – the old kiln has recently been retiled

made completely secure in 2001, when they were acquired by Hampshire-based barley farmer Robin Appel. He owns the barley variety Maris Otter, now many brewers' favourite barley. Despite floor-malted barley being more expensive, the maltings are flourishing, with customers in many parts of Europe, as well as most of the local real ale brewers. While we were there, we saw two pallets ready to be sent to France. Several different kinds of malt were on the pallet, and this is one of the advantages of using a small operation – both Tuckers and Warminster can supply small quantities, essential for home brewers and micro-breweries. They can dry organically-grown barley, which needs to be kept separate. So some farmers, not least a certain well-known royal farmer from near Tetbury, are bringing their crops to Warminster. But the malt is more expensive. "Is floor-malted barley superior to tower-malted?" I asked Chris Garratt. Recent research, conducted by an independent laboratory, seems to indicate that, for reasons no one at present understands, it is. So far, most of the floor-malted barleys are outperforming the tower-malted ones, with Maris Otter a clear winner.

Warranty of Origin

For the above reasons, Warminster Maltings is introducing, from 2007, a new scheme, inspired by the French Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée, called the "Warranty of Origin" label. Brewers will be able to specify precisely the barley they use, chosen by variety, geographical domain, soil type, husbandry best practice, farm assurance, and harvest quality criteria. The following step-by-step guide will then apply.

- Robin Appel selects suitable farms with a proven track record.
- A crop log for each farm is maintained by Warminster Maltings.
- Brewers have on-line access to their bespoke crop log.
- Certified seed is supplied to the farmers by

Robin Appel.

- Crops are inspected in the field and recorded by Warminster Maltings.
- Barley is sampled at harvest and quality tested by Warminster Maltings.
- Brewers are notified as each bespoke crop of barley is made into malt.
- Each delivery of malt carries a numbered Certificate of Compliance.

So if a brewer says he is using only local ingredients, he will be able to justify that claim. Participating breweries will be licensed to use the "Warranty of Origin" logo on the bottle or even the pump clip.

With the increasing demand for local and organically-grown produce, there is no doubt this is going to be an asset for real ale brewers



as word of this scheme spreads. The question is, what effect will it have on the big boys? Who would have thought, a few years ago, that micro-breweries producing real ale, would have started to eat into the massive empires of the multi-national breweries? Yet their refusal to allow guest beers in some of their pubco pubs is a measure of their concern. Certainly the regional breweries will have to sit up and take notice. Tuckers and Warminster are working at full capacity. With the Warranty of Control and the increasing possibility that floor-malted malt is simply better, might we see a revival of this ancient craft?

Kirsten Elliott

More information on the Warranty of Origin can be obtained from Head Maltster Chris Garratt – his e-mail is Chris.Garratt@warminster-malt.co.uk – or from their web site at warminster-malt.co.uk.



Blindman's Brewery – proof that small is beautiful

WHEN Andrew Swift and I decided to write the history of the pubs in Bath, we decided not to get involved in breweries – that, it seemed, was a subject in its own right. Mike Bone, from Saltford, has proved just what a fascinating story it is, and we could not compete with his extensive knowledge. But we soon found that we had to know something about the brewing trade, so we enthusiastically went on brewery visits.

As anyone who has been on a brewery trip knows (and that probably includes most readers of this journal) the one thing that breweries have in common (apart from making beer) is that no two are alike. As a historian and photographer, I probably found the visit to Palmer's Brewery at Bridport the most interesting, with much of the old equipment still in use, or only recently made redundant (and still kept in working order in case of emergencies). But the one that turned out to be the biggest surprise was Blindman's.



Paul Edney and his audience giving beer some serious attention

Once a micro-brewery starts turning out several beers, how often do you hear the plea, "If only we had more space, we could turn out more regular beers." Get to a certain output, it seems, and expansion is the only way forward. Thus, given Blindman Brewery's excellent output of regular real ales in addition to monthly specials plus a regular beer for The Raven, in Queen Street, Bath, I naturally assumed that the visit, organised by Tim Bethune of the Old Green Tree, would be to fairly sizable premises. So it came as a considerable surprise to find myself standing outside a very small converted milking parlour on a working farm, and, once inside, to find that our small minibus load filled most of the available space. Micro-breweries don't come much more micro than Blindman's.

The brewery was started in 2002 by retired naval officer David Capps-Tunwell. Not only did he live at Blindman's Cottage, he was also going into the brewing business totally blind – hence the name. After two successful years, he decided to retire to France, and sold to the current owners, Paul Edney and Lloyd Chamberlain. Both were experi-



Some of the Old Green Tree party with Paul and Lloyd of Blindman's Brewery

enced brewers and both came from another Somerset village, Rode. Between them, they have made Blindman's Brewery a resounding success. Much of this is down to the dedication to constant monitoring of the brewing process.

Paul Edney's explanation of how beer is made is one of the best I have heard, and his devotion to maintaining the highest standards is, to him, simply a natural part of the brewing process. But the secret ingredient for Blindman's beers may be due to having its own spring further down the field. Like everything else at this brewery, the water quality is constantly monitored. In addition, all other

ingredients are procured locally where possible – so malt naturally comes from Warminster Maltings. Finally, there is the efficient organisation required to produce the range of beers from this compact five-barrel plant, and then to transport it to the many pubs now demanding their output.

Our visit was enlivened by the cows outside, who seemed to appreciate the gentle smell of brewing emanating from the ex-dairy and were keen to join us – if necessary by chewing their way in. The evening was rounded off by a visit to the Pub at Wanstrow – that's its name by the way – where a substantial buffet had been laid on for us, and



An interested observer tries to join the party

if, by any strange chance, you had had enough of beer, there was an excellent range of wines.

Kerstin Elliott

The Eldon House

FOR a long time after I moved to Bristol in the mid 1980s, the Eldon House pub was a source of great frustration for me. Situated in a prime location close to Clifton and the Triangle, it always seemed like a missed opportunity to me.

It was still owned by Usher's in those days, and suffered from a serious lack of investment. It went through Courage, Grand Met, Scottish Courage and was the subject of a long-running lease dispute when in the hands of Innspired. And all through this time, the whole pub smacked of a lack of investment, and of game licencees making the best of a bad job.

However, over the last couple of years things have started to improve to the point where, just recently, the pub has been taken over by Rab (who readers may well know from his association with the Bridge Inn in Passage Street, Central Bristol).

For those who don't know it, the Eldon House (pictured) is an end-of-terrace pub in the cul de sac opposite QEH school on Jacobs Wells Road. It is well worth a visit. It has had a lick of paint, with a simple cream and green décor and bare floorboards. Traditional old-



fashioned pub is what Rab seems to do best, and he seems to have it nailed here too. The food is simple but good value, and there is a real sense of quiet courtesy about the place.

Although technically a free house, it benefits from Rab's strong links with Bath Ales Brewery, and has two or three Bath Ales beers, as well as their organic lager available at all times. On my visit recently, the Wild Hare was so good I'm surprised the picture that accompanies this piece is even remotely in focus.

Duncan Shine

Island in the sea

By your Nailsea, Clevedon, Backwell & District team of correspondents

Martyn Howell reports

(Covering an area including the Backwell Village Club, George Inn and New Inn at Backwell; Dewdrop Inn at Flax Bourton; and Old Barn at Wraxall.)

At Backwell Village Club real ale interest continues to stride forward following last winter's "Village Pump" beer festival. Many new relationships have been formed with "local" breweries who deliver direct and whose cost prices are highly competitive, enabling the club to maintain excellent retail prices.

Amongst those regulars are Archer's, Bath Ales, Berrow, Bristol Beer Factory, Cotleigh, Goff's, Moles, Newman's, Palmer's and Wadworth, as well as old favourite Sharp's whose range of superb beers has been enhanced by the improved variety.

Village Pump "beer of the festival", Studland Bay Wrecked from Isle of Purbeck Brewery, has twice made a welcome re-appearance at the club although not easily deliverable to our area. As a result of the increased interest in real ale the club also plans brewery visits in the near future, several of which have been arranged in tandem with the support offered by many of the above. A further club festival is likely to be held later in the year.

More on the rest of "my pubs" in the next issue.

Martyn Howell

Pete Dommett reports

(Covering an area including the Campbells Landing, Little Harp, Moon & Sixpence, Old Inn, Royal Oak, Salthouse and Triangle Club at Clevedon; and Drum & Monkey at Kenn.)

On the 7th, 8th and 9th of April the Clevedon Triangle Club held a beer festival with the support of CAMRA and club member John Figures, and a number of CAMRA members and others enjoyed a good selection of real ales and music, and look forward to future festivals at the club.

Clevedon Beer Festival

Clevedon Rotary Club, in conjunction with Clevedon Cricket Club, are holding a beer festival on the first weekend in September. The festival will be held at the cricket club itself on Diall Hill and will run on Friday evening, Saturday afternoon and evening, and Sunday lunchtime.

There promises to be a cricketing theme to the 22 beers on offer with a Somerset XI (ten beers from ten Somerset breweries plus an 'overseas' star) competing against a 'Rest of the West' XI (made up from Devon, Dorset, Cornwall, Wiltshire and Gloucestershire brews). It's hoped that there will be less well-known beers from the well-known breweries and some popular beers from the smaller outfits.

In addition to the obvious attraction of the

beer, there will be cricket action during Saturday afternoon and live music on the Saturday evening – the result being a celebration of West Country ale that will bowl you over!

Pete Dommett

Alan Sibley reports

(Covering an area including the Blue Flame, Friendship, Grove Sports Centre, Nailsea & Backwell Rugby Club, and Ring of Bells at Nailsea; Lord Nelson at Cleeve; and Claverham Hall at Claverham.)

As it is on my route to Claverham Hall, I decided to offer Pints West to the **Lord Nelson** at Cleeve, a large family-oriented pub on the A370, owned by Greene King and branded under their 'Hungry Horse' brand. The manager, Mark Green, who has been there for a year moved from another 'Hungry Horse' pub, the Albion at Portishead. The beer offer was the normal Greene King range of IPA, Abbot Ale and Old Speckled Hen, with no guest policy.

The **Claverham Village Hall 'Club Bar'** is open to the public and is proud to report that in February they achieved 'Cask Marque' status in addition to being in the CAMRA Good Beer Guide 2006. In keeping with their adventurous guest policy I sampled Harviestoun Belgian White on my recent visit. Their regular ale and best seller continues to be Butcombe bitter.

They are of course gearing up for the "**Claverham Froth**" beer festival from 30th June to 2nd July, which this year is on the theme of 'The Wars of the Roses', featuring 35 carefully selected ales from Yorkshire and Lancashire breweries. The British Institute of Facilities Management are proud to support Yeo Valley Lions in the running of this annual event and fundraiser.

At the **Grove Social Club** Claire Nichols has taken over as Manager since February. The regular beer is Courage Best, and the guest which is changed from time to time according to demand was London Pride.

The **Nailsea & Backwell Rugby Club** has reinstated its guest beer, which is regularly sourced from the Wickwar Brewing Company. On my last visit in March it was Rite Flanker.

Nailsea & Backwell festival

This year's Beer and Cider Festival takes place from Friday 14 July to Sunday 16 July. Expect the format to be similar to last year. There will certainly be wide range of beers and ciders and, using the feedback from last year, the return of favourites such as Caledonian Deuchars IPA, Butcombe Gold, and both Orchard's Wye Valley and Thatcher's Cheddar Valley ciders.

"*Get Kids Going!*", a national charity which gives disabled children the wonderful opportunity of participating in sport, is the

chosen charity for the 2006 event.

Headline bands will again include Venus Suite, plus Clause40 – the rugby club's very own blues and rock band. The full line-up will be announced shortly on www.appelfest.uk.com.

Alan Sibley

Laurie Gibney reports

(Covering an area including the Courtyard Wine Bar, Mizzymead Social Club, Masonic Hall, Moorend Spout, Olde Farnhouse, Queen's Head, Sawyers Arms, White Lion at Nailsea; New Battle Axe at Wraxall; Star at Tickenham; Angel and Bird In Hand at Long Ashton; Abbey Wood Bar at Filton; Cross Keys at Bath; and Bristol Cruising Club at Redcliffe.)

At the **Mizzymead Social Club** members and friends enjoy a changing guest real ale to compliment Courage Best and Butcombe Bitter. The changing guests have recently included Adnams Broadside, Bateman's Spring Goddess, Cameron's White Rabbit, and Marston's Pedigree. Once each month live entertainment is provided on Saturday evenings. On the 24th June Stormin' Norman entertains with 60's music, on the 8th July Gary Nelson sings in "Rat Pack" style, and on 23 September Brad Stevens returns with 50's to 90's music.

Louise Thomas, licensee of the **White Lion** in Nailsea, has introduced a new menu which for a small pub is quite extensive, but as it is summer-time the seating almost doubles when the garden comes into full use. The menu includes eleven main dishes including vegetarian options priced from £5.50 to £7.50 with four chalkboard specials from £5.25 to £9.95 including steaks, pies, chilli, lasagne, scampi and sausage & mash. The five starters range from £2.75 to £3.25. Snacks from £3.50 to £4.25 include baguettes, jacket potatoes, omelettes or fry-ups! The Sunday lunchtime menu on a recent visit included turkey or beef roast, scampi, and the vegetarian options were lasagne, or brie & redcurrant tart – priced from £5.25 to £5.75. Plus, you are able to wash this down with three real ales, Courage Best, Butcombe Bitter or a changing guest ale, which at the time of writing was the very popular local Newman's Wolver's Ale.

Richard Beaton and Lucy King at the **Queen's Head** in Nailsea town centre are progressing steadily with fitting new kitchens which they plan to bring into use in September. T-bone and other steaks will probably feature strongly on the new menu instead of the bistro-style menu mentioned previously in Pints West. A new wine selection has been introduced, but a changing guest ale is still awaited to compliment Greene King's IPA and Old Speckled Hen. Ideas for a possible new name for the pub are welcome. It has an old finger-post signpost outside and the name

"The Signpost Inn" has been suggested.

The **New Battle Axe** at Wraxall, to compliment their carvery, has introduced a two-for-one menu priced from £6.80 to £9.95 which includes sausage and mash with onion gravy, a giant Yorkshire pudding, rump steak, and other pub-grub favourites. Real ales are Courage Best and the local Newman's Wolver's Ale.

Ron Peters at the **Sawyers Arms** in Nailsea supported National Pubs Week in February by putting on a mini beer festival, supplementing the usually available Bath Ales Gem and Courage Best with Courage Directors, Greene King IPA, Newman's Wolver's Ale, and Young's Best Bitter.

Away from Nailsea & District

On Friday 3 March some CAMRA members and friends enjoyed a "Westbury (on Trym) Wobble" which was led by Malcolm Craig, a "local". The bus journey took 75 minutes from Temple Meads arriving at 18.15 (45 minutes late!) outside the **Post Office Tavern** which I found too smoky for me. At the **Victoria** I enjoyed a good pint of Wadworth 6X although the pub was busy with diners.

The **Mouse** was almost empty, with Courage Best, and Everard's Sunchaser which was a popular choice for our group of nine. Unfortunately the Codrington Codger from the new Cotswold Spring brewery had just run out. The Mouse has made an effort to go for real ale and food with a smartening up of the place, so please give it you support.

We ended up at the **White Horse** in the High Street. I considered the two little rooms reasonably smoke-free, unlike the big room. I enjoyed Sharp's Cornish Coaster at £1.95. They also had Sharp's Doom Bar, Butcombe Bitter and Bass at £2.45 – all on gravity.

The real ale at the Wetherspoon's **Commercial Rooms** in Bristol's Corn Street had perhaps not been up to standard a while back, thought it should now be much better due to the enthusiasm of the new manager Steve Binns, who walked into the Commercial Rooms off the street one day and asked if they had any jobs going. They took him on, trained him and after periods at the Commercial Rooms, the Van Dyke Forum at Fishponds and St Georges Hall at Redfield Steve, returned to the Commercial Rooms as manager. Asked how trade was since the introduction of the no-smoking ban last year, Steve said that there had been a change in clientele and that turnover was now higher than before the ban.

A visit a to **Smiles Brewery Tap** a little while ago found Smiles Best (4.1%), Oakham Ales Kaleidoscope (4.7%) and Barnstormer (3.7%) — don't tell Bath Ales! — from Frankton Bagby in Warwickshire. Well worth a visit.

The **Angel** at Long Ashton is a beautiful old pub well worth your support for its real ales, ciders and good food, the latter keeping licensees Tony Vile and Sian Powell in the kitchen for a lot of the time. On a recent visit the real ales included Courage Best, Butcombe Bitter, Bass and the guest ale Newman's Wolver's Ale. They have changing ciders on, and I found were Thatcher's Traditional, soon to be followed by Thatcher's Heritage. I was also please to see that a flashing games machine in the corner of the "Smoke Room" had been replaced by a real traditional pub game – table skittles. What more could you ask of a traditional pub!

When in Bath I recommen you visit the **Cross Keys** on Midford Road at Combe Down which offers real ale, real food and a real welcome from Mark and Caroline Palmer, who have been landlord and landlady for many years, ably assisted by the jovial Keith. An extensive menu at reasonable prices is supplemented by chalkboard specials, and a no-smoking dining area is available. Six real ales were available on my last visit, Courage Best

at £2.22 per pint, Brakspear Bitter (3.4%) and JW Lees Greengate Pale Ale (3.4%) – my favourite of the day – at £2.50, Bass (4.4%) at £2.56, Butcombe Bitter (4%) and Wadworth 6X (4.3%) at £2.64. Note that prices are calculated to the nearest "real" penny, not to the nearest 5p or 10p as in some bars! The "guests" were the Butcombe Bitter and Greengate Pale Ale which were soon to be changed for Bateman's Valiant and Marston's Pedigree.

Laurie Gibney

The Victoria, Clifton



EMPLOYEES of Solomon Hare in Clifton, and people nostalgic for the old Clifton open-air swimming pool, will know where the Victoria in Southleigh Road is, but many others may not. It's tucked away behind St Pauls Road, not far from Racks. The pub, unsurprisingly given the name, dates back to Victorian times when every pub was someone's local and there were no 'destination venue pubs' or 'themed bar/bistros'.

That's where the Victoria sits best, and in truth it has suffered in recent decades as the world moved on and it seemed to get left behind a bit. In recent years it has gone through several changes of management, including a time as a retro music bar. None of the incarnations has really hit the spot.

Until now. The Victoria has become part of the small but burgeoning empire of Glen Dawkins. Glenn also has the excellent Hillgrove Porter Stores in Kingsdown, as well as the Miner's Arms in Mina Road, St Werburgh's. His pubs are characterised by simple but welcoming décor, and a strong emphasis on good beer, and the Victoria is no exception.

Under the watchful eye of manager Francesca Arnold, the Vic has recently reopened after an extensive refurbishment, leaving a surprisingly light and airy feel to what, candidly, could be a bit dingy in the past.

When I visited, I was a bit stressed out about a few things (you know the sort of thing: global warming, the wife's running off with our Relate counsellor and – worst of all – the closure of Gale's brewery). However, fifteen minutes sat supping the Matthews Brassknocker and I was as chilled as the excellent bottle of white wine that my wife and Tarquin were sharing at another table.

Actually, the wine selection is excellent, but I was most impressed with the beers on offer. As well as Matthews, they were serving a range of beers including Goff's Joustier and Butcombe, and had a good range of malt whiskies and whiskeys too.

Given the location, the Victoria is a pub that you'll only ever discover by accident, or by recommendation. Either way, it thoroughly repays the effort to seek it out.

Duncan Shine

Nailsea and Backwell Beer and Cider Festival

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Beer festivals

Bitton

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The third annual Bitton Beer Festival will be taking place from 9th to 11th June (Friday 6 pm to 9pm, Saturday noon to 8pm, Sunday noon to 5pm). Entry is free, although spaces are limited for each day.

The range of ales will focus on local breweries, and takes place in the surroundings of their 1860's heritage railway station. This will also give you the opportunity to view their vintage diesel and steam locomotives

from the covered drinking area which has full views along the platform.

Claverham

This year's Claverham beer festival – their fourth, and nicknamed "FROTHi" – is to be held from 30th June to 2nd July in the enlarged Claverham Village Hall, with more beer, wine, cider and grub and more musicians than ever.

This year's festival has a "War of the Roses" theme, with a great choice of beers from Yorkshire and Lancashire. Just to whet your appetites, beers you can expect to find include Special Ale from the Black Sheep brewery; Premire Bitter, Pride of Pendle and possibly Pendle Witches Brew from Moorhouses; Original Bitter and Lancaster Bomber from Thwaites; Old Peculier, that old favourite from Theakston's; Courage Directors; and plenty of others from many of the smaller breweries such as Salamander, Porter, Red Rose, Goose Eye and Brown Cow.

CAMRA deal

This year as a special feature the organisers of the Claverham festival are offering CAMRA members a free shuttle bus from Yatton Station to the Village Hall for the Saturday afternoon session only. Just call 07799 361 897 a few minutes before your train arrives and they will be waiting for you with their 12-seater minibus to whisk you the three miles to the hall. And yes, they will take you back afterwards!

Depending on the success of this trial it may be repeated so do think seriously about

making best use of this facility.

Chipping Sodbury

The weekend of the 14th and 15th of July sees the return of the South Cotswold Beer Festival. In its eleventh year now, this is organised by the Yate and District Rotary Club in association with the Chipping Sodbury Rugby Club.

This is a big event held at the rugby club's grounds with lots of real ales available in the marquee and plenty of entertainments laid on. There is even free camping available – though due to increasing demand you must book first – so those of you who live some distance away can stay overnight, or even make a weekend of it.

Tickets, which will not be available on the door, should be on sale at the Tourist Information Centre in Chipping Sodbury, and Any Sports in Yate. You can also write off for them at the address in the advert below. Visit their web site at www.bs37.com/beer for further information, including how to get your free camping pass.

The annual beer festival is the club's main fund-raising event, with profits going to worthy charities.

Keynsham

Jemma Walsh is the sales executive at the Bristol Beer Factory. She also happens to be the social secretary at Keynsham Rugby Club and in that role will be organising a mini beer festival on Saturday 12th August. This will be their first festival at the rugby club, and the plan is to include only local beers – at £1.50 a pint.

Entrance is £5 on the door, with children (who get their own entertainment all afternoon in the form of a bouncy castle and other games) getting in free. For the rest there will be a barbecue on the patio and live country & western music.

The club does a lot of charity work for "Trust PA". Peter Andre Bundell was one of their players who died after severely damaging his spine whilst playing for Keynsham. His parents set up a charity to raise money for sporting injuries, and to date has raised several thousands of pounds. Half of the proceeds from this festival will be donated to his trust.

SP

Presented by Yeo Valley Lions & Claverham Village Enterprises



claverham BEER festival 2006 the **FROTHi**

Village Hall 30th June – 2nd July

Friday night – Country Sat night – 80s Rock

Clare Gaynor & Big River Band **Red Rooster**

Sat pm – Folk and Dance

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Visit www.bs37.com/beer for further information.

More festival news

THIS year's **Devizes Beer Festival** has been cancelled. The outdoor event, which attracted 1,400 visitors last July, has fallen victim to new licensing laws and the closure of public toilets at the Wharf. Whereas it only cost £10 for a licence last year, new rules would have seen the figure rise to £2,000, with another £1,000 having to be found for hiring toilets. However, the organisers are determined that the festival will return in 2007.

Every spring, the South West Branch of the Society of Independent Brewers (SIBA) holds a beer festival at **Tucker's Maltings** in Newton Abbot. A showcase for beers brewed in the South West (Cornwall, Devon, Somerset, Dorset, Bristol, Wiltshire, and the Channel Isles), with most of the brewers turning up in person – and even serving behind the bar – it's a must for anyone interested in seeing the full range of beers brewed in the region.

The festival is only five minutes' walk from the station, with fast, frequent trains from Bristol, and the added attraction of tours round one of England's last traditional maltings. This year's festival was held on 20-22 April, with over 200 beers available from more than 40 breweries. Turning up at opening time on the first day, our first half-pints were pulled by Stig Andersen from Stonehenge Brewery and drunk in the company of Paul Edney and Lloyd Chamberlain from Blindman's ... and so it went on. It's not many festivals where you get to chat to so many of the people who actually brew the beer.

It is the only festival organised by brewers themselves; in other regions SIBA events are held as part of CAMRA beer festivals. Before the event opened, 60 specially selected judges from all over the country tasted the beers on offer, and came up with the following list of prizewinners:

Champion Beer: Archer's IPA 4.2%
Reserve Champion: Bath Ales SPA 3.7%
Standard Bitters (up to 3.9% ABV)
 Gold: Bath Ales SPA 3.7%
 Silver: Bristol Beer Factory Red 3.8%
 Newman's Red Stag 3.6%
Best Bitters (4.0% to 4.5% ABV)
 Gold: Archer's IPA 4.2%
 Silver: Dorset Weymouth JD 1742 4.2%
 Bronze: Bristol Beer Factory Sunrise 4.4%
Premium Bitters (4.6% to 4.9% ABV)
 Gold: Cottage Golden Arrow 4.5%
 Silver: South Hams Eddystone 4.8%
 Bronze: Hidden Brewery Hidden Spring 4.5%
Strong Bitters (5.0% and over)
 Gold: Archer's Crystal Clear 5.0%
 Silver: Moor Summerland Gold 5.0%
 Bronze: Bath Ales Wild Hare 5.0%
Porters, Stouts & Old Ales
 Gold: O'Hanlon's Port Stout 4.8%
 Silver: Downton Chimera IPA 6.8%
 Bronze: Country Life Country Bumpkin 6.0%
Milds
 Gold: Moor Milly's Mild 4.0%
 Silver: Branscombe Vale Hell's Belles 4.8%
 Bronze: Teignworthy Martha's Mild 5.3%

Speciality Beers

Gold: Skinner's Heligan Honey 4.0%
 Silver: O'Hanlon's Wheat Beer 4.0%
 Bronze: Organic Brewhouse Charlie's Pride Lager 5.3%

Bottled Beers

Gold: Hop Back Entire Stout
 Silver: O'Hanlon's Port Stout
 Bronze: Skinner's Cornish Lager

Two Bath beer festivals to look out for over the summer: the **Raven** (Bath & Borders Pub of the Year) will be holding its first beer festival on 23-25 June, when its normal range of five pumps will be increased to ten. The theme of the festival will be football, with Tim Perry aiming for all the beers to have a football theme. However, there won't be any wide-screen TV – no TV of any kind, in fact – so, although there'll be plenty of pubs nearby screening world cup matches, there'll be nothing to interfere with appreciation of the beer.

The **Royal Oak** is holding a beer and folk fest, using their newly opened garden, on 13-16 July. No further details are known at present, though there'll be plenty of beers on offer, some of which you almost certainly won't have tried before. And, if the standard of the music sessions that take place every Wednesday are anything to go by, the music should be pretty good as well. Although the Royal Oak is a mile from Bath city centre, it's only two minutes' walk from Oldfield Park station, which has an hourly service from Bristol.

The excellent mini-beer festival at the **Bag O'Nails** in Hotwells (with over 40 beers on offer) got a great write-up in the prestigious weekend *Guardian* colour guide on 22 April.

With summer on the way, a day out at a beer festival, combined with a tour of Good Beer Guide-listed pubs in an unfamiliar town, plus a spot of sightseeing, could make an ideal day out. The three festivals listed below can all be reached easily by train from Bristol, and all the festival sites are a maximum of 20 minutes' walk from the station.

For details of the festivals, see listings in *What's Brewing* (all CAMRA members receive monthly copies). Below are listed approximate rail journey times from Bristol and cheapest available fares. Bear in mind that these fares may not be available on all trains, some may have to be booked in advance, and also that it is generally cheaper to travel on Saturday than on Friday. It is also useful to know that on First Great Western services, groups of three or four people can travel together at off-peak times for the price of two.

June 1-3 SOUTHAMPTON. Approx journey time: 1hr 40min. Cheapest fare £17 (APEX advance).

July 7-9 HEREFORD. Approx journey time: 1hr 40min (change at Newport). Cheapest fare

£16 (day return).

August 17-19 WORCESTER. Approx journey time 1hr 30min. Cheapest fare £16 (supersaver).

The cheapest day return fare to Paddington for the **Great British Beer** festival on 1-5 August is an APEX advance at £20.50.

Many readers will not need any persuading to visit the **Somerset Beer Festival** on the West Somerset Railway on 16-17 September, even though travelling by train from Bath or Bristol involves a (short) bus journey from Taunton to Bishop's Lydeard. Just a reminder, though, that the buffet cars on the West Somerset Railway serve real ale all year round, and that the current Somerset Pub of the Year is the **Star** on Mill Lane in Watchet – a handy place to break your journey on the WSR.

Many readers will be familiar with the **Bridge at Topsham** (also easily accessible by train from Bristol). As well as having been in the same family for over a century and included in CAMRA's National Inventory of Pub Interiors of Outstanding Historical Interest, it has also been honoured by a visit from Her Majesty. It is also pioneering a new way of serving real ale – in thirds. The law dictates that draught beer or cider be served in measures of a third or half of a pint or multiples thereof. We're all familiar with halves, but thirds?...

The only time I've come across them was way back in the early seventies, when the landlord of a pub in deepest Devon would only sell Taunton Vintage Cider in thirds of a pint. Now, Caroline Cheffers-Heard, the landlady of the Bridge, has revived this little-known quirk in the law to give customers the chance to try more real ales without getting legless. For £2.50, you can buy thirds of three different beers at the Bridge, all served in government-stamped glasses. This seems an excellent idea, especially for pub beer festivals, or when a wide-range of beers is on offer. Let's hope others are inspired to take up her idea.

Andrew Swift

Shipham Beer Festival

SHIPHAM, a village 15 miles south of Bristol, is playing host to a beer, wine and cider festival at the new Village Hall, as part of the first Mendip Midsummer Festival of Food and Drink. There should be 15 to 20 real ales, profiling two or three local breweries plus a range of national beers. Other attractions include a farmers' market, hog roast and barn dance.

The event takes place from 30th June until 2nd July. It is hoped that this will become an annual event.

For more information visit the web site at www.shiphamhall.co.uk.

Globalisation in brewing

BACK in 1989 when the Monopolies and Mergers Commission (MMC) published its report into "Beer Supply in the UK" all the talk was about "The Big Six". These were the half dozen mega-brewers, Allied, Bass, Courage, Scottish & Newcastle, Whitbread and Watneys, who between them had 84 per cent of the UK beer market.

The recommendations of the MMC when translated into the Beer Orders meant that these voracious giants sold off most of their pub estate. Some of them even gave up brewing. Today, nearly all trace of those Big Six has disappeared from the UK brewing scene. Only Scottish & Newcastle remain – an amalgamation of two of the original Big Six who along the way also swallowed and then closed the brewing capacity of Watney which had become Grand Metropolitan. Allied, Bass and Whitbread has exited brewing altogether.

Today we have the Big Four: **Carlsberg** (owners of Tetley); **Coors** (owners of the old Burton breweries of Bass and Allied); **InBev** (formerly Interbrew and owners of former Whitbread breweries in Whitbread in Magor and Samlesbury and the Bass brewery in Glasgow); and **Scottish & Newcastle** with four breweries remaining at Worton

Grange near Reading, the old Federation Brewery in Gateshead, John Smiths in Tadcaster and the Royal Brewery in Manchester.

But as well as these four breweries being the big boys on the UK brewing stage, they also play on the world stage making up the Big Seven, along with Anheuser-Busch, South African Breweries (aka SAB Miller) and Heineken.

These Big Seven now operate worldwide. Scottish & Newcastle, for instance, gets less than a third of its profits from its UK brewing operations and is number one brewer in France, India, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Kazakhstan and number two in Belgium, Finland, Greece, Portugal and Ukraine – not to mention Russia and China.

The final decision about whether the Tetley Brewery will close will be made in Copenhagen (HQ of Carlsberg) whilst what happens to Pilsner Urquell will be decided at SAB Miller's HQ in London. The bosses of the Big Seven move the brewery playing-counters around like players in a giant game of Monopoly. Local brands to them are national brands to any normal person and becoming the lowest-cost producer is their aim. InBev is now longer the world's local brewer – they have proved that by their decisions

to close Boddingtons, Hoegaarden and the Branik Brewery in the Czech Republic.

SAB Miller has shown its scant commitment to authenticity by their decision to brew Pilsner Urquell (the original Pilsner beer) under licence in other countries such as Poland. In order to counter this new breed of global brewers, UK beer consumers need to form allies with similar beer consumer groups in other parts of Europe and beyond. This is why CAMRA has formed the **European Beer Consumers Union** with 12 other European national beer consumer groups.

Just as the Big Six made their name by brewery closures and the axing of local beer brands, so the global Big Seven are cutting a swathe through the local breweries of the world. Carlsberg is expected to cut by half its breweries worldwide, even closing its brewery in Copenhagen where it was all started by JC Jacobson. The original buildings will remain as museum pieces but the bulk of the land will be sold off for development. The company has opened a small brewery that will produce speciality brews on the site that will be part of the visitors centre but the main Carlsberg brands will be brewed elsewhere in Denmark. Other Carlsberg plants are likely to close in the future. Although Carlsberg's CEO, Nils S Andersen, has said that he has now plans to close either of the company's breweries in the UK – Tetley and Carlsberg Northampton.

Iain Loe

The Windmill Inn

PORTISHEAD



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RCH Pitchfork and 2 other guest ales.

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- including children's menu -
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All day Saturday, Sunday & Bank Holidays

The Great British Beer Festival 2006

The Great British Beer Festival will be hosted this year at Earls Court between 1st and 5th August, following 14 successful years at London Olympia.

Over 47,000 people attended last year's 'Showcase of British Beer'. This event has now outgrown the London Olympia venue and will move to Earls Court allowing us to offer more choice, variety and beer than ever before!

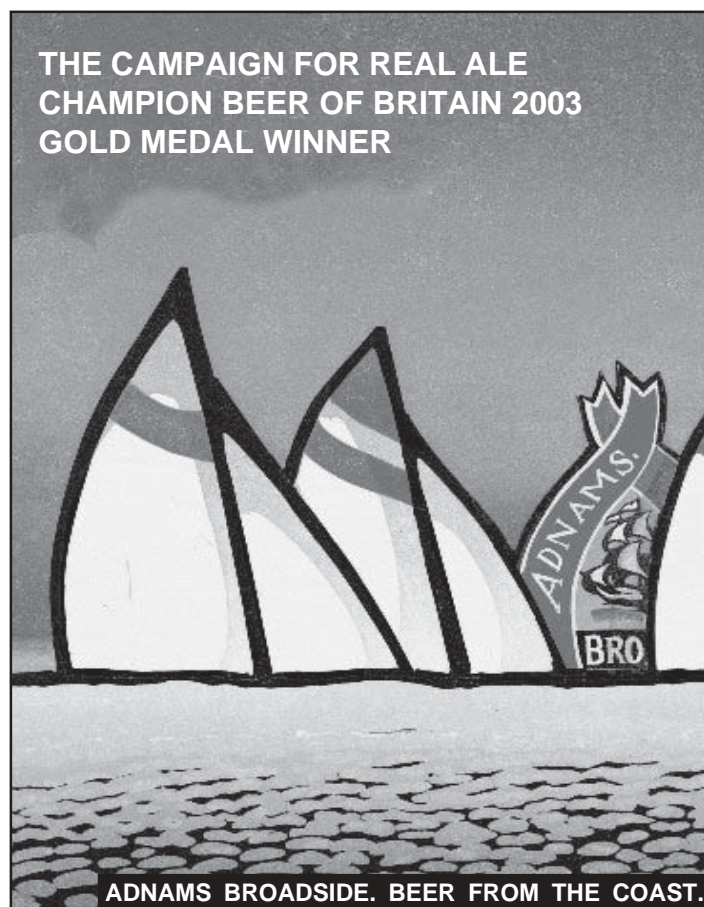
Tony Jerome, CAMRA Marketing Manager said, "We are all looking forward to moving the Great British Beer Festival to Earls Court. We have had some very successful festivals at Olympia over the recent years and following last year's record attendance we felt this was the idea time to move to a bigger venue. This success is a testament to how hard the 1,000 volunteers work at the Great British Beer Festival."

Over 700 tasty tipples from the smallest microbreweries and large regional brewers have been handpicked for visitors to try. More than ever before! These include wheat beers, golden ales, stouts, porters, bitters, milds, bottle-conditioned beers, ciders, perries and real lagers from all over the world.

The festival is not only about the ale! You will also be able to enjoy food, live music, entertainment, games, tombolas, and quizzes in the comfort of a family-friendly atmosphere. Why not catch up and socialise with friends, unwind after work, or just soak up the festival atmosphere!

Other Festival Highlights

- Family Room – all those under the age of 18 must remain in the Family Room throughout the festival and must be supervised by a family member.
- Tutored Beer Tastings – why not learn to appreciate the different tastes and flavours by attending one of our tutored beer tastings? But be



warned – places sell out fast!

○ Corporate Hospitality – for work colleagues or clients, we are able to offer a variety of packages to suit most tastes and budgets. Please email georgina.rudman@camra.org.uk.

Opening Times & Prices

Tues 1st August, 5pm to 10.30pm

CAMRA members £5, non-members £7

Wed 2nd, Thurs 3rd, Fri 4th August, noon to 10.30pm

CAMRA members £5, non-members £7

Sat 5th August, 11am to 7pm

CAMRA members £4, non-members £6

There is a further discount of £1 on any single-session ticket ordered before 21st July 2006.

Season tickets valid for duration of the festival

CAMRA members £15, non-members £17.50

(There is no advance-booking discount for season tickets.)

For more up to date information on the Great British Beer Festival please visit www.gbbf.org.

The Bag O'Nails

141 St. George's Road, Hotwells,
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Bristol & District CAMRA

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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

Smoking ban

Following up Richard Brooks' article on the front page of issue 69 of Pints West. Over a couple of pints of Smiles I began to wonder what the regulars at the Kings Arms would have thought about the smoking ban if implemented 600 years ago. I imagined all sorts of illuminated faces with opposing points of views by the inglenooks.

Of course I quickly came to my senses and declined the third real ale, perhaps I should have been drinking some low-alcohol lager and pretended I was driving home with granny after Sunday lunch, because smoking was not invented 600 years ago... or was it?

I have a theory that smoky caves and smoky, chimneyless abodes were part of our evolution and that all the side effects of smoke inhalation have been with mankind from the very beginnings of time. I also reason that humanity's penchant for the combined atmosphere of smoke and alcohol is more engrained than we think.

So a bit like 'clunk click every trip' this is just another phase of mass control and five years down the line we will no more walk into a pub with a lit cigarette than forget to put our seat belt on for the journey home!

Will Nicholls,
Ex-smoker,
Landlord of the Kings Arms at Litton
(www.the-kings-arms.co.uk)

Hi Guys & Gals,

Great rag! I have had some very animated discussions in quite a few real ale pubs when I've heard someone lament that their pub will surely close after the ban. I drive a Rock & Roll tour bus for a living and am in a different town every night and frequently a different country every night. I have seen the ban arrive in Ireland, Italy, Sweden and Norway. For a short time some people stay away from the bar, buy drink from the supermarket and stay in front of the TV. They soon get bored with that and drift back, accepting that they have to

go outside to light up (and socialise with fellow smokers!)

All of a sudden a new group of customers starts to appear, people who previously avoided the smoky atmosphere, diners who wouldn't want their meal spoiled by someone else's smoke, families, etc. Add to that the benefits for those working long hours in smoky conditions.

The main losers will be the bar staff who smoke, as they will no longer be able to light up at the end of the bar every five minutes. My friend was told that he couldn't smoke near the bar (he was about one metre away) by a barmaid that two minutes later stood at the end of the bar (right next to their only real ale pump) and smoked like a chimney along with her fellow bar staff. A case of don't do as I do, do as I tell you!

Alternate between smoking and non-smoking countries and you know which option the majority would prefer. It will also be one less factor which can negatively affect our ale! I'm actually from that ale desert known as Cardiff!

Yours,

Chop!

(The mad Welshman touring the urban jungle, somewhere between LLanfairpwll-gwyngyllgogerychwrdrobwll-llantysiliogogoch and Vladivostok!)

Festival beer scores

What a great 2006 CAMRA Bristol Beer Festival!

By my reckoning there were three 10/10 perfect beers, five 9/10 near-perfections, seven wonderful 8/10ers, three respectable 7s and no duffers. The service was excellent as always, as was the venue. The large seated areas and no music, plus the place seeming half-empty despite all tickets being sold, gave a quiet, almost reflective nature to the proceedings, quite unlike the all-standing, rowdier Bath Beer Festival... and the quality of the pasties almost matched the beer.

My personal best beer of the festival was White Shield 'P2 Stout'. Here are my beer scores and comments:

○ Robinsons 'Old Tom', 8.5%.

Perfect with a Cornish pasty. 10/10.

○ White Shield 'P2 Stout', 8.0%.

Wow. Almost indescribable. This is the multi-Michelin star of the beer world. Light, airy, complex, quality. Could hold a master class in beer making. 10/10.

○ Titanic 'Wreckage', 7.2%.

Like Fred and Ginger, the hop and malt dance on your tongue. Smooth and light, complex, beautiful, just beautiful. One of the best balanced beers I've had. The hop and the malt seem to melt into each other. Almost the best beer of the festival. 10/10.

○ Icen 'Raspberry Wheat', 5.0%.

I have this every year and bring my own blue woad in a bucket to get into the mood. This is warrior brew, designed to be drunk during the many hours hanging around before engaging the Romans. A unique beer that is designed to be drunk by the gallon and whose

affect slowly creeps up on you. Fantastic beer. 9/10.

○ Phoenix 'Wobbly Bob', 6.0%.

A classic beer I've had many times. It's as good as ever. Beautifully balanced, it's sweet, malty, with fruit in the finish. Mouth-wateringly good. 9/10.

○ RCH 'Pitchfork', 4.3%.

Ahhhhh, the taste of spring. Oh that green hop. It's like freshly cut grass. 9/10.

○ RCH 'Firebox', 6.0%.

Another classic from RCH. One of the best session beers you can buy. Drinkable, plenty of this, not too much of that, not too heavy, not too light. Beautiful balance. 9/10.

○ Wessex 'Imperial Russian Stoa', 9.0%.

Note the spelling of Stoa (not Stout), but it's just a gimmick for this is an Imperial Russian stout in its finest traditions, albeit, a little immature in the cask and hence a bit coarse in character, especially in the very bitter aftertaste. 'Massive' is a good word to use here. Liqueurice, toffee, complex malt layers, it just needs a few years in the barrel to knock a few edges off. This is how a mate described it: "An overpowering force of dark flavour, dragging the drinker down into a dark pit of doom bitterness." Yeah, I'll go along with that. 9/10.

○ Icen 'Men of Norfolk', 6.2%.

Should be drunk whilst humming the tune 'Men of Harlick'. Dark brew, prominent coffee flavour, but mild in nature due to the lack of biting hops. Porter-like in character with its smooth thinness. Very nice indeed. 8/10.

○ Dark Star 'Espresso Stout', 4.2%.

Starbucks would make a mint if they sold this in a long glass with ice. Better than any cold coffee you've ever had, and alcoholic to boot. I thought it great. My mate thought it fantastic. 8/10.

○ Downton 'Chimera IPA', 6.8%.

Think cornfield swaying in golden sunshine with a twang on the tongue. Oh my. Beautiful. Hopback Summer Lightning is a good reference point. One is not enough. 8/10.

○ North Cotswold 'Stour Stout', 5%.

A stout for a sunny day. Thin, drinkable, refreshing (for a stout). Not bitter at all, but mildness is a relative term. It's full of tasty ingredients making this a quality beer. 8/10.

○ Sarah Hughes 'Dark Ruby', 6.0%.

A beer that has steadily moved towards a rum porter and is now almost indistinguishable from Bath Ales 'Festivity'. A variable beer, but tonight Sarah is on form after not too hot a showing on several previous occasions. It's lighter and more refreshing than of late, with a strong roasted caramel malt. 8/10.

○ Castle Rock 'Harvest Pale', 3.8%.

This caused an argument as I thought it tasted like Shipstones did in the 70s and my mate who was from around Nottingham area disputed Shipstones ever tasted this good. I am of course right and everyone else is wrong. Hoppy, crisp, refreshing, delicious. 8/10.

○ Cottage 'Norman's Conquest', 7.0%.

Refreshing, mild, very tasty and extremely drinkable. Very much like Cotswold Spring 'Codrington Codger', it even tastes like a 4

The Windmill on Windmill Hill, Bedminster

THE WINDMILL re-opened on 3rd March after a complete re-furbishment by the new owners. This is the second pub for the owners, their first venture being the successful Pipe and Slippers on Cheltenham Road.

We received a warm welcome from Matty, the pubs cellarman, who had been in the business for fifteen years since starting in Lyme Regis and ending up in Bedminster via London. The cask ales were from the Bristol Beer factory (as are those in the Pipe and Slippers) and offered No. 7, Red and Gold, all of which were in excellent condition.

The Windmill is a comfortably spacious and friendly pub built on the side of the steep Windmill Hill, and situated about 40 metres up from the red brick railway arch of Bedminster Station. The pub consists of several areas spread over different levels that lead off of the main bar, with a non-smoking family room, lounge and snug where the wooden floorboards and décor give this clean pub a laid back atmosphere that allows you to relax and enjoy the beer.



As well as the Beer Factory draught ales, there was Bath Ales Organic Lager, Weston's Herefordshire Traditional Scrumpy on hand pump, and a good selection of bottled beers from around the world. The beers are not cheap, with No. 7 at £2.60 a pint and a Belgium Duvel at £3.50 a bottle, but the beer quality was excellent during our visit. The cellar is chilled, and Matty informed us that the beers are so popular, that a cask of No. 7 lasts about one and a half days. He said that the Gold might be replaced with Bristol Beer Factory's Sunrise in the near future.

There is an excellent menu serving tapas &



Matty, cellarman at the Windmill

antipasta, a range of Pieminister pies at £4.40, puddings and Sunday roasts. Wine and hot drinks are available (bottle of Shiraz £10, latte £1.50). Music comes from the 1970's jukebox playing original 45's with tunes ranging from the 60's through to the 90's – it even takes old style 50p coins which you can buy over the bar if you can't find any down the back of granny's sofa. There is a wi-fi hotspot in the pub, so you can connect to the internet with your laptop if you remembered to bring it with you.

It was the first time our friend Dave Jane had visited this pub, and he was impressed; like us, he said he would be back more often.

Colin & Pennie Postlethwaite

percent, but it's twice the strength, and hence twice the experience. 8/10.

○ **Cotswold Spring 'Codrington Codger', 4.2%**

Very much like Cottage 'Norman's Conquest', but half the strength and hence half the experience. 7/10.

○ **Moles 'Holey Moley', 4.7%.**

Of course it's nice, it's Moles. It will never set the world on fire, but it's good honest beer you'd be proud to drink on any pub night out. 7/10.

○ **Woodfordes 'Admirals Reserve', 5.0%**

Sound as a pound, but then I'm a great fan of Norfolk beers. Subtle fruit, malt and hop flavours all add up to a full-bodied IPA style beer. Nothing too dramatic, but a good, solid old-fashioned bitter like yer mumma used to make. 7/10.

Malcolm Fuller
(by email)

The Good Guide Guide

Dear Editor,

Firstly may I compliment you on an excellent newsletter. As an active CAMRA member living in the north west of England, I don't often come across hard copies of Pints West on a regular basis. However, courtesy of two local festivals (the National Winter Ales in Manchester and the CAMRA AGM in Blackpool) I have obtained copies of issues 68 and 69.

I became particularly interested and engrossed with the articles relating to the Good Beer Guide (GBG) and the Good Pub Guide (GPG). As an avid reader and collector of local and national guides, I regularly each year

'collect' the GBG. Not so much the GPG (I only have copies dating from 1990, 1992 and 1998 so these are a little outdated). Nevertheless, I have found in the past that both are useful and informative in their own right.

Whilst I agree with most of the arguments for and against each from all sides, I was disappointed that your contributor in her conclusions commented that the GPG "has not got to grips with the real ale revolution." Real ales are often referred to and I cannot come to terms with her views 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."

Whilst the GBG is concerned with quality real ales in the best pubs that serve it, there are some good pubs around for others, myself included, which I like to visit, sometimes not always offering a real ale for one reason or another. I may visit a village where only one or two pubs are on offer; they may be keg but if I want a drink and a meal then so be it, I will go in. Another example are that some of the pubs featured on CAMRA's National Inventory and sometimes included in guides don't sell real ale. I recently purchased a copy of CAMRA's Liverpool Historic Pub Guide in the Vines, a keg-only pub.

The GBG is specialised, the GPG is not and caters for a more commercial market – and both do their job adequately enough; don't knock one or the other, as the more you do so, the less chance it has of surviving on the bookshelves.

By the way, one thing I must do in this short life of mine – visit the King William in Bath – the portions sound just about right for

my appetite!

Cheers,
Steve Smith,
Harpurhey, Manchester.

Deus

Dear Sir,

On page 13 of edition number 69 you had a small article regarding Deus (*reputedly a champagne-style beer at champagne prices, Ed.*). In our shop Open Bottles in Taunton Road, Bridgwater we have 6 bottles of Deus which we sell for £14.95. We are in the current CAMRA Bottled Beer Guide by our mate Jeff Evans.

I hope this information is some use to you and by the way there are only 1,000 bottles imported into the country.

Regards,
John & Doff Hesketh,
Bridgeater.

The Lost Pubs of Bath competition

The answers to the competition in the last edition of Pints West were:

1 1997. 2 Zerodegrees. 3 The Coronation. 4 Cotleigh. 5 Festivity. 6 The Hillgrove (or the Victoria). 7 The White Lion and the Princess of Wales. 8 Nine. 9 Greene King. 10. Gale's.

The winner was Mike Jackson of Coalpit Heath, who receives the trilogy of books *Bath Pubs*, *Awash With Ale* and *The Lost Pubs of Bath* by Andrew Swift and Kirsten Elliott. (People else interested in these books can find details on their web site at akemanpress.com.)

The West Highland Explorer

MARCH – a dull month, with only the Bristol Beer Festival to look forward to. And then my mate Keith suggested a trip to Fort William far away in Scotland. Seemed like a good idea, so Keith sorted out sleeper train reservations from London Euston (via Scotrail) for £48 return, while I perused the CAMRA Good Beer Guide for suitable pubs to visit – and all was set.

Monday March 20th

After an eventful journey we finally arrived in Fort William before 10 o'clock in the morning, and after checking the bus timetables and maps at the Tourist Information bureau along the main street, we had time to look around before catching the 11.20 (service 915, £4.30 single) bus from Morrisons (by the train station). Our target was the **Clachaig Inn**, around three miles east of Glencoe. The pub was on a minor road, whereas the bus (being the Glasgow express) only went along the main A82 avoiding the village. We chatted with the driver, and he was happy to stop the bus for us, as soon as we worked out roughly where the pub was. The minor road junction where we alighted was about half a mile past the Glencoe Visitor Centre, although it's probably OK to get off there and take a short cut to the left.

For us, it was a short walk back along the

minor road, with only a few hardy sheep observing our progress. Being in Glencoe, there were towering snow-covered mountains all around: fantastic views, and great if you like climbing. But we had more important things in mind beer!

Entrance to the Clachaig Inn is through the right-hand side door – just follow the signs! Beers included Williams Red, something by Atlas, and even a cider (Thatcher's, I think), but the star was the Hebridean Celtic Black Ale – so good, we both had a second pint. The pub was quiet, but warm, with a pool table on one side, and also featured 100 malt whiskies too.

But we couldn't stay there all day, so after taking direction from the barman, we went back to the minor road, and walked all the way back into Glencoe itself, taking a good 40 minutes. Being remote, buses and taxis are rather infrequent. Fortunately, it was dry.

At the aptly named Glencoe Junction, we didn't have long to wait until the 14.00 bus to Kinlochleven arrived (service 44, £2.30 return), and the seven-mile journey to the **Tailrace Inn** didn't take long. Just through the village on the left-hand side, two beers were on sale from the **Atlas Brewery**, which is only a few minutes' walk away. After supping a tasty pint of Blizzard (the stronger Nimbus was the other beer), the chatty landlady suggested that we call in at the brewery for an impromptu tour.

Walking back along the road, the brewery is visible on the left-hand side, and after introducing myself to the receptionist and explaining what we were there for, she had a word with the brewer. He very kindly agreed to show us around the brewery, and explained about the brewing process. We were even able to sample thier Equinox as well, though I couldn't really taste the honey in it. As there were no off-sales at the brewery, we purchased a couple of bottles of Atlas beers at the nearby local store just across the road.

The 44C bus arrived on time at 15.40 to take us back to Fort William on a rather circular route via Duror, as this just

happened to be doubling as the school bus. It was fairly full of well-behaved teenagers, which makes a nice change. The fare from the Junction back to Fort William was a further £2.45. The bus rather usefully stops at the south end of the High Street, just a minute or two's walk from the **Grog & Gruel**, a regular Good Beer Guide entry. On sale were a good number of ales, including Orkney's Dragonhead Stout, An Teallach Ale and a couple of Atlas beers, Three Sisters and Latitude. I had the last pint of Three Sisters as it then ran out, but Keith tried the An Teallach, and pronounced it excellent as well. We couldn't leave before trying the Stout too, also excellent.

We then stocked up on some hot food (Ben Fong's takeaway along an alleyway on the left-hand side as you head back towards the train station is recommended). The next pub is the rather oddly shaped **Nevisport Bar**, the premises doubling as a café as well as selling sports clothing and outdoor accessories on the upper levels. For the bar, take the low level. Here we found three beers on sale: Houston's Peter's Well, Black Sheep Bitter and Isle of Skye Red Cuillin. We only had time for a swift pint, as we were heading off to our B&B by using the train – the London 'sleeper' train, which also includes a normal coach for travellers like ourselves.

We'd taken the decision that a bit of sightseeing was in order and departing promptly at 19.55, the two-hour journey to Crianlarich, with our 40-year-old diesel locomotive making a racket as it powered majestically though the often barren and snowy landscape, was atmospheric. Not that we could see much, as it was of course now dark! Still, the bottles of beer purchased earlier came in handy.


The B&B at Crianlarich was just a few minutes from the station (£25 each for a twin).

Tuesday March 21st

It was up at 7am, with the owners cooking us a splendid breakfast, including porridge. The sun was out as we made the short trek up to the station to catch the train back to Fort William. This time, we were able to enjoy the excellent scenic views from the train window in the rear coach.

Today, we planned to head towards Loch Ness, and after having a look around Fort William, we took the 10.30 bus (service 919, £12.30 return) to Drumadroit. The journey takes about 90 minutes, but as the journey goes on, it offers some excellent views of the Loch itself. Our target was the **Benleva Hotel**, which has won the Highland CAMRA branch Pub of the Year award twice in recent years. Getting off the bus, the hotel is clearly signed. On arrival, go to the right hand side of the hotel, and you will see the bar entrance.

Fyne Ales' Maverick was on sale, as the barman (who we later discussed was co-owner Stephen Crossland) pulled through a new



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barrel of Hebridean Gold. We had a most tasty pint of the Maverick, and when the Gold had been pulled through Stephen kindly brought us a sample. It was excellent, so we ordered a couple of pints and started chatting, passing over a copy of *Pints West* at the same time. It transpires Stephen had been in the Bristol area a few years previously, but hadn't found much in the way of good ale. You should have emailed us Stephen, we could have helped you out!

Back to the bus stop, and on to the southbound 919 service. After persuading the driver not to clip our return tickets (as we wanted to break our journey at Fort Augustus, and a break of journey is 'technically' not permitted), we leapt off at Fort Augustus as planned. Perhaps the most striking feature of the village is the impressive Caledonian Canal and lock system, built by Thomas Telford in the early 1800s, which along with the River Oich lead into Loch Ness – well worth a look.

Two minutes later, it was in to the **Bothy**, another Good Beer Guide entry. An excellent pint of Hebridean Gold was on sale, so perhaps not difficult to see which brewery's salesman had been in the area recently! A smartly-turned-out pub with a warm fire at one end and a pool table at the other, it seemed a shame that only one beer was on. However, the landlord explained that a second beer is stocked at busier times, so I can't fault his policy – one great beer always beats two average beers in my book. 40 malt whiskies on sale too.

We walked up beside the loch to the aptly named **Lock Inn**, which was selling Black Sheep beer. A pint was £2.70 here ... perhaps a locally brewed Scottish beer would be a little cheaper and attract more custom? Hard to say. Again, very nice, and with a warming wood-burning fire, perhaps oddly located at the end of the no-smoking bar – although wood smoke is always much nicer in my view than the

smoke from cigarettes. The Londis store opposite sold warming pies for a very reasonable 65p – just the job on this bitterly cold day, especially with the occasional snow flurry. Well, this is Scotland!

It was soon time for the next 919 bus back to Fort William, (two-hourly frequency) and a last chance to visit the **Grog & Gruel** and **Nevisport Bar**. Bumping into Messers Fraser and Guntrip, also on a break from London, we enjoyed a convivial beer or two in the Grog, with the new barrel of Atlas Three Sisters tasting absolutely excellent. As was everything else.

It was now time to make our way back to the station for the train home. The 19.55 departure was a few minutes late in leaving, as the 40-year-old loco just wouldn't start, and we were beginning to get worried that we wouldn't be leaving after all. Eventually, it burst into life, and we all breathed a sigh of relief as we set off into the night, with the sound of the diesel ringing in our ears as we sipped our beers looking into the wilderness. Rannoch Moor, Corroir, bleak places indeed.

It was then back to the sleeping compartment, and that was that until my early morning call at 04.30! The train was running 30 minutes early, and my change of trains at Crewe was fast approaching. With another pre-booked ticket (£12.90) to get me back to Bristol via Birmingham, I had to endure one of Mr Branson's noisy, vibrating 'Voyager' trains. The only good thing about it was that it was on time, and after a short walk, I was sat at my desk at 9am, ready for work. Dedication!

All in all, an excellent couple of days, and thanks to Keith for the travel arrangements and good company, to the brewer at Atlas for sparing the time to show us around, and to Stephen at the Benlava for such excellent service. And not a bad pint to be had anywhere.

Tim Proudman

Keynsham Brewery

KEYNSHAM Brewery's latest release is **Pixash** a 4.1% mid-brown bitter, which was being delivered to pubs in Bristol and Bath in May. It is the first time it's been brewed since last year, and after some more work was done on the formulation, it's looking and tasting quite promising.

All the **Stockwood Stout** (5.0%) sold out very quickly and went down very well with lovers of 'the dark stuff'. Some pubs are pleading for it to be brewed again, but they will have to be patient until the early Autumn unfortunately. The hoppy 4.5% **Somerdale Golden** is once again expected to be popular this summer.

Pub news

○ If you are into old black and white films then the **Hare on the Hill** could be worth a visit, as it is now staging regular Silent Movie nights on Mondays. The films are shown on the large flat screen television and Paul has talked about getting in some one with a piano to accompany them, just like in the old days.

○ After over ten years at the **Penny Farthing** on Whiteladies Road, and before that Crocker's on Cotham Hill, landlord Charlie has retired.

○ Back in the middle of March (and just after the last edition of *Pints West* went to press) there was a chance to "Meet the Brewer" at the **Highbury Vaults** on St Michael's Hill. Young's brewers Ken Dom and Ian Swanson gave an enjoyable tutored tasting of their draught real ales together with some of their bottled beers. It was such a popular event that it had to be split into two sessions, with a large contingent from the University of Bristol's Real Ale Club in attendance.

○ Plans are underway for this year's "Party on the Hill" on St Michael's Hill close to the Highbury Vaults. The free outdoor music event will be held on the 27th August and raises money for the Bristol Children's Hospital

○ The **Rhubarb** on Queen Ann Road in Barton Hill is under new management, with licensee Steve having moved there from the Three Tuns off College Green. He is currently stocking beers from Moles, Bath Ales and Newman's.

Pete Tanner

The manager of **Horts City Tavern** in central Bristol has advised us that the pub will close for about eight weeks from mid July. This is for a major refurbishment, the doubling in size of the kitchen and the removal of the giant TV screen. The pub will close very shortly after the World Cup Final. The pool table will also be removed and there is to be a move away from a sports theme to a food emphasis.

Pete Bridle

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Pub profile – the Cross Hands at Fishponds

IN a recent edition of Pints West Duncan Shine profiled the pubs of Fishponds and noted that he did not stay for a drink at the Cross Hands as “it had no real ale on sale at all”. Little was he to know that things were about to change big time.

The pub was acquired earlier this year by Ollie Bainbridge, the man behind three of the best of the new breed of pubs that have appeared in Bristol in recent years – the Inn on the Green (Horfield), Robin Hood’s Retreat (Bishopston) and the Adam and Eve (Hotwells) – all well respected for their choice and quality of real ales.

The pub was closed for a refurbishment and reopened in April 2006 with an astonishing array of *twelve* hand pumps absolutely dominating the bar and being the first thing you see as you enter. The pumps are not just for show and all twelve are used to dispense different beers. There are no permanent beers with a constantly changing choice of guest beers, both local and from further away. Those of us who live in East Bristol have felt a bit left out with all these great pubs appearing but now we have one of our own!

The Cross Hands is easy to find and well served by public transport. It sits at the end of Fishponds Straits right at the point where the road splits into Downend Road and Staple Hill Road. The imposing building cannot be missed as you approach the junction. The number 48 and 49 buses from town pass right outside and offer a frequent service right into the evening seven days a week (at least every 15 minutes from town until around 22.30). The 342 Bristol to Chipping Sodbury bus also passes the door. If you must drive, on-street parking is fairly straightforward too. The landlord is keen to encourage cyclists and will soon install a cycle rack at the front of the



Photo by Duncan Shine

pub.

The pub benefits from high ceilings and, together with the tasteful design which includes much use of orange and brown colours, window blinds and hanging lights – this gives it a very spacious and airy feel. This is complemented by the pleasant jazz/funk/blues music usually playing at a sensible volume in the background. The inside has a number of very distinct areas based around a very large central bar. There are many comfy sofas and armchairs dotted about in the various nooks and crannies and several non-smoking areas, not just for diners. The food is operated by an independent team within the pub and consists of a small range of up-market dishes, priced at around £6 for starters and £10 to £11 for mains, which are served in a discreet area at the rear of the pub. Currently a special offer of a free bottle of wine when you buy two main meals applies between 5pm and 8pm on Tuesdays. A good range of wines and quality malt whiskies also feature at the bar. A large spiral staircase leads to an upstairs function

room and the toilets (although there is a proper disabled one downstairs too). The function room is being refurbished but will be ready soon to hold private parties and events as well as the live music (jazz or similar) planned for Sunday evenings, and quizzes on Mondays. An enclosed outdoor patio area to the rear will also surely prove popular in good weather.

The Cross Hands has already had a change of manager, with Philip Lovemore taking over, having worked for some time at the Adam and Eve. Philip is extremely keen to make the

concept work and very much aware of the challenge involved in transforming a somewhat neglected and unloved old pub into something altogether different. A sign outside states that the pub is intended for those over 21 only – all fruit machines, pool tables, etc. have long gone, no standard lagers or ciders are sold, and the pub does not currently open late or all day. All of this is part of changing the image and attracting a different clientele. Sadly, from my point of view at least, the World Cup will not be shown either (why do so few pub serve good real ale and show football or other sporting events?). (See Duncan Shine’s article elsewhere in this issue – Ed.)

I have visited on the last three Friday evenings and was initially very sceptical about how a pub could go from nil to twelve beers and maintain quality. However, so far my fears have proven groundless and all beer that I have tried has been in good form. The management are prepared to waste some beer if necessary, and they also use the “spear” system on their casks which they feel adds a little priceless shelf life once a cask is opened. The pub is actually owned by Enterprise Inns, who allow them to choose from a list of over 150 real ales plus a list of local SIBA breweries who supply direct. Recent offerings have included beers from Hopback, RCH, Hanby, Cottage, O’Hanlon’s, Newman’s and Moor breweries.

This is an extremely bold venture, offering the kind of quality and choice not recently seen in Fishponds or nearby, and truly deserves to succeed. On each of my visits the pub seemed busier than the previous one which hopefully means that word is spreading. If like me you are fed up with a choice of formulaic poor pubs offering little or no variation, or cheap but brash and noisy Wetherspoon-style pubs, then you will be delighted by what’s happening at the Cross Hands and I urge you to give it your support.

Vince Murray

Cross Hands, 1 Staple Hill Road, Fishponds, Bristol BS16 5AA – 0117 9654684.

Opening hours 12-3, 5-11 (may be extended). Food served 12-3 and 6-9 (not Mondays or Sunday evenings).

Become a “beer correspondent”

THE Bristol and District branch of CAMRA is responsible for compiling a significant section of the Good Beer Guide – CAMRA’s flagship national publication. We cover a large area, roughly equating to the former county of Avon – including Bristol, Weston-super-Mare, much of North Somerset and South Gloucestershire, plus a chunk of the Mendips. This is a fairly major undertaking as we try to keep up with the bewildering number of changes that occur in the pub industry, and somehow end up with the best 60 or so pubs for quality real ale. Everyone involved is an unpaid volunteer, fitting the work in during their spare time. We run regular subsidised minibus trips into the more rural parts of our area, as well as social events in the major towns.

Where we struggle a bit is in knowing which pubs are worth us looking into each year – particularly in areas where do not have active members. This is where you could

come in – we are looking to set up a network of “beer correspondents” who help to keep us informed of what is happening in their area. Access to email is particularly useful but not essential. All that we ask is that you contact us when any big news occurs (top beer landlord leaving, pub under threat of closure, etc) and submit a quarterly brief report on the best real ale pubs in your patch. You don’t even have to attend any meetings or come on any trips – that said you would be welcome if you did.

Some example of areas that we currently lack regular feedback are Thornbury, Cheddar, Chew Valley, Yatton and Portishead. There are others. If you fancy becoming our correspondent in your local area, and seeing your efforts appear in the Good Beer Guide, then please contact us, either by email to Vincent.Murray@blueyonder.co.uk or by post to Vince Murray, 60 Wesley Hill, Bristol BS15 1TU.

668 miles to Corton Denham (along the Somerset Pub Trail)

A CHANCE visit to the then Good Beer Guide-listed brew pub, the **Masons Arms at Odcombe** near Yeovil in early March 2003, was to become the start of a four-year **Somerset Pub Trail** for Bristol CAMRA member Gordon Pearce and his wife Liz, who has been his constant non-drinking driver on this marathon.

The then licensee and brewer of the excellent Dunne Lane bitter, when realising that we had travelled over 40 miles just for that visit, said, "Of course, you are doing the Somerset CAMRA Pub Trail!", which was news to us. After being awarded our first stamp and collector's leaflet, it was obvious that with a bit of planning we could qualify for this first trail, which had started in National Pubs Week to promote visits to previously missed pubs in a quiet period of the year. All that was necessary was to visit ten pubs in about eight weeks to "qualify" for a t-shirt, or more for better awards.

So 2003 then saw us start to find many Somerset "gems". First there was **Eli's at Huish Episcopi**, where after ordering Teignworthy Neap Tide, the wife apologised for standing behind the bar, only to be told they didn't have one. Then we visited the **Old Custom House at Langport** and also on the same day we of course had to re-visit the **Halfway House at Pitney**, a pub that never fails to astonish, with not only the ten real ales at realistic prices all on gravity, including Branscombe Vale Own and Archers Mild. Add to that the friendly atmosphere, the simple décor, open wood fires, and it was obvious why it had been the National Daily Telegraph Pub of the Year in 2002.

We found the 17th-century **New Inn at Halse** on a trip to the Vale of Taunton to have some excellent beer and lovely food. Then down some narrow country lanes found us at

Bear Inn at Wiveliscombe to have some nice Cotleigh Golden Eagle. On leaving the pub it was unusual to find that we could have bought a gun in the same street.

In the same week we made a visit to South Somerset to the hamstone-built **Brewers Arms in South Petherton** for some nice food with Milk Street Mermaid. Another cross-country narrow lane trip found the Rose & Crown, known as **Dinnington Docks**. Immediately on entering, just for a beer, we realised that this could be a pub to be re-visited. First there is the constitution of the Docks Company, the photos of the railway crossing and of course the cast signal box name plate. Add to that an extensive menu of reasonably priced meals and three real ales, with tasting notes and very friendly locals. There is a massive roman villa beneath a field behind a pub that is sited on the pavement on the Fosse Way and you realise you have found a real gem, which needless to say has now been re-visited many times.

Qualification was completed with a rail trip to the **Coopers Arms at Highbridge** to have some strong Berrow, Harvestoun and Ringwood beers, and ended the following week on top of the Blackdowns with a visit to **Holman Clavel at Culmhead** for a classic isolated pub.

These ten visits were just the start of a four-year marathon around the pubs of Somerset. In 2004 we needed to visit 15 pubs and it was based on a holiday in West Somerset with visits as far across as Sandyway, only to find the pub closed, but the visit to **White Horse Inn at Exford** was memorable as one customer was charged twice by the landlord for using her mobile phone twice – and she paid up! Several other pubs in the area were visited and we qualified that year at Dinnington.

The following year we then decided to start during National Pubs Week with the excellent food at the **Ring O'Bells at Ashcott**, together with Fyne Ales Highlander, which like all beers at this pub was in excellent condition. Several re-visits followed, but we later discovered the **Ring O'Bells at Moorlinch**, with new owners, for the excellent food and perfect Cotleigh and Glastonbury beers. Further trips saw us visit the **Manor Arms at North Perrott** (the

licensee having recently come from the Great Western Hotel at Exeter) for perfect O'Hanlons Royal Oak and again excellent food. A number of pubs followed in the Vale of Taunton, but a visit to the **Cross Keys at Norton Fitzwarren** saw Hydes Perfection presented in an undrinkable condition, only to be told by the barman, "It's real ale, it should be cloudy" – the first bad beer on the trail. Qualification that year was at the **Drayton Arms in Drayton** for some lovely food, pub games and Sharp's Will's Resolve in excellent condition.

As National Pubs Week approached this year, a visit to Somerset CAMRA's web site (www.somerset-camra.org.uk) revealed that we had a choice of 43 pubs with 15 to qualify. The aim in 2006 was not only to re-visit some of our favourites, but to search out several from the 19 previously unvisited. We decided to record the trip in slightly more detail this year with photos, mileage, etc. The trip started at **Half Moon Inn in Somerton**, a pub sighted above the railway cutting above the town and proud to be in the Good Beer Guide this year – nice food with two beers in perfect condition, including Blackdown Devons Pride. A trip across the Blackdown Hills found us at the **Greyhound Inn at Staple Fitzpaine** for a very imposing interior. Then to the **Candlelight Inn at Bishopswood**, down some very narrow lanes in a snowstorm and some 57 miles from home. This pub presented perfect Butcombe Gold on gravity. It transpired that it is very much the centre of activity in the area with 13 skittles teams and a very friendly landlord. Then we found the **Bell Inn at Ash** and the **White Hart Hotel at Martock**, a classic coaching inn at the centre of the village. The food was very good, the atmosphere excellent and the beer in the form of Sharp's Will's Resolve perfect. The **Prince of Wales at Stoke Sub Hamdon** was in a country park with wonderful views for the perfect pint of Sharp's Doom Bar. Another new visit was the **Royal Artillery Arms at Highbridge** on the right of the A38 towards Bridgwater for another perfect pint; this time it was RCH PG Steam.

The **Queens Hotel at Corton Denham** ended this year's trail at 668 miles. The previous owners had not cherished this pub, several miles south of Castle Cary, close to the site of the ancient Cadbury Castle. New young owners from London have sympathetically renovated it and brought back a community feel to a now busy pub, which serves exceptional food. A pint of Sherborne 257 was also good. The owners are now renovating the **Stapleton Arms at Buckhorn Weston**, but that's another trip for another day.

What have we learnt from the past four years? There are wonderful pubs, all different, in some excellent untouched villages throughout Somerset. Almost all serve varying selections of beer in good, excellent or perfect condition. Add to that lovely well-priced food with genial staff and you have the perfect recipe for a nice day out. Roll on 2007!

Gordon Pearce

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CAMRA Good Beer Guide: suggestions for future entries, and comments on existing ones, can be made to our GBG co-ordinator, Vince Murray, care of the editor (above).

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

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Weston diary

○ **Wednesday 21 June – Highbridge and Burnham on Sea Crawl** – 1827 train from Weston. Arrives Highbridge 1838. Trains back at 2213 and 2319. Group travel arrangements apply, i.e. groups of three or four go for the price of two.

○ **Friday 14 July – Folk At The Oak. Trip to beer festival at The Royal Oak, Bath.** Train from Weston at 1837. Open less than a year, but The Oak is already established as one of the finest pubs in the area. Expect lots of great beers!

○ **Wednesday 26 July – Bristol & District CAMRA Branch Meeting.** To be held at the Raglan, Upper Church Road. Start 7.45pm.

○ **Wednesday 19 August – Annual Summer Saunter.** Visiting 6 or 7 pubs on or near the seafront selling real ale. Meet The Captain's Cabin, 8.00. Next two stops will be Dauncey's Hotel and The Claremont Vaults.

○ **Wednesday 20 September – Bristol city centre crawl.** Area and travel arrangements to be confirmed.

Non-members welcome at all of the above events.

Weston contact

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



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Diary

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

(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.)

○ **Tuesday, 6th June** - GBG Survey Trip. Leave from the Cornubia, 6.45pm.

○ **Wednesday, 14th June** - Branch committee meeting at the Cornubia, 8pm.

○ **Saturday, 17th June** - (provisional) - Annual Docks Cider Saunter. Starting at Orchard, Hanover Square at mid-day, then onto Avon Packet, Coronation and maybe more depending on how people feel.

○ **Wednesday, 21st June** - Highbridge & Burnham crawl by train. Depart Bristol Temple Meads, 7:01pm.

○ **Saturday, 24th June** - Pub crawl of Bath with Bath & Borders Branch. Start at Lambrettas, 12 noon.

○ **Wednesday, 28th June** - Branch AGM, Horts City Tavern, Broad Street, Bristol 8pm. Please bring membership cards.

○ **Wednesday, 5th July** - Explorer trip. Leave from the Cornubia, 6.45pm.

○ **Saturday, 8th July** - (provisional) - Visit to cider producers Wilkins, Hecks, Parsons Choice and maybe more...

○ **Wednesday, 12th July** - Branch committee meeting at the Cornubia, 8pm.

○ **Tuesday, 19th July** - GBG survey trip. Leave from the Cornubia, 6.45pm.

○ **Saturday, 22nd July** - Pub crawl of central Bristol. Start Nova Scotia, 11am.

○ **Wednesday, 26th July** - Branch meeting, the Raglan, Upper Church Road, Weston-super-Mare, 8pm. Bus departs Cornubia 7pm.

○ **Thursday, 3rd August.** Trip to GBBF. Leave from the Cornubia, 10.30am.

○ **Wednesday, 9th August** - Branch committee meeting at the Cornubia, 8pm.

○ **Saturday, 12th August** - Rail trip to Shirehampton, etc. Depart Temple Meads 11.53am.

○ **Wednesday, 23rd August** - Branch Meeting, venue TBA, 8pm.



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Postcode

Name(s) of Account Holder(s)

Bank or Building Society account number

Branch Sort Code

Reference Number (if applicable)

Instructions to your Bank or Building Society

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Beer Festival Success



THE NINTH ANNUAL BRISTOL BEER FESTIVAL took place at the Brunel Passenger Shed, Temple Meads, Bristol, on Friday 24 March and Saturday 25 March 2006.

Once again it proved to be a great success and a credit to all the volunteers who put their time and effort into making the event happen. Tickets went on sale on 19

December 2005 and sold out in record time.

There were 125 different real ales and 40 different ciders and perries on offer and there was still an excellent range available for customers when the festival closed at the end of the final session.

And we're planning next year's already! Don't miss it.

Richard Brooks (words and picture)

And the winners were...

ON 9th May members of the Bristol & District branch of CAMRA visited the Bristol Beer Factory to present them with their certificate for winning the "Beer of the Festival" award for their Milk Stout at the 2006 Bristol Beer Festival.

Although a brand new brew for this brewery, there is a historical link with Milk Stout. The Bristol Beer Factory is located on part of the site of the former Ashton Gate brewery, which closed in 1933 after it was purchased by George's. The Ashton Gate brewery produced a popular Milk Stout and this in fact went on to become one of George's main brands.

Brewer Chris Thurgeson said he is enthusiastic about resurrecting this beer style and is very happy with how the Milk Stout has turned out.

Simon Bartlett expressed his thanks to the Bristol & District Branch and to the Bristol Beer Festival customers for this fantastic recognition of how far the Beer Factory has come.

The brewery has only managed to fit in



Pictured left to right are Branch Chairman Richard Brooks and brewers Chris Thurgeson and Simon Bartlett

one brew of the much sought after Milk Stout since the Bristol Beer Festival and this has already been reserved by pubs eager to get their hands on some.

The pubs serving Milk Stout at the end of May or the beginning of June – as we were to understand as Pints West went to print – were to include the Hope & Anchor (Jacob's Wells Road), Duke of York (St. Werbergh's), Royal Oak (Bath), Olde Green Tree (Bath),

Pig & Fiddle (Bath) and the Cornubia. Hopefully these pubs, and others, will be serving it on many occasions in the future.

In addition to winning the coveted CAMRA Bristol Beer Festival "Beer of the Festival" title, the Beer Factory also picked up a silver and bronze award for Red and Sunrise respectively at the Society of Independent Brewers South West regional competition in April.

Richard Brooks