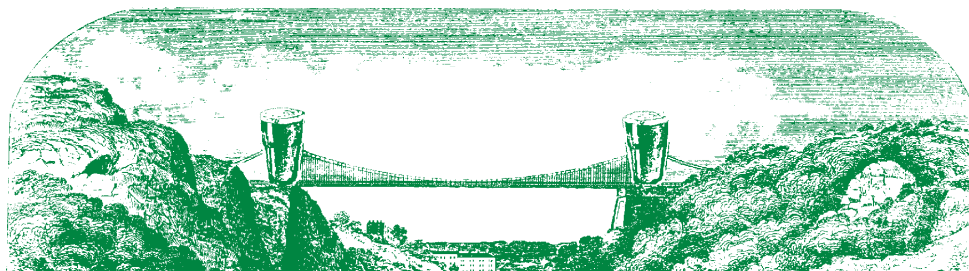




CAMPAIGN
FOR
REAL ALE

AWARD-WINNING



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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

Take a Walk on the Mild Side

Make May Mild

MAY has once again been designated Mild Month by the Campaign for Real Ale. This annual event is a celebration of Mild, a beer style applauded by those in the know but increasingly difficult to find at the bar.

CAMRA's 197 branches nationwide will be taking part in Mild Month and running events to promote Mild in May. This may include a crawl around pubs in the local area that sell mild, promotion of mild at beer festivals, or persuading local pubs to stock mild and get drinkers to try a pint.

CAMRA press officer Owen Morris said: "The number of breweries rediscovering the delights of mild is on the increase, but unfortunately it is still not widely available in pubs. Consumers who love and miss mild, or even those who are simply curious to try it, should ask for it in their local pub. By letting licensees and breweries know that there is a demand for this flavoursome dark beer we will see it make a comeback at the bar."



During the month of May, customers of the Star Inn in Bath (pictured above) should be able to quench their thirsts with a refreshing pint of Mild, the delicious, dark, smooth beer made by the nearby Abbey Ales brewery, owners of this historic pub. Managing Director of Abbey Ales, Alan "Bad News" Morgan, is a keen supporter of CAMRA's Mild celebration, and we trust he will support the cause this year by brewing it once again. Hopefully, readers of Pints West will be able to find this – and a range of other tasty milds – across the region in the coming months.

Massive Demand for Beer Festival Tickets

We knew that the Bristol Beer Festival had become a very popular event, but demand for tickets this year has proved to be truly incredible.

In total we could have sold over 12,000 tickets, which is three times as many as we have available for the four sessions.

The main reason for this increasing demand appears to be word of mouth recommendations and the fact that people who attend one year want to come back the following year and bring their friends. Obviously we must be doing something right!

We appreciate that this massive demand means that many people have

been disappointed as they were not able to get tickets. However, we ask them to spare a thought for the volunteers who have had to put in a lot of their own time to sort out all the administration required and deal with huge amounts of queries.

Postal applications continued to be received weeks after all the tickets had sold out. We therefore intend to investigate alternative channels for selling the tickets in future to avoid this, as the current method plainly means lots of unnecessary paperwork and wasted time and postage.

Richard Brooks

Hidden at the Cornubia



WHEN the last Pints West went to press, the fate of the historic Bristol real ale haven, the Cornubia, looked grim. Fortunately, a day or two later we heard the very welcome news that this hard-to-find Redcliffe gem was reopening under the ownership of the Hidden Brewery of Wiltshire – and the pub was packed and buzzing on launch night of 1st December 2006.

Created by converting two Georgian town houses, the Cornubia is small, tall, but beautifully-formed, with an L-shaped bar on the ground floor and function rooms above. Michael Woodhouse from the Hidden Brewery says, “The Cornubia has a long and interesting history and we are extremely excited to be reopening it. Over the years, the Cornubia has built a very loyal following, and we are keen to reinstate the warm, welcoming atmosphere, add good food and, of course, offer a wide variety of quality real ales from breweries across the region. Historically, CAMRA Bristol has also been a strong supporter of the pub and we would like this relationship to be re-cultivated.”

The new owners intend that the Cornubia will offer a range of food at the bar from both a lunchtime and supper menu, which will use local and seasonal ingredients where possible. The first-floor dining facilities will also be re-opened for private and business lunches.

Michael continues: “We are really looking forward to welcoming people back into the Cornubia and rebuilding its watering-hole reputation for excellent real ales. We intend to put Hidden Pint on the bar as the session beer and rotate the other pumps between our own range and those of other microbreweries in the region. We want our drinkers to help us select the beers and ciders that they are most passionate about. We will be keeping as much

of the original character of the building and its interiors as possible.”

The Hidden Brewery was founded by Gary Lumber and Michael Woodhouse and focuses on creating premium real ale using traditional production methods at its base in Dinton, Wiltshire. The list of their award-winning beers is growing and includes Bath's

Champion Beer of Festival 2006 for Hidden Potential, and Hidden Fantasy with three recent festival ‘bests’.

The most recent addition to the list is Hidden Strength, a copper coloured session beer, full in taste but light in alcohol content at 3.4% ABV. Gary comments: “Hidden Strength is the Hidden Brewery’s lowest alcohol beer and was created so that real ale drinkers who prefer to avoid high alcohol percentages can do so without losing out on taste. We named the brew Hidden Strength to indicate the great depth and complexity of flavour and draw attention to the alcohol content at the same time. It is great fun making, testing and tasting new recipes and we always use quality ingredients and traditional brewing techniques to make only premium real ale.”

The Cornubia is the second pub for Hidden (the other is the Bell Inn at Wylye, Wiltshire). Formerly the executive suite and brewery tap for Courage Bristol Brewery, and most recently run by Smiles, the Cornubia is tucked away between the old brewery site and offices. A brisk ten-minute walk from Temple Meads or the Centre, it has several other historic real-ale gems as near neighbours, including the Bridge and the King’s Head.

Whilst the Cornubia is almost as ‘hidden’ in the Redcliffe area of Bristol as the Hidden Brewery is in the country lanes of Wiltshire, it and its neighbouring watering holes are well worth seeking out.

Lesley Huxley



Pictured smiling behind the bar of the Cornubia on launch night are the new landlord Ross Nicol, landlady Karen Beesley, brewer Gary Lumber and director Lizzie Perry. (Photo by Richard Brooks)

Called to Assembly



A BEDMINSTER pub has reopened after being boarded up for over two and a half years. The Fussells (previously the Nelson) pub on East Street has opened as the Assembly following an £800,000 revamp by the Barracuda Group as one of its 'Smith & Jones' pubs.

The Assembly opened on 30th November, and was packed. This large, long-roomed pub has an area to suit most people, with comfy sofas around the fireplace, raised seating along the right-hand side opposite the long wooden bar that occupies the centre of the left wall,

and a large area of seating towards the rear. It can seat 200 in the comfortable padded-leather seats, and offers a wide range of food from snacks to main course meals.

Opening night offered Wye Valley Bitter, St Austell Tribute, Courage Best and Bass which the manager, Ian Newbold, said he will keep on for several months to see how they sell. We spoke to Ian again in January, and he said sales of real ale were doing so well that he is having another six-barrel stillage delivered that will double his capacity to settle beers and prevent lines running out.

Ian is passionate about his real ales and previously ran the Good Beer Guide-listed pub Restoration in Cheltenham, and says his goal is to get the Assembly listed as well. The beers have been in excellent condition every time we visited over the past two months, and is one of the reasons why this pub continues to grow in popularity.

The pub opens from 11 a.m. to 12 midnight.

It is great to see another pub selling well-kept real ale in Bedminster, and this one brings a touch of classiness, as well as a new choice of ale to the area.

Colin & Pennie Postlethwaite

A promising start by the new landlord of the Robin Hood



Photo by Duncan Shine

BARRY and Angie took over the running of the Wadworth-owned Robin Hood on St Michael's Hill, Bristol in December 2006.

On a recent visit I was surprised to find a mild on draught brewed by the Pint Size brewery and very good it was too, being full of flavour for a 3.3% beer.

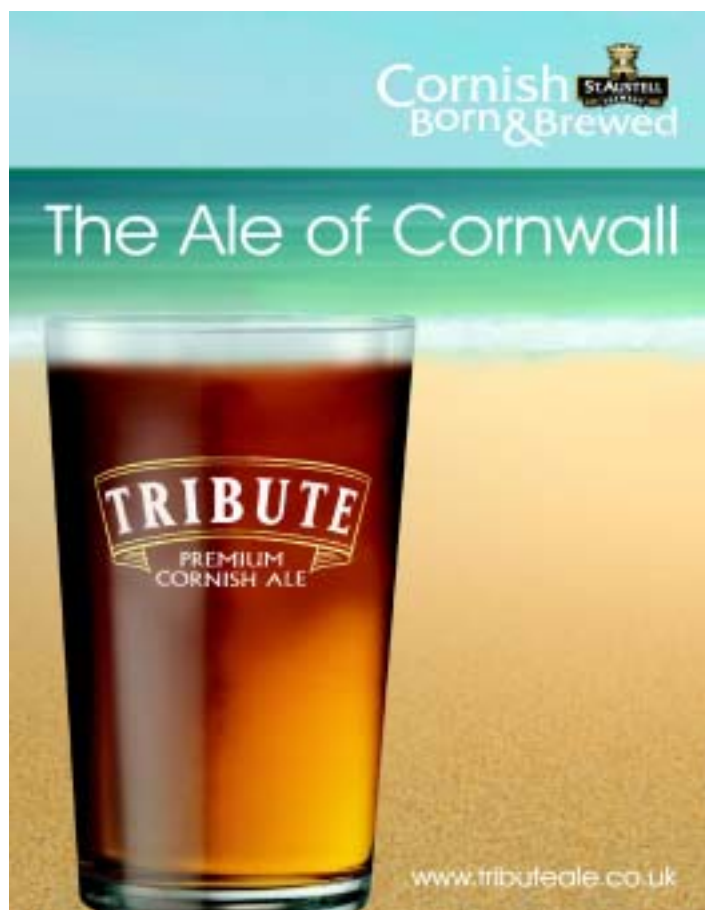
The Pint Size brewery is a 2.5 barrel plant owned by Wadworth who use it to try out more experimental beers, speciality beers and this cask mild. Let's hope that they brew this mild on a permanent basis. I know that Barry is keen to keep this mild as a permanent beer alongside his other three beers, Wadworth 6X, Henry's IPA and Bishop's Tipple.

On the occasion of my visit Old Father Timer, a winter seasonal from Wadworth, was also available and Barry intends to continue with a seasonal from Wadworth as and when they are available.

Barry is going to introduce live music: on Sunday afternoons this will be Jazz, Monday will be an open mic night, and on Saturday nights there will either be a band or a reggae DJ.

Home-made food, including planned Caribbean food and vegetarian options, is served from 12 to 8pm Monday to Saturday and a Sunday roast is served 12 to 6pm. Take-away food is also available to pre-order. The pub is open 12 to 11pm seven days a week.

Dave Jane



Beer festival round-up

Cadbury Heath

Stuart Carrow of the Cadbury Heath Social Club is staging his second beer festival from 15th to 19th May, and is hoping it will be as successful as his last. There should be beers from Bath Ales, Newman's, Wickwar, Courage, Bristol Beer Factory and others.

There will be entertainment on the last night with the Raggle Taggle folk band with whom Stuart plays. There will be food such as pasties and cheeses, and this year it's in a private function room which will be decorated in a "West Country fashion" (that's Stuart's old theatrical background influence, having been in musical theatre for 20 years).

Entrance is £3, which can be paid on the door, or tickets can be ordered in advance by writing to the club or calling 0117 9613526 or 07859 310072.

Horfield

Are they trying to compete with the Bristol Beer Festival in terms of the number of beers and ciders? The **Inn On The Green** in Filton Road, Horfield is hosting a festival on Sunday 12th April from noon onwards featuring no less than 60 real ales and 20 ciders! This fund-raising event, supporting local charities, will include entertainment with two live bands and a barbecue. Should be a great day out.

Dawkins Taverns

Each of the pubs in Glen Dawkins' estate of three (known as Dawkins Taverns) will be holding beer festivals in the coming months.

First up is the **Hillgrove** in Dove Street, Kingsdown, which will be having an "Irish Real Ale Festival" over the weekend of Saturday 17th (St Patrick's day) to Monday 19th March. This is expected to feature 18 rare cask ales from five Irish brewers.

Our own St George is not forgotten, with the **Victoria** in Southleigh Road, Clifton having a weekend beer festival from Saturday 21st to Monday 23rd April.

Last but not least, the Miners Arms in Mina Road, St Werburghs will be holding a "Summer Beerfest" sometime in August – exact details yet to be finalised.

These three pubs are great places for real ales at any time, let alone when they are holding beer festivals.

Central Bristol

The **Old Fish Market** in Baldwin Street, a Fuller's pub, is due to hold its first annual beer festival from March 17th to 25th.

There will be around 20 cask-conditioned ales available over the week, including Festival Mild, Caledonian Six Nations, Theakston Cooper's Butt, Butcombe Brunel IPA, Black Sheep Emmerdale and Everards Pitch Black.



White Lion landlord Les Clayton doing a quality audit of something dark

The **White Lion**, located on Bristol City Centre, recently had a five-week-long "Winter Ales Showcase", with over 30 special winter ales available through that period. As a follow-up to that, landlord Les Clayton set about organising the next event dubbed "Bristol's smallest beer festival". This was scheduled to run from Friday 23rd February until the Sunday – still in the future as I write this, but over by the time you read it.

Keynsham

Jemma Walsh of the Bristol Beer Factory is organising **Keynsham Rugby Club's** second beer festival.

They will again be selling Beer Factory beers plus several others from local breweries including Newman's, Keynsham, RCH and

CAMRA'S PUB OF THE YEAR
The Inn On The Green
 presents its annual

BEER FESTIVAL

- 2 LIVE BANDS
- FULL BBQ OF HOMEMADE BURGERS ETC...
- 60 REAL ALES AND 20 CIDERS
- BEER FESTIVAL GLASS AND BROCHURE TO BE BOUGHT ON THE DAY FOR ONLY £2.50
- FUND RAISING FOR LOCAL CHARITIES

Bristol Rugby's Last Home Game

SUNDAY 8TH APRIL 2007 12PM-ONWARDS
 Inn On The Green, 2 Filton Rd, Horfield Bristol, 0117 952 1391

BEER FESTIVALS

DAWKINS TAVERNS

irish real ale festival 12-3 & 5-12 daily 0117 9444780
st patrick's weekend Dove St, Bristol

sat 17th-mon 19th march 2007
THE HILLGROVE, KINGSDOWN 18 RARE CASK ALES FROM 5 IRISH BREWERS

ST. GEORGE'S DAY
WEEKEND BEER FESTIVAL

THE VICTORIA SAT 21 - MON 23 APRIL 2007 FROM NOON
 Southleigh Road, Clifton Bristol BS8 0117 9748675

SUMMER BEERFEST
THE MINERS ARMS, St Werburghs AUG 2007 DETAILS TBC
 Mina Road, Bristol BS2 0117 9556718

CLUB Join the NEW FREE DAWKINS CLUB for special offers and more! Ask or email: glen@dawkins-taverns.co.uk

Bath Ales, to name but a few.

The event will be held on Saturday 26th May at Keynsham Rugby Club, Bristol Road, Keynsham, between 12 noon and 8pm. Gemma says: "Entry is a fiver again with a free drink."

Hotwells

Continuing the now well-established tradition, the **Bag O'Nails** in Hotwells will be holding another of its popular twice-yearly beer festivals. The next one is due to take place in April, from Thursday 19th to Sunday 22nd inclusive.

As in previous years, the pub will be offering forty or more different real ales from all over the country. The pub is not exactly huge, so not all beers can be on at the same time. However, if you popped along on all four days you should get the chance to sample a good proportion of them (or all if you have the stamina).

The pub should be open all day from noon over the period. Lovers of dark beers have never been disappointed at the Bag O'Nails festivals as a good number of stouts, porters or milds always feature.

Rodborough, Stroud

Easter 2007 will see the second "Local Real Ale Festival" return to the **Bear of Rodborough**, set in 300 acres of National Trust land, high above Stroud on the wilds of Rodborough Common. (The first one just missed getting a mention in last year's *Pints West*.)

From April 7th to April 9th, this event will give you the chance to sample 30 local real ales, traditional ciders and English wines – all from Gloucestershire and surrounding counties. Starting at noon each day, the entrance price is £5 and includes a souvenir tankard, a festival guide and your first half-pint.

Entertainment will include the Roy Kirby Jazz Band, Crimson Flight, and Drunken Brewers from the local Uley Beer Company. There will also be entertainment from the local morris dancers and a bouncy castle for the children.

Food will include stalls from the local farmers' market, a barbecue, and bar food in the hotel all day.

There is a special festival weekend package – stay three nights for the price of two from April 6th to 9th for just £55 per person per night. Based on two people sharing a standard double/twin bedroom, this package includes entrance to the festival each day, dinner and full English breakfast. The only extra is your beer money!

For more information on the hotel and the festival, including the beer list with tasting notes, have a look at their web site at www.cotswold-inns-hotels.co.uk/bear.

Chippenham

The Chippenham Beer Festival, like our own in Bristol, is an annual event organised by a branch of CAMRA and is well worth making the effort to get to, with over 80 real ales, ciders and perries to tempt you.

This year's event takes place on April 27th and 28th at the Olympiad, only five minutes' walk from the train station.

If you missed out on Bristol's, why not give this one a go?

Bath

Paul Waters is holding a mini Cornish Beer Festival at the **Star** in Bath on 5 March, St Piran's Day. St Piran is the patron saint of Cornwall.

Bitton

Organised by the Avon Valley Railway, the fourth annual Bitton Beer Festival takes place from Friday 8th to Sunday 10th June. You should be able to enjoy a pleasant weekend supping fine real ales in the nostalgic surroundings of the 1860s heritage railway station, taking the opportunity to view



and ride on their steam and diesel locomotives in their natural home on the rails.

Check out their web site at www.avonvalleyrailway.org (following the "events" and "real ale festival" links) for more information.

SP

Springtime in Clevedon

Following its inclusion in the latest Good Beer Guide, the **Old Inn** on Walton Road, Clevedon is showing its commitment to real ale by hosting a Springtime beer festival.

It's the first time the pub has held such an event, which will be spread over the weekend of Friday 30th and Saturday 31st of March and Sunday 1st April.

The pub is gaining a reputation for serving consistently good quality beer and landlady Lesley Butler hopes to have twenty different ales on offer, plus cider, and local breweries should be well supported.

Pete Dommett

2nd Annual Beer Festival Cadbury Heath Social Club

Cadbury Heath Road,
Warmley, Bristol BS30 8BX

15th-19th May

Tuesday - Friday 7pm - 11.30pm
Saturday 12noon - 11.45pm

**Over 25 real ales and ciders
with special guest
"Wines of the World"**

Food available:

West Country pasties and fine fayre

Entertainment Saturday 19th
with The Raggle Taggles
Entrance £3

For more information please call
0117 9613526 (club)
or 07859 310072 (mobile)

CHIPPENHAM BEER FESTIVAL

April 27th & 28th 2007

Studio Hall, Olympiad, Chippenham

Friday: 6-11pm (£4.50)

Saturday: 11 - 3.30 (£3) & 7-11 (£4)

- Admission to evening sessions by advance ticket only
- Over 80 real ales, ciders & perries
- Foreign bottled beers on sale
- Only 5 minutes from railway & bus stations
- £2 of **free beer** tokens to CAMRA members (join at festival and benefit!)
- Live music at all sessions

**Tickets available mid-March from Olympiad, or from
CAMRA NWW, PO Box 2882, Chippenham SN14 6WT.
Cheques payable to "CAMRA North West Wiltshire" –
please enclose SAE.**

Organised by the North West Wiltshire Branch of CAMRA
www.nwwiltscamra.org.uk



Try a Mild in May

Each year CAMRA promotes Mild throughout the month of May, and this year will celebrate National Mild Day on Saturday 5th May.

Mild is one of the most traditional beer styles and is starting to enjoy something of a revival in today's real ale market, often tempting lager drinkers to taste real ales. Usually dark brown in colour, due to the use of well-roasted malts, it is less hopped (and less bitter) than normal bitter beers, and often has a chocolaty

character with nutty and burnt flavours.

Cask-conditioned mild is a rarity in some parts of the country, including the Bristol, Bath and Weston-super-Mare areas, which is a crying shame because mild is a distinctive and tasty beer. Ask your licensee if they are going to give you a chance to taste a mild in May.

Mild is one of, if not the oldest beer style in the country. Until the 15th century, ale and mead were the major British brews, both made without hops. Hops were introduced from Holland,

France and Germany after this time, which made our ales more bitter than previously, and they became known by the modified continental name of "beer". This also started the trend of reducing the gravity or strength of ale, as the hop is also a preservative, and ales had previously been brewed very strong to help preserve them. The hop also started the rapid decline of mead, which is only made in very few places today.

So what exactly is mild? It is an ale which has tastes and textures all its own and is less bitter than "bitter" beers. The darkness of dark milds, such as Wickwar's Penny Black, Brain's Dark and Greene King XX Mild, comes from the use of darker malts and/or roasted barley that are used to compensate for the loss of hop character. "Chocolate", "fruity", "nutty" and "burnt" are all tastes to be found in the complexity of milds. However, not all milds are dark. Banks's Original, Webster's Green Label and Yorkshire-brewed Timothy Taylor's Golden Best are some of the examples of light coloured milds. Some milds have changed their names from "Mild" to try to give them a more modern image. In Scotland, 60/- ale is similar to mild (Belhaven's being a good example).

Milds today tend to have an ABV (alcohol by volume) in the 3% to 3.5% range, with of course some notable exceptions (a popular example is the 6% Sarah Hughes Dark Ruby). In fact, a lot of the micro-breweries who try their hand at mild are bringing the alcohol content back up somewhat! Mild wasn't always weaker though. In the latter half of the 19th century, milds were brewed to about the same strength as bitters as a response to the demand for a sweeter beer from the working classes, and in those days most bitters were around 6% to 7% ABV.

During the First World War, malt rationing and pressure from the temperance movement led brewers to rapidly reduced the strength. Following the Second World War, as prosperity returned, mild's popularity as a cheap ale began to fade, not being helped by being kept badly in run-down pubs as the "big brewers" began to heavily promote their keg bitter and lager brands. Coupled to this was a gradual but steady decline in heavy industry in the North and Midlands of Britain, mild's great marketplace.

By the 1970s, the keg lager boom had seen mild's share of the market fall to around 13% and it was a shame to see a bland, gassy and overpriced product – lager, which was generally weaker than the mild it was trying to oust – succeed in many cases. So lager drinkers (and the rest of you) ... try a mild in May?

Laurie Gibney

GRANDAD was *always* a bit of a practical joker.

So I should have known better when he took me down his local. Especially when he blindfolded me. Hand on elbow he steered me to a chair and sat me down. *"Here, sup on this,"* he ordered, holding a glass to my lips. *"What is it Grandad?"* I CHUNTERED, apprehensively. *"Never you mind,"* was the stern reply. *"Just get it down you."* I sipped, timidly, then again, bravely.

Then again, with NARY a care in the world. It was smooth, hoppy and dry. *"It's delicious!"* I exclaimed, ripping the blindfold from my eyes to reveal my Grandad's laughing face. *"Theakstons Mild,"* he chortled. *"I can tell it with my eyes closed. Now you can too."* *"But, even my dad says Theakstons Mild is only for pensioners,"* I protested. *"Aye, your father's just not old enough to appreciate it,"* said Grandad, his eyes twinkling merrily. *"But I reckoned his son would be."*



PECULIERLY
FINE COMPANY

GO WILD FOR MILD IN MAY

MAY is CAMRA's month for promoting Mild ales, where we encourage as many local pubs as possible to stock a Mild Ale. This style of ale has seen a steady increase in popularity in Bristol over the last couple of years, with several pubs now stocking one as a regular.

We want to promote those pubs that will be putting on a Mild during the month of May, by publishing a list of availability on our website at www.camrabristol.org.uk and planning pub crawls.

So far we know of four pubs that regularly stock mild. In Bristol, the Ship, Lower Park Row has Theakston's Mild; the Commercial Rooms, Corn street has changing dark milds; the Robin Hood, St Michael's Hill has Pint Size Brewery Mild (from Wadworth); and in Clapton in Gordano the Black Horse has Webster's Green Label (a light mild).

We need to know what the landlords of your locals are planning for May, and what dates they would expect the mild to be available.

Please email your pub's mild plans to badrag@camrabristol.org.uk, including pub name and location, dates mild available and what milds they will be (if known).

Promotional literature is also available for your pub landlord through CAMRA head office by writing to:

CAMRA Admin. Dept.
230 Hatfield Road,
St. Albans, Herts, AL1 4LW.

Tel: 01727 867 201 Email: camra@camra.org.uk

Colin Postlethwaite

TELL ME WHERE I CAN BUY A PINT OF PORTER . . .

. . . or STOUT or MILD or OLD ALE. These beer styles have almost disappeared from our pubs, and along with barley wine and weak bitters are classed as "RARE".

These rare ale styles are sought out by lovers of that style and those who like to try something different, as can be seen at beer festivals where these ales are often among the first to run out.

We are setting up a list of pubs in the Bristol & District area where you can find these ales, and we need your help to let us know what is out there. This list will then be accessible through the CAMRA website at www.camrabristol.org.uk where it will be kept up-to-date.

The info we need is: pub name, location, name of beer (and brewer), date spotted, and whether this is a regularly available or an occasional or guest ale.

For example: "The Ship", "Lower Park Row, Bristol", "Theakston's Mild and Theakston's Old Peculier", "14/01/2007", "Both are regulars."

Please email details to badrag@camrabristol.org.uk or send them by post to:

Rare Ales List, c/o Pints West editor, Garden Flat, 6 Royal York Villas, Clifton, Bristol BS8 4JR

or bring them along to any CAMRA branch meeting.

Colin Postlethwaite

Ship Shape and Bristol Fashion!

THE SHIP in Lower Park Row is a good place to sample a nice drop of that elusive beer known as Mild.

The pub is within sight of Zerodegrees, the microbrewery, bar & restaurant which opened a few years ago in a blaze of publicity, overshadowing its nearby older cousin a little.

Tony Kirk, the licensee of the Ship told *Pints West* that on April 10th the pub will close for a month to enable major renovation and improvements to take place. Unfortunately therefore the pub, which until recently has been the only pub in Bristol offering a mild regularly, will be closed for part of Mild Month 2007 and on National Mild Day on Saturday 5th May.

The Ship, is owned by Enterprise Inns which is Britain's biggest pub group, and comprises three properties rising up a fairly steep hill, thus has numerous changes in floor level. Some of the changes in level are being alleviated, an improved food counter will help them compete with their nearby cousin, and the number of hand pumps and lines is being increased from six to twelve to enable the number of real ales on offer at any time to be increased and maybe to provide some real ciders. The renovations are taking full account of the unique character of this exceptional pub, and two blocked up fireplaces are being restored. It is planned to provide a smoking shelter in the small yard at the rear of the pub.

Theakston's Mild, Old Peculier and XB, as well as Wells & Young's Bombadier and Greene King Old Speckled Hen, are currently the resident ales and the sixth pump is home to a changing guest ale which on a recent visit was Timothy Taylor Landlord. The Ship hosted a CAMRA meeting on Sunday 14th January which laid the foundations for the formation of a group within the local branch to campaign for pubs to widen their real ale range and include some rare ales, the new group is due to be officially launched at the Bristol Beer Festival in March.

Laurie Gibney



Photo by Duncan Shine

National Mild Day – Mild Ales Trail pub crawl

Saturday 5th May is National Mild Day.

To celebrate this CAMRA will be organizing a pub crawl in the central area of Bristol visiting the pubs that will be featuring mild ales.

You are welcome to join us at any point in the crawl which is intended to start at the **Victoria** in Southleigh Road, off St Paul's Road, Clifton, at midday. Proceeding downhill we will call at several pubs yet to be finalized before visiting the **White Lion** on the Centre, the **Commercial Rooms** in Corn Street, the **Old Fish Market** in Baldwin Street, and finishing at the **Cornubia**, Temple Street in the early evening. Final details will be available at the end of April on the CAMRA web site (www.camrabristol.org.uk). Alternatively, send a stamped, addressed envelope to 33, Stanbury Avenue, Fishponds, Bristol BS16 5AL and you will receive a copy of the itinerary.

Henry Davies

Greene King and Marston's cut real ale choice

MANY readers will know that the East Anglian brewer Greene King bought Hardy's & Hanson's brewery in Nottinghamshire last year. They made no bones about their intentions, which were to shut the brewery and keep the pubs – and this was accomplished by Christmas 2006.

This sadly predictable outcome is just the latest in a series of acquisitions and closures of smaller local and regional brewers by bigger ones that has been going on for decades, if not centuries. What has changed in recent years is that two brewers who were not multinationals already, but who had pub estates covering large parts of the UK, have become dominant in such takeovers. These two have made no secret of their aspiration to grow into national or multinational companies. Their names? Wolverhampton & Dudley Breweries – who recently renamed themselves Marston's because one of the brands they acquired by takeover was more popular than theirs – and Greene King.

The problem about all this for people who enjoy the taste of beer is that much of the diversity and interest, not to mention history and local heritage of brewing, is being lost. The acquiring company typically discontinues all the brands it has acquired – Marston's being a

shining exception to this rule – and substitutes its own product range in the pubs it has bought. Being brewed for a mass audience, and usually widely advertised, these are necessarily bland and standardised by comparison with what they have replaced. Thanks to Greene King's (GK's) efforts in particular, many long-established and locally popular brands have disappeared in only a few years. Names such as Ridley's of Chelmsford, and now Hardy's & Hanson's, are only the latest in a string of losses.

The loss of Kimberley Ales (the name used by Hardy's & Hanson's and their customers for their products, which were brewed in the small town of Kimberley near Nottingham) is especially poignant for me, as I grew up in their trading area. My earliest experiences of bitter and mild drinking involved their products, and I have remained particularly fond of them to this day. They were far more palatable to me than their rivals Shipstone's and Home Ales, both of whom also brewed a bitter and a mild, although these have now sadly disappeared through takeover and brewery closure.

This loss of good quality, popular products is bad enough, but there might be some compensation if the alternatives that companies such as Greene King and Marston's offer were themselves tasty and distinctive. Sadly, in my opinion at least, most of them are

so ago is no longer worth seeking out, in my view.

Taken in conjunction with the recent news that pubs owned by companies in the Marston group will no longer be allowed to sell "guest beers" (i.e. those brewed by other companies and chosen by the licensee to suit the preferences of local customers), this all looks like a renewed effort on the part of suppliers to tell the customer what we are allowed to have. It is reminiscent of what the "Big Six" national brewing companies tried in the 1960s and 1970s, and that led to the formation of CAMRA, the Campaign for Real Ale, the biggest and most successful consumer group the UK has seen.

The newly renamed Marston's company has at least retained brands of companies it took over, and whose breweries it shut, such as Mansfield bitter and mild. The main complaint about them for us in Bristol is that we hear they have withdrawn from many of their licensees the choice to offer something brewed locally, alongside their main product range which is brought in from the Midlands.

If you agree with any of the sentiments expressed above about the loss of choice and the blandness of what suppliers offer in place of distinctiveness and diversity, you don't have to give your money to the companies that do these things. Vote with your feet! Choose locally brewed and other distinctive products, drink where they can be found, and do please let the offending suppliers know what you are doing and why. If you want to lend your support to a movement that opposes these trends, and perhaps to meet other people who feel the same way, you can join CAMRA – there is a membership application form somewhere in this publication. We look forward to hearing from you.

Norman Spalding

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not. Greene King have been known to brew some interesting ales – a premium bitter known as Triumph was particularly good in the late 1990s, but personally I have not seen it for several years – and their XX Mild is a very pleasant dark-coloured ale brewed to a low gravity. Will these be offered in Kimberley Ales' former pubs? If GK's performance in the pubs they have acquired around Bristol in recent years is anything to go by, the best we can expect is their IPA (to my taste an uninspired and insipid drink, and an impostor – IPAs or India Pale Ales were originally brewed very strong and hoppy to survive the sea voyage to India, and 3.6% ABV does not qualify) and Abbot Ale, which despite its good reputation 30 years or

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The Great Welsh Beer & Cider Festival

ON Saturday morning of the 25th November, passports at the ready, we caught the train to Cardiff to experience our first visit to a Welsh beer festival.

Arriving at Cardiff Central station we make our way through crowds of shoppers and rugby supporters past the Millennium Stadium where Wales are playing New Zealand in six hours time. We head down the high street towards Cardiff Castle, past the Good Beer Guide-litsed pub, the Goat Major, and then head towards the city hall where the festival is being held. The tall clock tower of the city hall is clearly visible on top of one of the white stone Victorian buildings that form the civic area of Cardiff.

The festival is housed over two floors of this ornately decorated building, with over 150 beers, 40 ciders and perries, and a large range of German draught and bottled beers. It is a great opportunity to taste beers from Welsh brewers, with over 24 represented from small brew-pubs like Black Mountain brewery, just started recently at the Telegraph Inn in Llangadog, Carmarthenshire, to this year's festival sponsors and Wales' largest brewery, the family-owned Brains.

We soon get stuck into the hard work of sampling our way through the range, accompanied by faint snatches from the Welsh male voice



choir. About 20 beers have already run out, but beers of interest were the 3.6% Dark Mild from Wigan's Rosebridge brewery that was so smokey that it might have been brewed on a barbecue; the Wye Valley Brewery's Dorothy Goodbody's Wholesome Stout, a 4.6% rich creamy stout with a dry roast flavour; and my favourite today, an excellent pale amber beer from the Bryncelyn brew-plant housed in the cellar of the Wern Fawr pub in Ystalyfera, Swansea, called Holly Hops: it was a hoppy and fruity beer overflowing with flavour and only 3.8%.

The Champion Beer of Wales competition was won by Otley Brewery of Pontypridd with O8, an 8.0% winter ale. Second was Brains Dark a 3.5% Mild, and third was Otley's OG a 5.4% Golden coloured ale. Regrettably all these beers were sold out, as were many of the stronger ales, and when we left at 3pm it looked like about half the beers had run out. Despite this, it was still a good festival with a large selection of beers to try, many from new breweries that have only opened in the past 12 months.

The venue's ambience was friendly and the traditional Cornish pasty was the size of a dinner plate. We caught the train home in time to watch the Rugby on the TV (Wales 10 : 45 New Zealand).

Colin & Pennie Postlethwaite

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Watering Holes in the Desert

news from Weston-super-Mare

Weston Whispers (pub and beer news)

LOCAL CAMRA members were bitterly disappointed to hear that Gary Havard was leaving the Raglan Arms on Upper Church Road.

Over the three years that Gary had been in charge, he had taken "The Rag" from being a real ale non-entity to proudly appearing in the last two editions of the Good Beer Guide.

The leaving party for Gary and Jo went on a bit, with the last revellers getting out just before daybreak (and we are talking January here). The pub was then closed for three weeks, with a hopeful sign in the window saying that it would be re-opening under new management on 1st February with "real alesback with a vengeance."

The re-opening did indeed happen and over the first weekend Sharp's Doom Bar and RCH Pitchfork and East Street Cream were on offer. Fingers crossed that the new management will still be looking to attract discerning real ale drinkers.

In the last Pints West we mentioned that the **Ancaster** on Drove Road was about to re-open. Local CAMRA members had been keeping an eye out for the big day, which occurred on Friday 1st December.

The pub has been taken over by Ray Sparks, who also owns also the **Royal Artillery** in West Huntspill. As part of breaking with the past, when the Ancaster did not always have a good reputation, it has been re-named as the **Oak House**. The great news for Weston's real ale drinkers is that Ray has close connections with the local award-winning RCH brewery and all his ales will come from there, as well as some of their equally fine bottled range of beers. Several CAMRA members had the pleasure of seeing in the New Year sipping RCH's Santa Fe, although given its strength I am not sure how much they could actually see at midnight.

The Oak House should be a very welcome development for the local ale scene. On my

last visit, Pitchfork, Santa Fe and Steaming Ice were all available.

Come and decide for yourself at our social on Wednesday 21st March.

Another positive change of management has taken place at the **Red Admiral** on Alexandra Parade, opposite Tesco. After a period of closure, behind depressing steel shutters, it has now re-opened with a management team of John Bowles and Rob Button, both CAMRA members – Rob also being a guitar maker. Not surprisingly, they are keen to put real ale at the forefront of the business. At present they are selling Butcombe Bitter at an attractive £2 a pint and a changing guest beer.

The pub is owned by Admiral Taverns and the list of beers from which they can choose their guest ales from is small. However, good quality Timothy Taylor Landlord, Adnams Broadside, Wychwood Hobgoblin and others have been enjoyed by their new customers. John reports that they are trying to get Admiral to join the Society of Independent Brewers scheme which would allow them to source a wider range of ales – in particular more local ones. The main aim for now is to build up trade to support the addition of a third ale. Another pub worthy of your support if you enjoy real ale. The local CAMRA branch will be visiting for our April social on Wednesday the 18th, but don't wait for that – get along now!

Good news from Mike Fletcher of **Weston Cricket Club** on Devonshire Road. A beer festival is to take place over the weekend of the 24th and 25th of March. On the Saturday, proceedings will begin at 12 noon. From then through to 6pm there will be exhibition cricket matches played by the clubs youth teams. Food will also be available.

Admission will be free throughout the two days, with the exception being from 8pm until

midnight on the Saturday evening, when there will be a live band and disco. Admission to this will cost £5 for two people.

On Sunday, the festival will run from 12 noon until 5pm. Pre-booked Sunday lunches will be available. There will also be sponsored head shavings going on from 12 till 2 and live rugby between Bristol and Northampton on the big screen from 3pm.

There will be ten real ales available – including Pitchfork and East Street Cream from RCH brewery.

The **Parish Pump** in Worle has been selling a very nice pint of Gales (or rather Fuller's) HSB, along with Wadworth 6X and Courage Best.

The local branch of the Licensed Victuallers Association in conjunction with Archers Brewery has organised a one-day (or rather a one-afternoon) mini-beer festival at the **49 Club** on Baker Street.

This will be held on Monday 2nd April, running from 1pm to 7pm. There will be six Archers beers on offer for the incredible price of 80p a pint. CAMRA members are welcome as guests of the club.

If you are not a member of CAMRA or the 49 Club, I suggest that you do something about it now, as you will quickly get an excellent deal for your money.

You can't keep a good woman down – nor Di Bradley landlady of the **Night Jar**. The latest appearance of the Mead Vale pub in the local press concerned six people being confirmed by the Right Reverend Roger Sainsbury during one of the regular monthly services held there. Everyone apparently celebrated with a pint.

Shortly after my glowing comments in the last edition of Pints West, Steve and Rose left the **Ebdon Arms** in Worle. They have taken over at the Butcombe-owned **Swan** at Rowberrow.

The Swan has been a Good Beer Guide regular in recent years and I am sure that Steve will deliver beer of the high standard that the locals have come to expect at the Swan.

Back at the Ebdon Arms, the new management are still putting a strong emphasis on real ales, with at least seven ales usually available. The ales now seem to be fairly rigidly sourced from the Wolverhampton & Dudley-approved range, so the local RCH beers that had proved popular (not to mention Steve's occasional whims like running a Welsh micro-brewery



mini-festival) are likely to be a thing of the past. Indeed some of the beers are brewed at the Jennings brewery site in Cockermouth, Cumbria.

So now instead of beers being sold that have travelled two miles to get to the pub, they will now travel 302 miles. It's called caring for the environment. Almost makes you look forward to the oil running out.

And finally on the branch's Worle Crawl in January, our resident "King of the Snuff", Robin E Wild, met a soulmate in the guise of the landlord of the **Lamb** on Worle High Street. Robin came away armed with a wide array of new varieties to try. Several other CAMRA members have been seen to "have a sniff" recently and Robin has already weaned one person off tobacco and on to snuff.

Could snuff-taking replace smoking when the ban comes into force? If so, Robin will be well-placed to provide an expert consultancy service.

Further snuff news in *A Round With Robin*.
Tim Nickolls

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McVittie goes crackers at Christmas

WELL here I sit at my word processor raring to go, after another fun evening out with the Weston-super-Mare CAMRA sub-branch on our Christmas Ales Crawl – two versions of my *Pints West* article zooming around my beer befuddled brain. (Is befuddled a word? Sounds like a good name for an ale – copyright Dave McVittie, 2006).

We started off, most of us, at the **Raglan Arms**. Excellent as always with more than enough ales to suit even the most fussy CAMRA pallet. Me? I had Wickwar's Christmas Cracker followed by their Station Porter, after which delights the Raglan's own Knightstone Nectar seemed poor!

I cannot remember what else was on offer but Gary had, as always, an impressive range of ales and he was encouraging us to stay longer with a very nice free buffet. It is rare that publicans support CAMRA so well and we too should support pubs that are aware of the 'power' of CAMRA.

From the Raglan we went to the **Regency**. Of course with twenty or so of us in the 'crawl' we had decided to travel in small groups. It must be frustrating for pub staff when ten or more drinkers walk in all wanting halves. Groups of five or six are somehow more manageable.

Duncan (remember him from the last *Pints West*?) ordered three halves of Young's Christmas Ale. It was very nice, better than it was at the same place last year. Perhaps Young's have improved it. Unfortunately we got pints, oh dear! But we did agree that the Station Porter had probably ruined our taste-buds before the Knightstone Nectar, and the walk from pub to pub had re-aligned our taste buds.

Anyway after the Regency it was the **Royal Hotel**. Very posh and a great lady blues vocalist. Exmoor's Exmas Ale ran out as we

arrived so we drank some very cold, but delicious, Fuller's London Pride in front of a very nice, fake, coal fire. It is a comfortable bar in the Royal with some genuine character, well worth a visit and usually a couple of ales on the pumps. Free live music is a good bonus too.

The next establishment was to be the newly refurbished bar of the **London Inn**. However my companions and I felt rather old in this place and left as soon as we arrived. They were selling the Young's Christmas Ale but we were not about to fight our way through the crowds of the young and beautiful at the bar to try it. Whilst writing I note that the other half of the London Inn is now being refurbished. Great to see investment in pubs when all about us is doom and gloom. I must go back to the London Inn when it is a little quieter.

Wetherspoon is a chain of pubs that sell a wonderful range of real ales. For me the problem is, because they sell such vast quantities of reasonably priced food, getting a beer around lunchtime can be difficult and tediously long-winded. Oh how I like pubs to be pubs and restaurants to be restaurants! Having said that, Wetherspoon do have great pubs – their pubs are attractive, atmospheric and in good locations. Well we had arrived at the **Dragon** latish, well after food service had stopped, and our beers were delicious and the service excellent. The seasonal beers on were RCH Steaming Santa, Smiles/Highgate Holly Hops, Shepherd Neame Cracker Ale and Bath Ales Festive Gem. I was suitably impressed and pleased. I think that in future I will be careful to visit JD Wetherspoon's pubs after food service has ended. I am sure "Mr Wetherspoon" will be relieved!

Some members had been to **Bar Shallus** beforehand for some reportedly very good Newman's Hoppy Gristmas and so were off to

Off The Rails. That is where we all eventually ended up. RCH Santa Fé was promised but was not actually available so we happily drank Otter Ale. (*Unlucky Dave, the barman eventually relented in the face of sustained public demand and Sante Fé went on* – Tim Nickolls.)

I don't think I mentioned our new member. It seems my articles in *Pints West*, combined with our great leader Tim Nickolls' visit to our local Rotary Club, may have found us a new CAMRA member. Peter, like me, is more of a social CAMRA member, out for the fun of the trips, conscious of the need to promote real ale, but not really interested in the fine detail of which brewer invented what. On this occasion Duncan (our new member mentioned in the last *Pints West*) had failed to get a kebab, but managed to play with his phone all evening; Peter was, I think, convinced that CAMRA is worth joining and we, all the WSM CAMRA members, had a thoroughly good night out.

If you live in or around Weston and fancy coming on our next trip check out the diary lists in *Pints West*, maybe give our Hon. Sec. Tim a call, and come along next time round. It really is a fun night out.

Postscript – Since writing the above the Raglan has closed, but only for a short time, and messages are filtering through that it has now re-opened. I feel the need to go forth and find out more.

I missed out on the WSM January crawl in Worle as I was working and I must miss out on the minibus crawl in February (oversubscribed I am told!) as I shall be warming myself in España. So, dear reader, you may not find these inspirational notes in the next *Pints West* (unless I can find another excuse for writing drivel).

Dave McVittie

A Round with Robin

DID you get any beer for Christmas? My niece gave me a "Beers from around the World" pack and I was so pleased at the time for her to acknowledge that her uncle is a beer drinker; it was only later that I suffered the disappointment of finding that they were all brewed by InBev in the UK!

The **Crediton Inn beer festival** that I mentioned in *Pints West* 72 went ahead and I attended on the first and second days, with my favourite ale of the festival being the Downton Chimera Golden Delight, this being new to me. More recently I went with four others from Weston sub-branch to the **Exeter Winter Ales Festival**, where over 50 ales ranging from 3.8% to 8.2% were on offer, with three ciders including a "dangerously easy drinking" 7.5% Devon cider from Wiscombe named Suicider. We didn't have a bad beer amongst what we had, though not all were to each other's taste. My favourites were the Welsh Otley Ho Ho Ho (5%), Branscombe Vale Yo Ho Ho (Ho), a stronger version of their Yo Ho Ho coming in at 8.2%, Ashcott Old Freddie Walker (7%) and Kent ale from Westerham, God's Wallop (4.3%). On our way back we visited a couple of Exeter's waterfront pubs, the **Prospect Inn** and the **Bishop Blaise** – both are worth a visit, with Otter ale featuring strongly in both pubs.

On our annual Christmas Ales Crawl around Weston (see Dave McVittie's article)

we had a few surprises, one being the **Royal Hotel** having Exmoor Exmas, and furthermore that many folk commented that the Young's Winter Ale at the **Regency** was so much improved on the same beer last year (maybe the move to Bedford has improved it?). In fact at least two people thought it was the best ale on the crawl.

Between Christmas and the new year a small group of us went to Bath to search for the (up to now) elusive Abbey Ales Twelfth Night, only available up to the 6th of January. We started with breakfast at the Wetherspoon pub, **Kings of Wessex**, and moved to the **Coeur de Lion** where to my joy the Twelfth Night was on; not surprising, I suppose, as Abbey Ales have bought the pub. We found it to our taste, but to check on the beer rather than the pub we opted to have another of the same at the **Star Inn**.

After a few half pints (which was the order of the day) in other pubs in Bath we broke our train journey back to have a visit to the **Cornubia**, which I imagine will have received some praise elsewhere in this *Pints West*. As well as there being four beers from the Hidden Brewery, they were showcasing the Black Country Bradley range of beers, the Fireside (5%) being my favourite. Hidden Depths vied with Hidden Pleasure for my delight.

On Saturday 20th January I went with the Chalice Morris Men to the Wassail at the **Westcroft** cider farm at Brent Knoll.

Although Westcroft is better known for their award-winning Janet's Jungle Juice, they also produce much other traditional cider both medium and dry. The Wassail there is held on very old-fashioned methods, no shotguns being used as they are post-medieval, whereas the wassail is pre-Roman invasion. Although the morris men danced and led the singing of the old wassail song, it's a shame to report that unless new members are found the Chalice men may not in future be able to continue to attend this and other festivities. So if you want to know more or would like to join us, visit our website at www.chalicesmorris.org. It is also a great way

to visit many real ale pubs in Somerset, and occasionally elsewhere in England.

In Weston-super-Mare we have lost the **Raglan Arms'** Gary and Jo, and therefore the acoustic music session on Friday nights (when incidentally the most real ales were freshest) has moved to the **Red Admiral** pub in Locking Road on Sunday afternoons. This pub, re-opened in mid December, sells Butcombe Bitter at £2 a pint, and recent guest ales have included Greene King Abbot Ale, Adnams Broadside and Timothy Taylor's Landlord. It was a great shame to see the Raglan Arms close as a real ale pub, but the good news is that Weston has been re-opening pubs and clubs that a few months ago had a doubtful future. The **Oak House** in Drove Road has done well with a continuous supply of RCH Santa Fé and its own RCH Steaming Ice (unavailable anywhere else), this retailing at £2 a pint. I saw the New Year in at the Oak House and a friendly place it is, with the daily papers available.

Colin at **Off The Rails** also had Santa Fé and continues to have a good varied selection of real ales, recently having the new Cheddar Ales brewery's Best Bitter, and Skinner's ales from Cornwall. He is open to suggestions from beer (and cider) drinkers on what to order, as is Lou at the **White Hart**, where since Christmas we have had a few really good real ales, Archer's Marley's Ghost (7%) and Church End Fallen Angel (5%) being two of the best.

After a year or so in the doldrums the Wetherspoon **Dragon Inn** (once a regular in the Good Beer Guide) has picked up with the appointment of a new cellar manager. It was great the other day to visit and see O'Hanlon's Port Stout, Bath Ales Wild Hare, Oakham Inferno, and RCH East Street Cream lined up together.


On the recent Worle crawl it was heartening to be able to have a varied selection of beers in the evening: Otter and Old Speckled Hen at the **Woodspring**, St Austell Tribute at the **Nut Tree**, Newman's Hoppy Gristmas at the **Old King's Head**, and Butcombe Bitter at the **Lamb Inn**. The last two were very good value for money: £2.26 for the Newman's and £2 at the Lamb.

Although I have been sitting on the fence, so to speak, on the impending smoking legislation, I would point out that snuff could make a comeback as it is almost impossible to suffer from secondary snuff-taking. I mention this here, as the **Lamb** at Worle has been selling snuff for as long as I can remember, as do the **Star Inn** at Bath, the **Miner's Arms** at Shipham, and no doubt readers will know of others in Bristol. I have taken snuff on a social basis since about 1979 and it can be pleasurable without being addictive. It also goes well with real ale, as the aroma of one can heighten the aroma of the other. If you see me at Bristol Beer Festival I will have a selection on me – when I am not at the bar, just ask for a pinch!

Robin E Wild

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Portishead pub update

The Albion, Bristol Road

Andrew and Dawn only took over the management of this Greene King establishment in December last year. Andrew mainly does the hard work producing the food while Dawn looks after the bar. It isn't Andrew's first stint here – he left for further GK pastures eight years ago.

A major refit is planned from 12th February when the pub will be closed for up to two weeks. The local public can then expect to see some big improvements – including a sports bar with telly screens and pool tables at the back of the place.

At the moment, the real ales are Greene King's IPA (at a very reasonable £2 a pint) and Abbot Ale, £2.20. The hope is that the refit will also allow room for barrels of changing guest ales and cider. If these are as good as the Abbot I sampled, we can expect exciting things from this friendly couple.

The Plough, High Street

I gave the Plough a quick shufti the other day. As expected, as far as I could make out all the drinks were keg which didn't seem to put off the mainly young and lively crowd. Although this may not be a typical CAMRA member's cup of tea, it undoubtedly has a place in town. I have to say the Thatcher's cider tried went down well while watching a gripping session of "Deal or No Deal" on widescreen.

The White Lion, High Street

At Number 1, the High Street, this pub is part of the history of Portishead. In fact, some of its walls formed part of the original sea wall

and barges used to flow under its archway. At almost 300 years old, according to landlord Barry who has been here five years, this is the third oldest building in town. Previous lives were as a working mill and then a hotel.

There are two bars separated by a large fireplace. At the rear, most of the seating seems to be made up of comfy sofas whereas the front looks to be more of a bar where people who have got their hands cold and dirty on the local building sites are not turned away. OK, lagers are the biggest seller, and this is definitely on the lively side for some. However, Barry and his team are friendly and helpful and the one real ale, Bass, was tip-top. A second cask ale is being considered so watch out for it. Sky Sports is provided and homemade pies and Sunday lunches feature amongst the food available.

The Windmill, Nore Road

I have to admit to being fairly regular at this joint, drawn mainly by the excellently kept beers and the regular turnover of the guest ales. Local independent breweries are supported in particular and personal favourites in the last couple of months have been RCH's Santa Fé and Bath Ales' Barnstormer. At the time of writing this, I'm in a state of some excitement – Exmoor Ales' Beast will be ready in a couple of days – hubba hubba!

I'm also pleased to say the Easter Weekend Beer Festival is being planned at the moment. All nine of the real ale taps will provide constantly changing brews from Friday 6th to Monday 9th April. There is no admission charge. Just turn up and enjoy.

Neil Ravenscroft

The Black Horse, Clapton in Gordano

On a recent lunchtime visit to "Meet the Landlord" all my preconceived ideas on this place were only reinforced. What a great pub! The "Kicker" is in a 14th-century building which had served as the local lock-up and still features the gaol window with bars. More recently, this had been a Courage pub. The range of real ales is now wider with Courage Best, Butcombe Bitter, Wadworth 6X, Shepher Neame Spitfire and Webster's Green Label as the regulars. Also, when I visited, Old Hooky (4.6%) from Hook Norton Brewery was the extra guest. OK, I'm biased, but that was the best pint of Hooky I've tasted.

If I have a problem with this place it is that it panders to personal indecision. One day I drink the cider, another the beer. This time, the beer was washed down by some Black Rat cider – at £1.80 a pint that often equals a good night out for less than a tenner for this lightweight.

Meet the Landlord

Name: Nick Evans, landlord of the Black Horse, Clapton for 14 years.

Age: 45

Where from: Born in Barry, South Wales but, in his defence, he grew up locally and attended Gordano School.

Interests: All sport but especially rugby supporting England, Bristol and Gordano RFC (the pub sponsors this local club).

Memorable moment: When one of the pub's many "characters" – Skinner – had his sheep wander into the pub looking for him.

Previous pubs: Horse and Groom, near Stow-on-the-Wold.

Other jobs: Wine salesman. English Teacher in Spain.

Best thing about being a landlord: The customers.

Worst thing: Can't think of any.

Favourite other pub: None comes to mind.

Average hours worked in a week: 45.

Last holiday: France in September.



The Black Horse, Clapton in Gordano



Jane and Nick of the Black Horse

Remember a Pint of Courage Best?

Well probably – you can still find it in some pubs in Bristol, but no where near as many as a few years ago when it dominated the real ale market locally.

How about Courage Directors though? This was once highly regarded ale with quite a large following locally. Trying to find a pint of the stuff in Bristol these days is almost akin to the fruitless search for a black cat down a coal mine.

Most readers will be aware of the disgraceful decision to close the Courage brewery in central Bristol just a few years ago thus ending hundreds of years of brewing on the site. The brewing of the Courage real ales, namely Best and Directors, was transferred to Tadcaster in Yorkshire. So, you can now be sure that, if you see Courage ales in Bristol, they will have clocked up

a not inconsiderable amount of “beer miles” to get to your local pub. The Tadcaster brewery, which is best known for the production of John Smith’s beer, is part of the Scottish & Newcastle (S&N) empire.

The Courage beers, however, are on the move again! S&N have done a deal with the Wells & Young’s Brewing Company of Bedford to brew the beers there.

If you can’t quite keep up with the ever changing world of brewery ownership, takeovers, mergers, etc, Wells & Young’s are the brewery recently formed following the very sad closure of the famous Young’s brewery in Wandsworth, South West London, and the merging of their brewing operations with the Charles Wells brewery in Bedford.

At least with the transferring of the Courage beers to Bedford, there will be no brewery closure. The deal S&N has struck with Wells & Young’s is for the latter to purchase the rights for production, marketing and sales of the Courage portfolio of ale brands.

However, the sale demonstrates a concern that the global breweries have no real interest in real ale production or promotion. It is good news that Wells & Young’s will be putting quite a substantial marketing push into the brands – any promotion of real ale is surely welcome in a market dominated by ads for lagers and gassy ciders. However, when S&N refer to “niche brands” in their press release on this matter, I think it must reflect their view on the ale market as not one they have a primary interest in. I mean, Courage beers “niche”? – they were once iconic!

Had S&N put an equal amount of marketing spend behind the Courage beers as some of their other products, perhaps they would not be so “niche”.

This is obviously good business for Well & Young’s. The new business will grant them an initial seven-year licence for the Courage beers. There should be no impact for Courage drinkers. S&N will retain a 17% stake and continue to sell and distribute Courage beers throughout its direct regional on-trade business. Wells & Young’s will be free to promote the brands within its own customer base and seek new stockists in the UK.

The transfer of brewing of the beers from Tadcaster to Bedford will take place over the next few months. See if you can tell the difference.

Pete Bridle



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Taste the difference at the Victoria (and elsewhere)

HAVE you ever walked into a real ale pub, been faced with an array of handpumps and thought this is your idea of beer heaven?

Well, for some people, this would be their idea of beer hell! This is because they would not know what the difference was between the different beers on offer and, to avoid admitting their lack of knowledge in front of friends, the bar staff and the punters at the bar, they would probably opt for a “safe” beer, i.e. one they had tried before, or, worse still, a keg beer. There are a vast array of beer style and flavours available down the pub, but they are not realising their full potential in the marketplace, particularly amongst new drinkers, because of poor salesmanship and the lack of information available to help the consumer make an informed choice at the bar.

I am somewhat surprised that, although beer is our national alcoholic drink, it appears to be the poor relation of wine in terms of knowledgeable people being prepared to write and talk to the public about the kaleidoscope of tastes and flavours that are provided by real ale, which is the simple combination of malted barley and hops, water and yeast together with a bit of craft from the brewer.

However, the beer industry is fighting back and people like Brian Yorston, Head Brewer at the Wadworth brewery located at Devizes in Wiltshire, are leading the charge by passing on their knowledge to the masses to help educate them. Brian is a professional beer taster with many years of experience and a passion for real ale. Back in December, he hosted a beer appreciation evening at the Victoria in Westbury-on-Trym. His co-hosts were Alistair & Fiona Deas and Rhona Murdoch of this excellent Wadworth pub that also serves guest beers, which is tucked away down Chock Lane in the heart of the village (the more eagle-eyed amongst you will have read in the local press recently that Alistair helped to foil a burglary in Westbury-on-Trym with the help of a neighbour).

The event was held to mark the launch of Wadworth’s winter beer, Old Father Timer, and Alistair went to collect the beer from the brewery himself to ensure he got one of the first casks. Following an interesting talk on the history of brewing, we were treated to a tutored tasting of eight different beers from Britain, Ireland and Belgium: Wadworth Pint Size Mild (3.3% ABV), Wadworth Henry’s Original IPA (3.6%), Butcombe Bitter (4.0%), Guinness (4.5%), Hoegaarden White Beer (4.9%), Belle-Vue Framboise (5.7%), Wadworth Old Father Timer (5.8%) and Chimay Red (7.0%).

This relatively small sample of beers, some on draught and some in bottles, were carefully selected to expose us to a wide range of styles and flavours in terms of colour, bitterness, sweetness and alcohol content. We experienced the dry roasted bitterness of the Guinness, the citrus and spice flavours of the Hoegaarden (you could recognise coriander as well as clove-like flavours) and the complex (rasp-

berry) flavour of the Chimay.

A good time was had by all and we left with a greater appreciation of what is a complex beverage made from simple ingredients. Many thanks to both Wadworth’s and the Victoria for putting on this excellent event to promote the cause of real ale.

Cyclops

There are over 2,500 real ales produced by over 600 breweries in Britain. There are bitters, golden ales, stouts, porters and barley wines to name but a few styles. Nobody can know what they all taste like, but there are a number of initiatives in place to help with making an informed choice when presented with a new beer or a selection of beers to choose from.

On an annual basis, CAMRA holds the “Great British Beer Festival” in London to showcase a wide range of real ales from Britain and abroad. At the event held in August last year, a new “wine-like” tasting scheme to demystify real ale was launched by CAMRA and 14 breweries (Caledonian, Camerons, Charles Wells, Elgoods, Everards, Fuller’s, Hall & Woodhouse, Hook Norton, Refresh UK, Robinson’s, Titanic, Wadworth, Wolverhampton & Dudley Brands and Woodforde’s). The scheme is called “Cyclops” due to the one eye, nose and mouth imagery used on the promotional material.

As mentioned above, real ale is an incredibly complex drink with an enormous range of styles and flavours. A great deal of skill and care goes into the brewing process, and there are many thousands of dedicated enthusiasts and connoisseurs, which has led to a whole new and fascinating language behind beer tasting. Some beer experts in the past have used very “flowery” language to describe real ale and many consumers have found this hard to understand.

The aim of Cyclops is to inform existing, and particularly new, real ale drinkers of what style of beer they are drinking, what its alcohol content is, what it should look like, what it should smell like and, of course, what it should taste like. This is achieved by using very simple but informative language. Sweetness and bitterness are the two dominant taste qualities of real ale, and Cyclops uses a scale of 1 to 5 for each to enable drinkers to work out how sweet and bitter they like their beers. The idea is that drinkers will know what a beer will look, smell and taste like before they part with their cash at the bar.

Hopefully, many more drinkers will learn to appreciate the complex flavours of real ale and, in time, they will become the dedicated enthusiasts and connoisseurs of the future.

There are other initiatives too and the pubs are doing their bit. It is quite common these days to find real ale pubs offering a “try before you buy” scheme where you can try a small sample of the beer, or beers, you are interested

in so that you can see it, smell it and taste it before you make a final selection. Some might argue that this small volume of beer effectively given away for free is money down the drain. However, I would argue that it is a small investment as it is much more likely that the consumer is going to return to buy more beer if they initially find one they like and enjoy.

Many real ale pubs today have the currently available beers on tap chalked up on a board and it is not uncommon for simple tasting notes to be provided too, as can be found at the Hillgrove Porter Stores in Kingsdown. Alternatively, some real ale pubs such as the Cross Hands at Fishponds have the tasting notes on the bar adjacent to each handpump. The most unusual approach I have seen to date is at the Royal Oak in Bath where they have a small sample of beer on the bar adjacent to each handpump so that you can see what it looks like. Perhaps you are allowed to smell it and taste it too?

It is still not uncommon to go into a real ale pub to be faced by an array of pump clips with striking imagery but very little information about the product on offer, with the alcohol content only discernable with the aid of a magnifying glass. However, the brewers are also trying to help the consumer make an informed choice, with many re-designing their pump clips to provide clear information about the style of beer and the alcohol content.

So, next time you are down the pub, take a look around you see what is available to help you select a beer that you will like and enjoy. The person behind the bar should be able to offer you informed advice and there is always CAMRA’s *Good Beer Guide* to fall back on. However, although it is updated and published on an annual basis, it can never be totally comprehensive as there are so many new and one-off beers brewed these days.

Finally, just to show how times have changed, I noticed in the latest edition of *What’s Brewing*, the monthly newspaper for CAMRA members, an article which contained a quote from a major player in the beer industry who was borrowing language from the wine industry. Two award-winning Scottish beers, Caledonian’s Deuchars IPA and Harviestoun’s Bitter & Twisted, were being compared, with the former described as a “Chardonnay” and the latter as a “Sauvignon Blanc”.

For those of you familiar with these two popular beers and white wines, this was a particularly apt comparison when you consider the greater assertive and sharpness of flavour of Bitter & Twisted when compared with Deuchars IPA. I for one am perfectly happy for the beer industry to beg, steal or borrow language from the wider drinks industry if it helps to de-mystify real ale for the consumer!

Dave Graham

News from Bath and Widcombe

THE Old Farmhouse on Lansdown Road has reopened after a low-key and sympathetic refurbishment – and not only is the beer as good as ever; the jazz is back as well. Matthew and Mark Warburton, (whose parents run the Old House at Home in Burton, the Northey Arms in Box and the Crown in Dyrham), have taken over the Farmhouse, and, apart from serving quality pub food, they aim to keep it much as it was.

The opening night, just before Christmas, saw the old place packed, and it was good to see John and Mary Bradshaw, who gave up the lease in August, chatting to a large group of old friends. Five pumps dispensed a range of Wadsworth's beers, and newly-commissioned murals took the place of the collection of jazz memorabilia that once covered the walls. The bar that once extended along the wall of the back room had been replaced by tables, creating much more room to sit and watch the superb Berry Goddard Band performing at the far end.

So, full marks for a sensitive makeover, and for keeping alive a great Bath institution – but with one small caveat: the video screen behind the band which, on opening night, was playing a selection of vintage slapstick comedies. At the right time – i.e. when there's no band playing – this might have been OK: as it was, it was more than a little distracting and, with performers of this calibre, the last thing you want is distraction.

Another Wadsworth's pub to receive a new lease of life is **the Curfew on Cleveland**



The Curfew by night



The Old Farmhouse

Place East. This was a cracking little boozer, with possibly the best pub room in Bath on the first-floor, but latterly trade had dropped off and opening hours were cut back. This January, however, it was taken over by Heidi Hunt and Anna Livesey from Chippenham, who, in between getting to know the resident ghost, have started to turn the place around.

The Curfew is now open all day, and – something of rarity for Bath – bar snacks (toasties, baguettes and soup) are available in the evenings. Special theme nights are planned for the Six Nations championship, and the beer (which included Old Timer on a recent visit) is spot on.

The Curfew has only been a pub since the 1960s. Before that it was a wine merchant's; earlier still it was a bookshop. Built by Henry Goodridge (who also designed the Corridor and Beckford's Tower), its Regency facade, dating from 1827, is one of the most elegant in the city. Refurbishment by Wadsworth's in the

1960s entailed the lowering of the ground-floor ceiling and the addition of a lovely wood-panelled snug, down a few steps from the main bar. Add a secluded beer garden – another rarity in Bath – and you have a pub worth seeking out. And, as it's midway between the Star and the King William, you don't really have to go too far out of your way.

Another Bath pub that's recently joined the league of ones to watch is **the White Horse at Twerton** which changed hands last July. Ten minutes walk from the Royal Oak on the Lower Bristol Road (carry on along the Lower Bristol Road; just past the pedestrian crossing lights turn up Jew's Lane and you'll find it at the top), it's worth a detour. The old place has been revamped, smartened up, given a new lease of life as a friendly community pub – and, most important, has four hand-pumps. Hobgoblin and Sharp's Doom Bar are the regulars, along with guests such as Otter. The White Horse is open everyday from midday. The website can be found at www.thewhitehorsebath.com.

The events calendar at **the Raven in Quiet Street**, local CAMRA pub of the year, keeps getting longer. A science café, a story-telling circle, an acoustic club and a cycling campaign group all meet regularly in the upstairs bar. The latest venture is a blues night every Tuesday, while on 5 April there will be a night of Acoustic Punk. If you drop in for a pint during the latter part of February, you'll also get chance to vote in the Raven's beer election: vote for your favourite beer and, when the results are counted, the top six brews will appear at the Raven throughout March.

There will also be a beer festival with a difference at the Raven for St George's Day (or rather St George's Week), with brews from long-established English breweries. For details, see www.theravenofbath.co.uk.



Reopening night at the Old Farmhouse



The White Horse at Twerton

In case you haven't discovered it yet, there is a great website featuring all of Bath's pubs, complete with picture gallery, recent news, etc., at www.bathpubs.co.uk. Another entertaining site is www.beerinthevening.com, which features reviews of most of Bath's boozers. A recent pub crawl round some of Bath's real ale pubs can also be found on www.scoopergen.co.uk/Main_Page_again.htm.

The Salamander in John Street now features an Irish session every Tuesday night, organised by Marick Baxter, who is also involved in the weekly session on Wednesdays at the **Royal Oak**. Tuesday is also the night to catch local Celtic band, Sulis, at the **Star Inn**.

The Star was the featured heritage pub on the front cover of February's *Beer* magazine from CAMRA, with some atmospheric photos by Mick Slaughter.

THE Royal Oak on Pulteney Road (not to be confused with the Royal Oak on the Lower Bristol Road) has changed hands and is currently closed for refurbishment until 24th February.

A few doors down, the **Golden Fleece**, which closed in the 1990s but whose incised lettering still advertises beers from the long-defunct Lamb Brewery at Frome, reopened early this year as a sushi bar, but closed again almost immediately.



Elsewhere in Widcombe, the **Ram**, which featured in the 2005 Good Beer Guide, has also changed hands, but, apart from removing the bit of the bar counter that jutted out into the room, little has changed. Bass, Bellringer, Otter and Courage Best can still be found on



draught, as well as Thatcher's cider. There are plans to bring in some old church pews to fill the gap left by the removal of the bar, which should nicely complement the décor of this atmospheric pub.

For anyone planning to come to Bath for a pub crawl by train, a detour to the Ram can easily be included. On leaving the station, turn right, go through the tunnel under the tracks, cross the river, cross the road, turn left and you'll find it less than 100 yards along on the left.

There are two more historic pubs over the road serving real ale as well – the **Ring of Bells**, where you can currently find 'Beer!' from Milk Street brewery, and the **White Hart**, with Butcombe Bitter and Butty Bach from Wye Valley, plus one of the best beer gardens in Bath.

Andrew Swift

Abbey Ales is 10!

DRINKERS across Bath will soon be able to raise a toast to mark ten years of top tipples from Abbey Ales. Alan Morgan set up Abbey ten years ago – reviving a brewing tradition in the city that had been lost for decades.

And to this day Abbey Ales are still brewed in the centre of Bath, a World Heritage City, at Camden Row.

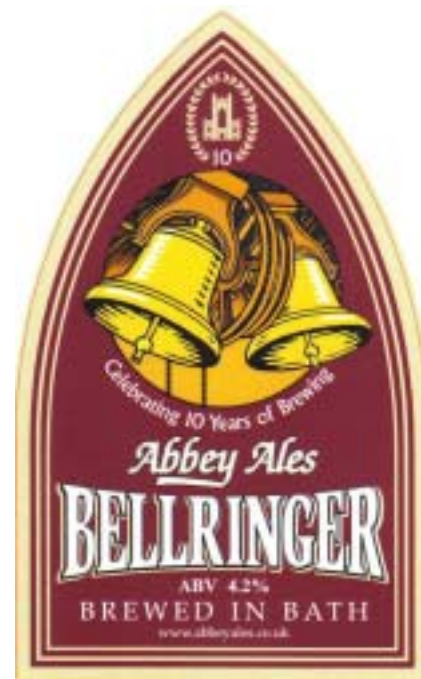
The firm's first pint was produced in October 1997 and since then the brewery has been swamped by demand.

Because of that, it has also been able to introduce a range of guest and seasonal beers, such as Black Friar, Twelfth Night and Chorister, Steeplejack and Mild.

To mark the company's tenth birthday it has produced a new clip for its popular Bellringer beer, which will be appearing in pubs across the city from late February.

Alan Morgan said: "I think it is quite an achievement in this day and age for a small brewery to survive as long as Abbey Ales has. There is so much competition out there and there are so many new breweries starting up and even more unfortunately closing. Everyone we talk to in Bath seems amazed that it has been ten years. People keep telling me how quickly it's gone – especially many of our customers who have been with us since day one. This new clip is part of our birthday celebrations which will go on all year."

Abbey is also planning a special birthday



brew to mark its anniversary which will be launched at the forthcoming annual Bath CAMRA beer festival.

The brewery recently released Bellringer in a 500ml bottle which has proved extremely popular with the city's restaurant and wine bar trade.

News from Bath Ales

Record Fayre at the Hare (on the Hill)

BATH ALES have a new pub – it's the **Live & Let Live** in Frampton Cottrell. This takes the pub estate up to nine, if you include the **Bridge Inn** and the **Eldon House**.

It is expected that the pub will receive a make-over in the Bath Ales house style later in 2007.

Following it's longest production run yet, **Festivity** will shortly be replaced by the 5% **Wild Hare**. For those not familiar with it, Wild Hare is an organic pale ale with a citrus flavour and a powerful dry, hoppy bite. Look out too for **Rare Hare**, which will be brewed soon and this year may be rarer than ever!

It is hoped that the new bottling line will arrive soon. This will allow the brewery to consider exporting its beers, as well as bottling for the UK market.

Phil Cummings

DO real ale and vinyl records mix? They do at the Hare on the Hill in Kingsdown on Saturdays between 12 and 4.

Those who have gone to the Hare for a Saturday afternoon drink over the last few weeks have been either bemused or amused to find stacks of vinyl records on sale, and after a bit of a slow start on week one it seems that this is an idea whose time has come.

This last Saturday (as I write) the Hare was pleasantly inhabited by a mixture of people who had come to drink a very well-kept pint or two (or three) of the Wild Hare whilst watching England on the box along with those who had come specifically to buy vinyl records. The upshot of this interesting mix was that several people missed most of the rugby match because they were sorting through boxes of records, some rediscovering those records that they'd had and lost back in their youth, and those of a younger generation buying anything that looked 'interesting'...and most of those who had come to buy records ended up staying for a pint or two (or three) themselves and watching the end of the rugby.

The idea for having a record fayre in a Bath Ales pub was first mooted when Paul and Dee were running the Wellington in Horefield. This didn't happen, but they brought the idea to the Hare with them, and the intention is that, apart from having record dealers, private collectors can sell their own collections at the fayre. Even Paul is threatening to bring his own collection down for sale one of these weeks.

The records on offer (and sold) so far have covered everything from Gato Barbieri to Count Basie, Dire Straits to the Beatles, sound effects to Gong, steam



engine noises to Louis Armstrong, and plenty of good, old progressive rock – it's nice to see all those old Yes, Bo Hansson, ELP, Van der Graaf Generator, PFM, King Crimson, Man, Soft Machine and Rick Wakeman LPs again!

So if you've got an old record collection gathering dust in the attic, or if you're a record dealer who likes the sound of an afternoon in a real ale pub (who cares how many records you sell when you've got tip-top condition Bath Ales on tap!), why not give Paul a ring and bring your records down to the Fayre at the Hare?

If you have a collection that you want to sell at the Hare on the Hill, please phone Paul on 0117 9081982 to book a space...and best of all, there's no charge for entry or to sell!

Mark Jones

bath ales

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

The Hop Pole

Upper Bristol Road, Bath (opposite Victoria Park playground)

The Hare on the Hill

Dove Street, Kingsdown, Bristol

The Merchants Arms

Merchants Road, Hotwells, Bristol

The Salamander

John Street, Bath

The Wellington

Gloucester Road, Horfield, Bristol

The Bridge Inn

Passage Street, Bristol

The Swan

Bath Road, Swineford

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Champion Winter Beer of Britain 2007

"Ripper" from Green Jack Brewery in Suffolk voted best winter beer in the land!

Green Jack Brewery's Ripper was recently named as the supreme Champion Winter Beer of Britain 2007 by a panel of judges at CAMRA's National Winter Ales Festival in Manchester.

The 8.5% ABV barley wine was described as: "A light coloured beer brewed as a homage to Belgian trappist ales, with sweet notes and a strong hoppy flavour."

At the announcement, Steve Prescott, organiser of the National Winter Ales Festival, congratulated Green Jack on its victory. He said, "It's great to see a barley wine win the

competition yet again. I sincerely hope people will be inspired to try this fantastic beer style on the back of Green Jack's victory."

On hearing the news, Green Jack Head Brewer Tim Dunford said: "This is absolutely incredible. All my life it has been my ambition to win a national award for my beers and I can't believe it has happened."

The Silver award went to Fuller's London Porter and the Bronze to Orkney Skullsplitter.

A panel of CAMRA experts and beer writers at the National Winter Ales Festival (New Century Hall, Manchester) judged the competition. Drinkers at the festival, which took place in January, were able to sample the winners as well as try over 200 old ales, milds, stouts, porters, barley wines and bitters.

Supreme Champion:

Gold: Green Jack: Ripper
Silver: Fuller's: London Porter
Bronze: Orkney: Skullsplitter

Category winners

Old Ales & Strong Mild Category

Gold – B&T: Black Dragon Mild
Silver – Orkney: Dark Island
Bronze – Rudgate: Ruby Mild

Stouts & Porters

Gold – Fuller's: London Porter
Silver – Cairngorm: Black Gold
Bronze – St Peter's: Old Style Porter

Barley Wines

Gold – Orkney: Skullsplitter
Silver – Green Jack: Ripper
Bronze – Durham: Benedictus

Category definitions

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

Porter: A dark, slightly sweetish but hoppy ale made with roasted barley; the successor of

'entire' and predecessor of stout. Porter originated in London around 1730, and by the end of the 18th century was probably the most popular beer in England.

Old Ale: Now virtually synonymous with 'winter ale'. Most 'old ales' are produced and sold for a limited time of the year, usually between

November and the end of February. Usually a rich, dark, high-gravity draught ale of considerable body.

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

A hat-trick of awards for Wye Valley

A HAT-TRICK of gold medals was a perfect ending for Wye Valley Brewery's 21st anniversary year, giving the seal of approval to years of work perfecting the taste of their traditionally brewed beers.

Three of Wye Valley's beers were awarded first place in West Midlands CAMRA's 2006 Beer of the Year competition. Judges named Butty Bach the

number one best bitter, with HPA taking the title in the category for bitter, whilst Dorothy Goodbody's Wholesome Stout collected gold for the best bottled beer.


Said Vernon Amor, managing director at the Stoke Lacy-based brewery, "To be told that not just one, but three of your beers are amongst the very best is a truly awesome feeling, and is a great credit to

all the team at Wye Valley Brewery, and also to our loyal customers whose support over 21 years has helped us achieve this success."




To cap it all, HPA won the silver award in West Midlands CAMRA's champion of champions contest involving all gold medal category winners in a grand final round of tastings of all styles.



Head brewer Jimmy Swan (left) and managing director Vernon Amor in jubilant mood



THREE GOLDS FOR WYE VALLEY

HPA - Awarded West Midlands CAMRA Bitter of the Year 2006
Butty Bach - Awarded West Midlands CAMRA Best Bitter of the Year 2006
Dorothy Goodbody's Wholesome Stout - Awarded West Midlands Bottled Beer of the Year 2006

ALSO

HPA - Silver Medal winner at West Midlands CAMRA Beer of the Year 2006

Wye Valley Brewery, Herefordshire
www.wyevalleybrewery.co.uk

A Few Swift Rambles

Alcoholic Rats from Oz

“Potential cure for alcoholics is hailed”: so ran the headline in the *Independent* on 26 December. Australian scientists claim to have come up with a drug that eliminates the craving for alcohol.

According to the scientists, the euphoria produced by alcohol is linked to the release of orexins or hypocretins in the hypothalamus region of the brain. Laboratory rats in Melbourne’s Howard Florey Institute were first turned into alcoholics, put on a detox programme and then given orexin blockers. When “reintroduced to an environment which they had been conditioned to associate with alcohol use,” they showed no interest in resuming their former addiction.

Leaving aside the question of what sort of environment an Australian rat would associate with alcohol use (although it almost certainly wouldn’t be the sort of place the likes of you or me would choose for a good night out), this discovery has disturbing implications.

While the prospect of a cure for alcoholism is to be welcomed, it is salutary to remember that, under government health guidelines, a large proportion of social drinkers fall into the category of binge drinkers. Government guidelines, which some medical experts are now trying to reduce even further for certain age groups, restrict consumption to no more than two pints of ordinary strength beer a day and one and a half pints for women.

While not wishing to tangle with government experts, there is a world of difference between the social drinker who sometimes exceeds these limits and the sort of binge drinkers whose intake is the stuff of urban legend and who can be seen staggering around any town centre on a Friday or Saturday night.

While the guidelines remain guidelines, it could be argued that having such a threshold is useful as a yardstick against which consumption can be measured. There are signs, however, that the government is thinking of getting tough on alcohol abuse – and, by definition, that could include anyone who exceeds recommended guidelines. In the same issue of the *Independent*, it was revealed that the Cabinet is discussing proposals to deny priority medical treatment to smokers, the obese ... and people with alcohol problems.

With the war on smokers now entering what looks like its final phase, there seems little doubt that alcohol is next on the health police’s hit list. Aversion drugs to treat those who don’t stick to government guidelines – possibly even, at some stage, orexin blockers added to alcoholic drinks like fluoride to water – may seem an impossibility today, but so would have the prospect of a smoking ban in the 1950s. And what the Australian scientists don’t tell you is that orexins are not just linked to alcoholic highs but other types of euphoria as well. Alcohol may not be the only thing that orexin blockers will cause a loss of interest in. But then, an apathetic electorate is just what

some of our lords and masters would like.

Calls of Nature

Talking of lords and masters, councillors in Bath are getting excited about late night revellers relieving themselves *al fresco*.

We have, of course, been here before – a century or so ago, in fact. In the late nineteenth century, when alcohol consumption was much higher than it is now and many pubs had rudimentary or non-existent lavatorial facilities, it was a big problem – such a big problem that the local council decided to establish a network of public conveniences all over the city. And for a time, all was well.

Then, as the 21st century dawned, a new generation of councillors, faced with spiralling costs of construction work on the new spa, decided to close most of the public loos down and sell them off. So now we’re back where we were a century ago – and, surprise, surprise, with the same old problem. To which the said councillors react with righteous indignation and the threat of draconian penalties.

While not in any way wishing to condone *al fresco* evacuation, I will quote some words of wisdom from Arthur C Clarke: “Human judges may show mercy, but against the laws of nature there is no appeal.” And go one step further, pointing out that, of all the laws of nature, the call of nature, after a night on the town, is one of the most compelling.

Three years ago, Chief Inspector Mogg (who, in a memorable phrase, described the streets of Bath as “awash with urine”) suggested installing modern loos that rose from the ground around the city – a great idea, but one that seems to have fallen by the wayside.

Perhaps a little more joined-up thinking would be a good idea, and a recognition that closing the loos down wasn’t such a great idea. But then, if the problem were to be solved by making facilities available, there would be one less stick to beat the licensed trade with, and one less reason to call for tighter controls on drinking.

Raise your pastics

A news snippet you might have missed – two MPs have submitted Early Day Motions (a particularly unfortunate turn of phrase I always think) calling for plastic glasses to be used in all licensed premises after 11pm.

Almost a hundred MPs have pledged their support for this ludicrous proposal, which would affect most of Britain’s pubs.

Plastic is a poor substitute for glass, and, while its use may be advisable in venues with a history of violence, or in beer tents at outdoor events, a blanket ban of this sort is a wholly disproportionate reaction. Nobody could reasonably object to a ban targeted on specific premises to combat specific problems; this type of nanny-state intervention is tantamount to labelling all drinkers, should they choose to stay out after eleven o’clock, as potential criminals.

Development Bonanza

Amid all the discussions surrounding the smoking ban, it is becoming apparent that it will be used as an excuse for certain pub companies (pubcos) to carry out a cull of pubs, enabling them to realise the assets tied up in their real estate. Pubcos have been trying for years to close pubs in the face of opposition not just from those who use them but also from local and county councils. While there is nothing to stop them closing the pubs down, they have to apply for change of use if they want to sell them off as private homes, shops or offices, and it is this that many councils have refused to grant.

Pubs in Bath once earmarked for closure but saved by councillors responding to local pressure include the **Coeur de Lion**, now owned by Abbey Ales, and the **Beehive** on Lansdown, Bath’s last cider house and now converted to the **Grappa Bar** (one thing councillors can’t do is stop pubs being turned into wine bars because that doesn’t count as change of use).

Just over the border in Wiltshire, the **Chequers Inn** in Box Market Place has been closed for over five years, awaiting a change of heart by North Wiltshire Council to grant



Change of use has been refused for the Chequers at Box

change of use which hopefully will never come.

Yet the tide may be turning. Official disapproval of anti-social (and social) drinking is on the increase, as is pressure from property developers. Many pubs would be worth far more as private houses or business premises

than they are as pubs. The smoking ban is a golden opportunity for the pubcos to come out of their corner fighting. And this time local councillors may not be in a mood to resist them.

A report in the business section of the *Bath Chronicle* in January made the threat to public houses clear. "Eyes of land-hungry housing developers are being turned on the freehold pubs of Bath," was the article's opening salvo.

Simon Gait, from Linden Homes, told the *Chronicle*'s reporter that "freehouses represent a great area of opportunity ... With brown-field land such a finite commodity we are redoubling our efforts to find suitable freehold pubs in prime locations for our bespoke homes." Philip Marshall, managing director of Bath property firm Crisp Cowley, added that "we are seeing this kind of pub approach by a number of developers now because all the easy development sites are gone. Because of that, developers need to be a bit clever." Even though he advised caution, pointing out that "sometimes it might not be appropriate to lose such a local facility," the likelihood is that an increasing number of pubs will be snapped up by property developers. After referring to an unnamed Bath pub currently on the market and in the process of being sold to housing developers, the article concluded by inviting readers to contact Linden with details of available property.

One Bath pub whose fate had already been sealed by the time the article appeared was the **Burnt House** on Wellsway. As lost opportu-

nities go, the Burnt House ranks pretty high. It stood in an expanding residential area, with extensive car parking, on one of the major routes into the city.

Nobody knows how old the Burnt House was. It appears on a map of 1787, and, from the look of it, dated from the early eighteenth century.

Whether an older building lurked inside, nobody knows, and now nobody ever will, for last December the Burnt House was demolished.

The reason it was called the Burnt House isn't known, although there are plenty of theories. Some say it was used as a turnpike house, burned down by colliers protesting against the tolls they had to pay to carry their coal to Bath. Others say it was burnt down by gypsies, offended by their treatment at the hands of the owner of the house. Whatever happened, it survived the fire and was rebuilt, only to succumb to property developers in 2006.

It was originally a farm, and in its early days, stood alone. While it is tempting to think

of waggoners and coachmen stopping off there for a mug of beer or cider, there is no record of it being a pub before Thomas Stride opened it as a beerhouse in the 1870s. The chances are, though, that it operated as an unofficial refuelling stop for many years before that.

As Bath expanded out towards the Burnt House, and as country walking and cycling became more popular, the pub grew rapidly. By 1898, its accommodation was lavish: three bars, a tea room for lady cyclists, a stable for seven horses, a coach house, a brewery, a cattle stand (for drovers to park cattle while nipping in for a drink), and a skittle alley. From cowmen to lady cyclists, the Burnt House catered



The Burnt House Inn as it appeared before demolition



The Burnt House a century ago: a pub at the heart of its community

for them all.

So much for its history. The building was not only one of oldest, but also one of the most interesting in Bath.

Before Wellsway was built, the only way into town was down the Old Fosse Road, which now runs at the back of the Burnt House site. What became the back of the building was originally the front, facing the Old Fosse. Around 1830, when the new road was built on the other side of the Burnt House, a new building was slapped onto the back of the old. The difference in style between the old and new parts of the building was marked. Look in the picture, for example, at the difference between the old and new chimney stacks. And, tracing the lineaments of the old stone building, cluttered by later accretions, try to imagine what the Burnt House was once like, when it stood in proud isolation, looking out over the green hills of Somerset.

Over the years there were several changes. The ground-floor bay windows were added in the late nineteenth century, the veranda in the early twentieth. Much of the building was gutted in the 1970s, but the exterior remained largely untouched. On the outbuilding on the right, part of the original farm, there was even a ring to tether your horse to if you felt so inclined.

But, despite its history, and despite it being within a World Heritage Site, in 2006 it was signed into oblivion by an official in Bath's planning department. And, in the current climate, if it can happen to the Burnt House, it can happen just about anywhere.

Andrew Swift

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Island in the sea

By your Nailsea correspondent
Laurie Gibney

NAILSEA & BACKWELL RUGBY CLUB have announced plans for this year's beer and cider festival.

The event will take place from Friday 13 July to Sunday 15 July at the club in the western fringe of Nailsea. As before, the club will have a roster of live entertainment throughout the weekend and will be raising money for local charities. More details will emerge on the club's festival website at www.applefest.co.uk.

Following last year's fantastic attendance, the club donated £3,000 to wheelchair charity Get Kids Going! This year the club expects to return its attention to the Babe Appeal charity and their hospice at Charlton Farm in Wraxall.

This will be the club's fourth year of running the festival, which over the years has grown to host some fifty beers plus around thirty ciders from Orchards, Thatcher's, Wilkins and others. Last year's festival favourites (and the first to be drunk dry) were Orchard's Dabinett cider (8.3%), and the Maris Otter pale malt bitter, Titanic Iceberg (4.1%).

Meanwhile, the new year has seen a change of club manager for the rugby club in the (front-row) shape of Mark Hooper. Now a first team prop at local rivals Clevedon, Mark will continue to serve one of the best-kept pints of Courage Best around, and for the duration of all forthcoming six-nations international games is stocking Butcombe Bitter as a guest beer.

The Ring o'Bells at St Mary Grove is known locally as "The Ringers", no doubt because it has provided a pleasant, community pub where all the hard work of pulling on bell ropes at the nearby Holy Trinity Church may be rewarded – in addition to blessing from above of course! Kevin and Diane Mildon find time not only to run a busy pub but also to take an active part in pub teams and fund-raising activities.

Last year a team from the pub raised a staggering £11,000 for cancer research by navigating a dragon boat from London, up the Thames, along the Kennet & Avon Canal and down the River Avon to Bristol's historic harbour. In the previous year they walked Hadrian's Wall raising funds for charity, and this year they will be dragon boating again from Stourport on the River Severn to Sharpness on the Gloucester Sharpness Ship Canal, and then will take to the Severn and Avon estuaries (escorted by experts in these difficult waters) and end in Bristol's historic harbour.

The Ring o'Bells is home to a table skittles team, two darts teams, two crib teams, three petanque teams and five skittles teams. Also the Nailsea Folk Club meets there on certain Fridays when local, national and international

artists perform. On the first, third and fifth (when there is one) Sunday of the month, from about 8pm, Irish music may be enjoyed when a local jam session gets going. There are a number of not too intrusive TV screens around which provide Sky Sports and Premiership Plus programmes, and an extensive outside children's play area and patio.

Food is served at lunchtimes seven days a week from 12 noon until 2 pm, and on Friday and Saturday evenings from 6 pm until 9 pm. Most importantly, there is always a good selection of excellent real ales, with Bass (on gravity from a cask in the cellar) and Courage Best as regulars plus two guest ales from a list which usually includes Bath Ales Gem, Brain's SA, Caledonian Deuchars IPA, John Smith's Cask, Sharp's Doom Bar and Wychwood Hobgoblin. On Mondays to Fridays between 4 and 5 pm pints are available with a happy-hour 30p off.

At the **New Battle Axe** in Wraxall, Hadi, who has been in charge since 1st November, tells me that some redecorating is going ahead during the Winter and Spring. A "free" function room with a bar is now available for weddings, anniversaries and other parties. The carvery, à la carte, bar, two-for-one and Indian menus prove ever popular, as are the real ales provided by local brewers from Yatton, Newman's, their Red Stag and another changing brew usually being on tap – but at the New Battle Axe lines are cleaned between every cask so there may occasionally only be one real ale available. Newman's Hoppy Christmas proved so popular that it was still on sale on the 20th January.

Bragg's Restaurant and Wine Bar are now opening the restaurant in the evenings. Your correspondent and his family enjoyed an excellent meal there at the end of December. Cream of vegetable soup or pate were our starters, followed by fillet steak; steak, ale and mushroom pudding; three-cheese pasta and broccoli bake; country-style vegetable Kiev; and breaded scampi. With drinks all round as we chose from the menu, wine with the meal, and coffee to follow, the price of £14 per head was quite reasonable.



Braggs licensees Richard Beaton and Lucy King (photocourtesy of Clevedon Mercury)

The three days between Christmas and New Year were quiet in the licensed trade and at Bragg's Richard and Lucy had wisely decided to field one real ale, Abbot Ale, instead of the usual two, thus ensuring that good real ale quality is maintained.

Trying to cover almost twenty bars as a volunteer for *Pints West* is quite a challenge. In addition I have recently been leading the formation of a new "Rare Ales Group" in the Bristol and District area of CAMRA, to be known as "BADRAG" – of which details elsewhere in this edition. Unfortunately I have not been able to visit all of the bars "on my patch". I am grateful to Phil Brooks for agreeing to look after the Angel, Miners and Bird in Hand in Long Ashton which I have been "caretaking" for some time. Offers to help me with research, particularly in Nailsea and on the subject of facilities for smokers when the ban comes in from July, would be much appreciated, contact initially through the editor of *Pints West*.

And Finally ...

Attention Home Brewers

The monthly *Nailsea Newspaper* reported in January 2007 details of interest to home brewers in the Nailsea area. The Nailsea Wine and Beermakers' Circle meets on the first Friday of each month from 8 to 11 pm at Church House on Silver Street in Nailsea and welcomes anyone who is known to brew ale or make wine at home, or would like to give it a go. Activities include talks and tastings, competitions and demonstrations. Call Keith Roberts on 01275 858996 for further details.

The article said that their members brew or make the odd "barrel" of beer or wine. I am sure that was a slip of the "pen" because home brewers or wine makers, or even the hundreds of micro-brewers would be very unlikely to brew beer or wine by the "barrel"! For those who don't know, beer and wine is stored in "casks" of various sizes, of which a barrel is a 36-gallon or 288-pint cask weighing about 200 kilos, or the weight of three adults.

Home brewers are most likely to use the "pin" size cask which contains four and a half gallons or 36 pints, or even smaller casks. The majority of casks used commercially now are nine-gallon "firkins" which weigh 50 kilos or about 8 stone, or 18-gallon kilderkins. A small number of breweries including Bathams at Black Delph in the West Midlands use 36-gallon barrels and 54-gallon hogsheads. The larger sizes of casks, which I have never come across, are 72-gallon puncheons, 108-gallon butts and 216-gallon tuns, but they might be used now for static storage in the wine trade.

READERS' LETTERS

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

Where have all the dart boards gone?

Dear Steve,

More and more pubs are taking down their dart boards. Half a dozen of us like the odd game, but where?

Could someone make a list of pubs with good beer and which have dart boards, and publish it in Pints West? And perhaps state if there are any restrictions like no darts after 9pm?

Yours,

John Marshall,
KingsdownParade,
Bristol.

Here are some to be getting on with:

Masons Arms, Stapleton;

Star, Pucklechurch;

Fleur de Lys, Pucklechurch;

Hare on the Hill, Kingsdown (I think board is still there);

Portwall Tavern, Redcliffe;

Ring O'Bells, Coalpit Heath (in back room);

Downend Tavern, Fishponds;

Cross Hands, Winterbourne Down;

Blue Flame, West End, Nailsea;

Prince's Motto, Barrow Gurney;
White Hart, Palmer Row, Weston-super-Mare.
Any more suggestions? Ed.

Clifton pubs

Steve,

Whilst down in Bristol in December I decided to have a wander around Clifton and visit some of the local pubs. I thought Pints West readers might be interested in my findings.

The Clifton – no smoking room at the front; Fuller's London Pride (£2.50) – very good; Taylor's Landlord also available.

Albion – clearly a foodie pub with most of the tables set out for meals. Sharp's Cornish Coaster (a pricey £2.70) was very average, nearing the end of its life. Bath Ales Festivity also available.

Hophouse – reasonably busy with a youngish clientele; Vale Grumpling Premium (£2.70) was very average – also available was Vale Best Bitter, Butcombe Gold, Wadworth IPA and 6X.

Quadrant – more like a wine bar than a pub and busy with a number of smartly dressed office workers. Bath SPA (£2.60) was fine but unexceptional. Butcombe Bitter also available.

Somerset House – very smokey but busy local. Courage Best (£2.30) – average; also available was Greene King Old Speckled Hen and Charles Wells Eagle IPA (wrongly marked as a 4.5% beer – it's 3.6%!).

Royal Oak – excellent pub worthy of its Good Beer Guide status. The Sharp's Doom Bar (£2.40) was in fine form. Also available was Butcombe Bitter, Courage Best and Fuller's London Pride, with Otter Ale due to appear that Friday.

The Mall – no-smoking pub with very good Fuller's London Pride (£2.50) – also available was Taylor's Landlord and Greene King Old Speckled Hen. It also had Addlestone's Cloudy and Westons Organic Vintage ciders and a good range of draft foreign beers: Hoegaarden, Leffe Blonde, Franziskaner Wheat Beer and De Koninck.

Clifton Sausage Bar and Restaurant – very busy with diners – more of a restaurant than a pub – Butcombe Bitter (£2.60) was only average.

Coronation Tap – busiest pub of the evening with lots of students, most of them drinking the Taunton Exhibition cider (apparently 8.5%) – served only by the half pint plastic glass at £2! I stuck to the beer – Brakspear's Best

(£2.30); Bass was also available along with four other ciders – Addlestone's, Thatcher's, Cheddar Valley and Taunton Traditional.

Grapes Tavern – very quiet locals' pub with just Wadworth 6X available (£2.40) at the time – the Wadworth IPA was unavailable and the pump clip was turned round.

Avon Gorge Hotel (White Lion Bar) – smart hotel bar with excellent Butcombe Brunel IPA albeit at £3.00 a pint!

Portcullis – very nice locals' pub, reasonably busy for a Tuesday evening with Courage Best (£2.40) – also available was Bass. The pump clip for the Portcullis Bitter (4.5%), presumably a house beer, was turned round.

Overall thoughts were that the area seemed to be able of supporting a high concentration of pubs serving a wide variety of different groups. Beer quality was pretty good although there was nothing outstanding other than the beer at the Royal Oak and the half I had in the Avon Gorge Hotel. Prices were high in comparison to those here in the North West, but perhaps typical for Bristol? All in all an enjoyable evening and as a final thought I have to praise the fish and chips at the Clifton Fish Bar – first class (praise indeed from a northerner!).

Keep up the good work with Pints West.

Regards,

Gary Elflett,

Marple, Cheshire.

What exactly does "very average" mean? Ed.

Hi Steve,

Hope I've managed to catch the latest issue of Pints West with some news for you from The Hillgrove. We unfortunately missed the previous issue with details of the whisky tasting that we held back in late November. This was very successful, with all tickets selling out. The tasters paid £10 per ticket and enjoyed a taste of ten different whiskies from distilleries across Scotland, whisky-compatible nibbles and an informal talk. They then took full advantage of the discounted rate on The Hillgrove whisky range that their tickets gave them. A great evening for all involved and we will definitely be holding more events like this in the future.

To keep up with all the latest news and deals, customers can now join the Dawkins beer club for free at any of the three pubs, The Hillgrove, The Miners Arms and The Victoria. By completing their details, they will then receive a voucher that entitles them to a free pint or drink to the value of £4 during community pubs week. All three pubs are true community pubs so we are pleased to be giving customers something back for their support!

Keep an eye out for a very special celebration at The Hillgrove this St Patrick's Day. Historically a traditional Irish pub (hence the lesser-used 'Porter Stores' part of our name, out of use to prevent confusion with the Cotham Porter Stores) and known formerly as The Dubliner many years ago we intend to celebrate St Patrick's in style!

Phew! That's all for now Steve.

Many thanks and kind regards,
Marianne White, manager & licensee
The Hillgrove Porter Stores,
Kingsdown, Bristol.



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Shine on Clifton Village

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

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

BRITAIN is struggling towards Spring. Of course it is only weeks since the whole nation was brought to a standstill by three flakes of snow and enough ice to make one "Mr Freeze" Ice-pop. But with the arrival of the first crocuses, with birds starting to look for nesting materials, and with another succession of not-quite-famous people filling prime time telly by doing something very badly that isn't even the thing that they were good enough at to become not-quite-famous in the first place, you know that spring is in the air.

Well, we thought that it was time to revisit Clifton, Bristol's Jewel in the Crown, with its historic buildings, the Bridge and Camera Obscura, it is surely one of the best places to visit in Springtime. So off we went one spring Saturday.

Since the **Portcullis** on Wellington Terrace is closed when you visit (the landlord who did so much for the place, even introducing his own recipe Porcullis Bitter, has left) we start our visit at the **White Lion** bar of the Avon Gorge hotel. This place is renowned for its views over the Avon Gorge and Brunel's Suspension Bridge, best appreciated in fine weather from the large terrace out back. On this visit we spot a single handpump dispensing, aptly enough, a tasty pint of Butcombe Brunel IPA.



The White Lion

Next up on our visit is the **Greyhound** in Princess Victoria Street. This pub has recently been refurbished, with the front bar now boasting a large screen television for watching all the football and rugby matches. There's a more airy feel to the place now. The beers are Courage Best Bitter, Fuller's London Pride and



The Greyhound

a crisp pint of Bath Gem that is hoppy and malty at the same time. In years gone by, this pub was known to some as the Sally Gunnell, though the explanation of why is a little unkind and best left to a future CAMRA social.



The Somerset House

The shortest of walks from the Greyhound is the **Somerset House**. The Somerset House is something of a throw back to a bygone era. You can see where the alley used to run down the side of the building, as you enter through double doors. There is much wood about the place: furniture; floors; one or two of the customers. Actually, this is a friendly, simple



The Clifton

boozer, today offering Courage Best and Greene King Old Speckled Hen, and both are in perfectly good nick.

Next stop is the **Clifton** in Regent Street. Here is another pub just creaking under the weight of all that history. There is no doubt that pubs like this, and many around the

region, are a fundamentally important part of Britain's history, and our heritage. Although CAMRA campaigns for the preservation of such buildings, there can be no doubt that the most powerful way of protecting them is to vote with your feet.

The truth is, if everyone who believed in our heritage made a point of visiting historical local pubs in preference to newly-built super-pubs built on brown-field sites, then the big national developers would soon start to realise that investing in our historic pubs makes more commercial sense than selling them off for residential use while building new ones with a millionth of the warmth and character.

The Clifton seems to be doing well at the moment. The corridor that leads down the left of the pub has one door leading to the snug front bar; but also opens out into the more spacious rear bar. There is a quiet dignity to the place during the day time, with a much livelier ambience in the evenings. On our visit, there is Taylor Landlord, Fuller's London



The Quadrant

Pride, Caledonian Deuchar's IPA and Butcombe Brunel IPA on handpump, as well as speciality beers such as Erdinger Weissbier and Fruiti Fruit Beer. The Taylor Landlord has a really citrusy smack to it.

From the Clifton, it's back up Regent Street to the **Quadrant**. The Quadrant is the perfect pub in Clifton for people-watching and, with its picture window, drags the discerning drinker in like a sailor to a siren. On handpump today are Butcombe Gold and Bath SPA. Both are on top form, and one can't help thinking that Clifton Village is as well-served for a decent pint of beer as it has been at any point in the last twenty years.

From the Quadrant, head over the pedestrian crossing and on to Boyces Avenue, where the **Albion** pub and dining rooms nestles at the bottom of its own pedestrian cul-de-sac. It's been said in these pages before, but how many pubs are there where you can have quail eggs washed down with a pint of Thatcher's Traditional Cider? Well, you are slightly disappointed that you can't here today, but such delicacies have been enjoyed here in the recent past, and a barmaid assures that they are due to make a reappearance soon. On your visit, they are actually offering Hot Thatcher's Cider. You haven't had this before, and give it a go. It is a wonderfully therapeutic experience, though hard to describe. If you can



The Albion

imagine the medicinal impact of a hot lemon drink, allied to the sensation of that first nip of brandy when you come in from a mountain expedition, linked with the refreshing hit of a smooth dry cider on a summer's day, then you probably ought to stop being so pretentious and just enjoy the drink. Also on offer here today are Wye Valley Bitter, Sharp's Doom Bar, Bath Barnstormer and Butcombe. Yet more independent regional beers – terrific.

Next is the **Hophouse** in King's Road. Converted from the old entrance into a covered shopping arcade, the Hophouse has become a fixture and popular night spot in the village. This buzzing boozier boasts a pretty mezzanine, though not necessarily in use, and a



The Hop House

downstairs bar characterised by soft sofas, a relaxed atmosphere and the full range of Wadworth beers and/or guest beers. On our visit, the flagship brew 6X is complemented by Bishop's Tipple, the former Gibbs Mew beer from Salisbury. I confess both beers seemed a little tired on our visit.

From the Hophouse, it's back across Regent Street and into the one-way system. Next stop is the **Clifton Sausage** in Portland Street. Now, clearly any establishment that



The Clifton Sausage



The Coronation Tap

offers forty different types of sausage deserves more than a little respect, but for the purposes of *Pints West*, the key point here is that the Clifton Sausage very sensibly concentrates on offering just one real ale, but keeping it in tippety tip-top condition. It is no coincidence, therefore, that this is as good a pint of Butcombe Bitter as you will get in Bristol.

From the "Sausage", it's straight across the Mall and into the **Coronation Tap**. Now, the Coronation could easily feature in the current series of Life On Mars. The truth is, it doesn't seem to have changed much in character since the seventies, and possibly well before. Still the same style of décor – though the pub has



The Grapes Tavern

expanded in size since the early days – and still beloved of generations of students, and the odd ciderhead. On my return, there was still the same mix of Thatcher's and Taunton traditional ciders, complemented by very good pints of Bass and Pedigree.

If you carry on through the Coronation Tap, and leave by the back (or should that be front?) entrance, you find yourself just yards from the entrance to the **Grapes Tavern**.



The Royal Oak



The Mall

Another Wadworth house that has undergone a number of refurbishments and changes-of-hands in recent years, it is currently in the capable hands of Sherrie Newcombe. The seating is still impossibly comfy, and the Wadworth beers are on very good form.

Out of the Grapes and back towards the Mall, you see the **Royal Oak** across the road ahead of you. Good Beer Guide-listed in 2007, this is a no-nonsense but welcoming pub aimed at a wide range of clientele. From local professionals to sight-seeing tourists, from students to long-term residents, the Royal Oak feels like a comfy pair of slippers that have been moulded over the years to perfectly match your feet. The recent addition of a weekly guest ale has added variety, but the Butcombe, Courage Best Bitter, Fuller's London Pride and Sharp's Doom Bar Bitter are as edifying as ever.

Finally, a stroll to the top of the Mall to visit the former Lyon's Cornerhouse that is, after a few years in other guises, glorying in the name of **The Mall**. This is another pub that has suffered in recent years from a mixed reputation, either as a den of student iniquity or as a jaded tourist trap. Delighted to say that the current incumbents have successfully transformed the place into a kicking bohemian watering hole offering a superb range of beers and ciders. On our visit, the choice was between (deep breath): Sleeman Honey Brown Lager, Kuppers Kolsch, Schneider Weisse Bier, Franziskaner Weissbier, Fruli Fruit Beer, Leffe Blond, Weston's Draught Organic Cider, Addlestone's Cloudy Cider, Fuller's London Pride, Timothy Taylor Landlord and Wickwar Old Arnold.

The feeling as I poured myself into a taxi home from Clifton Village is that here are the best part of a dozen pubs almost all offering a good choice of real ales and traditional ciders in a pleasant and empathetic environment. Of course, there is much work for CAMRA to do to safeguard the future of the decent pint in a decent pub, but if Clifton is anything to go by, there is at least the chance of the battle being won.

Duncan Shine

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

2006 - another year of change on the local beer scene

Vince Murray takes a look back at 2006 and the changes it brought to local pubs and breweries

A YEAR back I reviewed 2005 in relation to the local real ale scene. The central theme of that article was the astonishing amount of change that had taken place in a mere 12 months. So now to 2006 – and it is fair to say that the pace of change has certainly not slowed at all, as I will attempt to illustrate.

At the start of the year two of our most notable free houses in Somerset changed hands. The **Woolpack** in St George near Weston-super-Mare was purchased by Butcombe brewery, whilst the family that sold the Woolpack bought the **Plough** in Congresbury, a long-standing and much loved Good Beer Guide regular. Around the same time Butcombe also bought two more free houses – the **Queen Victoria** at Priddy and the **Ring O'Bells** at Hinton Blewitt. Butcombe have changed little of the basic nature of these excellent pubs, but naturally have sought to concentrate on their own range of very good beers, with a few (normally predictable and widely available) guest beers. They have also recently bought two more pubs just outside of our branch area. I can think of many ailing pubs that would be vastly improved by the Butcombe treatment (including one in my street!) but find it a bit frustrating that they

tend to buy the better free houses – with the result that they may sometimes actually decrease choice in that pub (although the Queen Vic was already majoring on Butcombe beers to be fair). I should point out that this is my own point of view and not necessarily that of CAMRA as a whole.

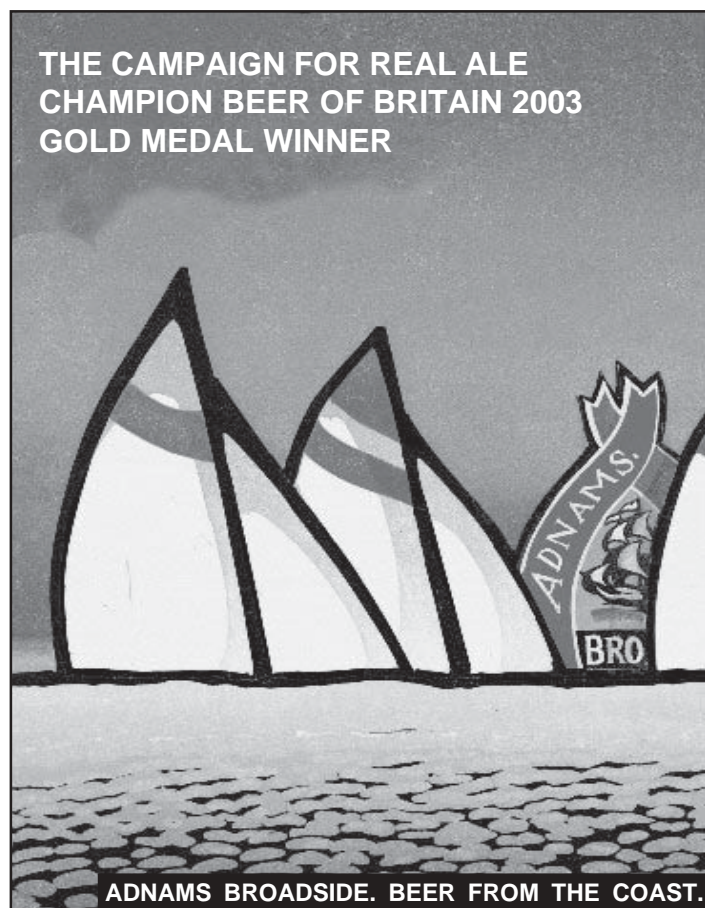
Elsewhere in Somerset, the long standing licensees of the other **Ring O'Bells** at Compton Martin, owned by Butcombe, moved to the nearby **New Inn** at Blagdon which is a Wadworth house. The newly built **Ebdon Arms** near Worle was voted into the Good Beer Guide after impressing with its range and quality of beers, only for its owners (Celtic Inns) to sell out completely to Wolverhampton and Dudley. The beer range was immediately changed – removing the much-loved RCH brews from just down road in favour of Marstons and Jennings brands from far away. Shortly afterwards the licensees upped sticks to take over yet another Butcombe pub – the **Swan** at Rowberrow.

The big story of the year in Bristol occurred when Smiles Traditional Inns (or whatever name they had at the time) suddenly closed their only two pubs, the serial award-

winning **Cornubia** and the **Smiles Brewery Tap**, without warning in July. Both pubs were thriving at the time and the whole affair was shrouded in mystery. We were advised that the Brewery Tap would reopen in the future as a microbrewery – but nobody is holding their breath as the whole bar was gutted and ripped out within days of it closing. Six months later – still no sign of that microbrewery. The Cornubia just lay idle until November, with none of us able to find out what was happening and most of us fearing that it had also served its last pint. Almost as suddenly as it had closed, it opened again to our huge relief! An email came to us from Gary Lumber of the tiny **Hidden Brewery** in deepest Wiltshire. He had bought the lease and was bringing probably the most-loved beer pub in Bristol back to life! It now serves three or four of Gary's brews and around three guests from other small breweries. It seems to have immediately regained all of its old customers and more. A very happy ending for once!

Last year I reported on the very important role played by two local entrepreneurs in improving the availability of quality real ales in quality pubs. Glen Dawkins, of the **Hillgrove**

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Porter Stores in Kingsdown and **Miners Arms** in St Werburghs fame, also took over and rejuvenated the **Victoria** in Southleigh Road, Clifton in 2006. He now runs three superb pubs all offering excellent and varied real ales, pleasant surroundings and good company. Where will you buy next year Glen? It's nice here in Kingswood you know! Ollie Bainbridge, who already had the **Inn on the Green** in Horfield, the **Robin Hood's Retreat** in Bishopston and the **Adam and Eve** in Hotwells, took on his most ambitious project yet this year. The **Cross Hands** in Fishponds is a very large pub that had been totally neglected and gained a less than brilliant reputation and had not served any real ale in recent times. What a surprise then when Ollie took it over and introduced 12 (twelve!) real ales – all of them changing guests from smaller breweries. Many of us doubted his sanity but, after a short settling in period, this is now a truly wonderful example of what can be achieved in the right hands – in this case Phil Lovemore who moved from the Adam and Eve to take over early in 2006. Sadly we have heard that Ollie has recently sold the lease on the Adam and Eve, but do not yet know who to or what their intentions are. Who knows, it may free up some cash for Ollie to buy a pub near you? Its nice here in Kingswood you know Ollie!

The Good Beer Guide, as always, came out in September 2006 and, as always, we made a fair few changes. Amongst the new entries were the **Old Fish Market** in Baldwin Street, central Bristol, the Fuller's pub that has gone from strength to strength, the **Royal Oak** in Clifton Village, and several of the pubs already mentioned above. In Somerset the **Old Inn** at Congresbury (Young's) and its namesake the **Old Inn** in Clevedon were among the new entries, along with the **Ploughboy** in Green Ore, near Wells. In the latter case we

feel we may have previously missed a trick as it has been in the same hands for 19 years but we simply weren't aware of how good the beer was. We have also discovered a few other pubs that have impressed with their beer recently. These include the **Duke Of York** in Jubilee Road, St Werburghs (three changing interesting beers), the **Fox** at Easter Compton near Cribbs Causeway (three local beers) and the **Ship** at Redcliffe Bay in Portishead – apparently built by the landlord in 1974 and he is still there! Also on the up are the **Red Lion** in Staple Hill (Wadworths and guests), the **Poachers** in Portishead (four beers), and the **Windmill** in Windmill Hill, close to Bedminster Station (three beers from Bristol Beer Factory). In central Bristol both the **White Lion** on the centre and the **Naval Volunteer** in King Street have impressed many of us with improved beer choice and quality, as have the **Ship** in Park Row and the **Commercial Rooms** in Corn Street. For reasons I cannot find space for here, we have to select our pubs for the 2008 Good Beer Guide in late February and we will have our work cut out as we have far more nominations than available slots in the book. Somewhere else that the beers have impressed (though has shocked with some of the prices – £3.20 for Bath Festivity indeed!) is the **Albion** in Clifton.

For the cider lovers amongst you the new **Apple barge**, moored along Welsh Back in town, is a new "must try" destination with its huge range of ciders and perries.

On the brewery front, it is fair to say that neither **Courage** (real ales moving again to be brewed in Bedford!) nor **Smiles** (brewed in Walsall!) can claim to have any meaningful active connection with Bristol any more. On the positive side we have seen **Butcombe**, **Bath Ales**, **Bristol Beer Factory**, **Cotswold Spring** and **Wickwar** beers all more freely

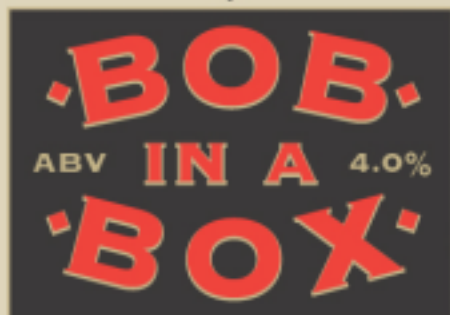
available on bars around town. **Keynsham** brewery is also starting to appear frequently and is being joined by the new **Cheddar Ales** outfit. Also expected to appear soon are **Arbor Ales** based in the Old Tavern in Fishponds. Add that to the much greater availability of brews from other small brewers from the South West and further afield and things are far from despondent round here. Combine this with the fact that we have just sold over 4,000 tickets in a few days for our Bristol Beer Festival (and could have sold many, many more), and supply and demand do seem to be coming together for once. What excuse then for some pubs in Bristol still to serve no real ale claiming that there is no demand?

Apologies if I haven't mentioned your favourite real ale pub as there simply isn't space to cover the very many more I haven't mentioned.

Incredibly, I can already report on some more significant changes in the four weeks of 2007 up to the date of writing this article. In addition to the **Adam and Eve**, we understand that the long-standing licensees of the **Orchard Tavern** (as famous for its cider as its beer) in Hanover Place near the SS Great Britain have sold their lease and are retiring in February or March. The **Portcullis** in Clifton, which was gaining a very strong following for its beers, recently closed and it is believed the landlord has left (hopefully it will be open again by the time you read this). The same fate has befallen the **Raglan** in Weston-super-Mare which offered the biggest choice of beers in town (although a note in the window says "reopening in February with the same emphasis on real ales" apparently – let's hope so). At the time of writing nobody knows who is taking on these pubs and whether they will seek to build on the strong foundations built by the previous occupants. If change continues at this pace next year's review could be an even longer article!

Vince Murray

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Bristol United Beer Drunk in Clifton Rocks Railway

WE of the Clifton Rocks Railway Trust have been refurbishing Clifton Rocks Railway since Easter 2005. This started life as a cliff railway linking Hotwells to Clifton between 1893 and finished operating in 1934. From 1940 it had multiple war-uses because it was divided into sections by the Ministry of Works for use by Imperial Airways to mend barrage balloons, for use as a night time refuge shelter from bombs by the residents, and by the BBC.

Apart from clearing loads of rubble and debris, we have been searching under the refuge ledges to see what the residents left behind during their wartime stay. There are three refuge areas – two large and one small, the large ones each having ledges for about 90 people, the small for about 40 – so there is a big area to search. So far the bottles we have found are:

Type	Quantity
½ pint beer bottle	8
½ pint cider bottle	1
½ pint soft drinks bottle	12
½ pint milk bottle	7
1 pint beer bottle	2
1 pint soft drinks bottle	6
1 pint milk bottle	5
1 pint sherry bottle	2
2 pint beer bottle	1
disinfectant bottle	2



This Ashton Gate bottle is as it was when it had just been dug out

horlicks bottle	1
medicine bottle	5
spirit bottle	1
coffee essence bottle	5

This shows that soft drinks were the most popular beverage, but beer was undoubtedly popular. Bristol United was the most common beer bottle found (at least one bottle still has beer in it), and only one bottle was from George's Brewery. In the old tunnel we discovered under Sion Hill from the railway, which had been bricked up in the wartime, we found a green glass bottle of Sunrise Brand beer from Ashton Gate Brewery probably from the 1920's. This is complete with stopper and again presumably contains beer.

Sunrise Brand beer was made at the Ashton Gate Brewery between the very late 1800's and pre-1930 (and the name has recently been resurrected by the Bristol Beer Factory at the same site). Green bottles are earlier than brown ones.

Bristol United Beer was made between 1889 and 1961, being merged with George's Brewery in 1956 (which was later taken over by Courage).

Why don't you come and see the bottles for yourself on the next open day at Clifton Rocks, Saturday 19th and Sunday 20th May, 10 till 4.

Have a look on the web at www.cliftonrocksrailway.org.uk



This Bristol United bottle still has a label saying "Home Brewed"

and www.b-i-a-s.org.uk/rocks_railway_refurbishment.html if you want to find out more about this amazing project.

Maggie Shapland, Restoration Officer

News from the Beer Factory

THE Bristol Beer Factory, based in one of the remaining buildings of the old Ashton Gate brewery, reports that, after a fantastic Christmas, they are now thinking ahead and towards the Bristol Beer Festival and recreating one of Bristol's old favourites.

"A part for Bristol's 'Heritage' you could say!" is how Simon Bartlett, Production Director at the brewery, put it. "We are looking to bring out a strong, dark ale very similar to the Smiles Exhibition that once graced our pubs." Smiles Exhibition, readers may recall, was renamed Smiles Heritage many years back.

Simon says, "Surprisingly enough, it's actually very, very close to the original recipe – it does of course help having Smiles' old head brewer amongst the ranks!" The chap he is referring to is Chris Thurgeson who left Smiles to take up his position with the Bristol Beer Factory.

The new Heritage beer should be available at the Bristol Beer Festival in March, and presumably in the pubs thereafter. The award-winning Milk Stout will also be at the festival.

Two others of their beers, No. 7 and Gold, will very shortly be available in bottles, perhaps even by the time you read this. The

first bottling run of No. 7 was due to be at the end of February and so available to buy from the beginning of March.

For further information about goings-on at the Beer Factory, check out their revamped website at www.bristolbeerfactory.co.uk. This gives you, amongst other things, a history of the brewery, details of the beers made, and where you might find them. According to the site, Bristol Beer Factory beers may be found, on either a permanent or an occasional basis, at the following Bristol venues (though I'm sure there must be more):

- Tobacco Factory Cafe Bar and Theatre, Raleigh Road, Southville (served through what look like keg fonts, but the Beer Factory beers here are indeed real ales);
- Pipe & Slippers, Stokes Croft;
- Hope & Anchor, Jacob's Wells Road, Hotwells;
- Nova Scotia, Nova Scotia Place, Hotwells;
- Shakespeare, Henry Street, Totterdown;
- Cottage Inn, Baltic Warf, Cumberland Road, Hotwells;
- Windmill, Windmill Hill;
- Greenbank, Bellevue Road, Easton;
- Adam & Eve, Hope Chapel Hill, Hotwells.

SP

In search of RCH beers

FOR those of you who appreciate the fantastic real ales produced by the RCH brewery at West Hewish near Weston-Super-Mare . . . but find them difficult to track down other than at beer festivals and occasionally as a guest beer in local pubs (albeit pubs like the Crown at Churchill and the Windmill at Portishead do keep a regular RCH beer) . . . then there may be some good news on the horizon.

Last summer, Ray Sparks took over the **Royal Artillery** at Highbridge in Somerset as a freehouse and, as Graham Dunbavan, Head Brewer at RCH, lives virtually next door, the two got together. This resulted in RCH supplying new handpumps and two or three of their beers becoming a permanent fixture (Double Header plus other regular and seasonal brews).

The pub was re-launched over the August bank holiday weekend with a mini beer, cider and wine festival; with all of the regular RCH beers being available, either on draught at the bar or on stillage in the marquee in the garden. There was also entertainment for children, live music and a barbecue. Ray has introduced a new food menu and Sunday lunches are also provided. There is a real fire and a skittle alley. Subsequent to the re-launch, refurbishment work has continued to further improve the facilities.

From the beginning of December, RCH's stupendous winter beer Santa Fé (7.3% ABV) was a regular feature. For those of you who fondly remember the Coopers Arms next to the

train station in Highbridge as a regular outlet for RCH beers prior to it being taken over by Scottish & Newcastle, you will not be too surprised to hear that several of its former regulars have transferred their allegiance to the Royal Artillery.

Getting there is slightly more difficult than the Coopers, but relatively straight forward: proceed from the train station past the Coopers up towards the mini-roundabout in the centre of Highbridge, turn left and follow the A38 towards Bridgwater; the Artillery can be found set back from the road on the right on the border of Highbridge and West Huntspill (look out for the flag of St. George). Walking briskly should see you there in under half an hour. Alternatively, the 21/21A bus stops right outside the pub or you could get a taxi from the station. If you insist on driving, there is a small car park in front of the pub. They are open from lunchtime until final closing every day and can be contacted on 01278 783553.

Ray has been in the trade for several years and, in addition to the Royal Artillery, he also has the **Oak House** on the outskirts of Weston-super-Mare (formerly the Ancaster), where he has draught RCH beers, and **Ice Bar** (in the centre of Weston-super-Mare), where he has bottled RCH beers.

The potential good news on the horizon for beer drinkers in Bristol is that Ray is looking to take on a pub in our area where RCH beers would feature prominently.

So, watch this space for further developments!

Dave Graham

How much!?!

THE next time someone gets excited about spotting a £3 pint in Bristol, you might like to think of my recent experience in Tunbridge Wells. We were in a Good Beer Guide listed pub and after the draft foreign beers proved rather expensive, I took pity on the person buying the next round. There was a Dark Star beer on hand pump and although it didn't appear on the price list and the cramped bar area meant we couldn't see the detail on the pump clip, we assumed it would be a more reasonable price.

Some expletives later my friend realised that he had just been charged £5 for my pint! It turned out to be Dark Star Imperial Stout and admittedly you would expect to pay a premium for such a beer that weighs in at 10.5% alcohol. However, it was generally felt that £5 was rather steep and that the justification for it not appearing on the price list "it's a guest beer" was somewhat poor.

One potentially serious aspect was that there was no hint of consideration of responsible drinking as the barman made no effort to check if we realised the strength of the pint we had ordered. Fortunately it did taste good and was obviously not an ordinary strength beer. Still, it's just as well I wasn't driving.

Richard Brooks

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Cotleigh Brewery continues winning ways with national award

SOMERSET brewers Cotleigh have been awarded 'category winner' at the Excellence in Food and Drink Awards 2006 for their bottled Cotleigh 25.

The event was hosted by *Caterer and Hotelkeeper Magazine* in association with 3663 First for Foodservice, and held at the prestigious Dorchester Hotel in London on Friday December 1st.

According to comments from the judges, Cotleigh 25 "Tastes like summer and has a fresh aroma and a fruity finish." Other comments included: "It is a superior beer and just the sort of beer I love!"; "Hoppy and sweet!"; "I would buy it – I could have a couple and be happy!"; "A summer drink!".

Said Stephen Heptinstall, who runs Cotleigh with Fred Domellof: "We were delighted to win this award which is the result of almost three years design and development which we did together with Professor Geoff Palmer OBE, one of the most pre-eminent brewers at Herriot-Watt University. Packaging design is from local design studio Quantock Design in Taunton."

Fred Domellof added: "This is the second major award Cotleigh 25 has won in three months after its GOLD at the 'Taste of the West Food and Drink Awards 2006'. It reflects our passion for excellence and our commitment to use the best quality ingredients!"

Cotleigh 25 was first released in June 2004 to celebrate the company's 25th anniversary. It was pilot tested in the market prior to this date, under the code name Cuckoo!



Partners Fred Domellof (left) and Stephen Heptinstall receiving the award at the Dorchester Hotel in London

Cotleigh Brewery was named Somerset Life Magazine's Drinks Producer of the Year in 2005 and was runner-up in 2006.



Brewing excellence from the Heart of Somerset since 1979

It has been 27 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

2051: A Beer Odyssey

IT was a dark stormy night and the clocks were chiming 13.

Winston Swift, chapter leader of the paramilitary wing of the Campaign to Bring Back Real Ale looked at his watch, an old-fashioned wind-up contraption, the sort made illegal by the multinational directive on the standardisation of time. Wearing it, he knew, would render him liable to a hefty fine and a spell in the interrogation cells if he was caught, but he reckoned the chances of being stopped were slim. Curfew was a couple of hours away and the number of people on the street gave him a feeling of security. A far more serious offence was wearing the officially proscribed T-shirt hidden away under his shirt. Get caught wearing that and his name would almost certainly be added to the list of undesirables posted outside city hall.

He stopped before a door with the words Red Lion Club above it, blinked into the lens of an iris recognition camera and pushed the door open. Walking down a corridor, he turned into a small room where subdued groups of men sat round tables. They turned as he walked in and the room fell silent. Then, recognising him, a few of them mumbled curt greetings. As he joined three men at a table, nursing plastic glasses of beer, the club steward strode over. Winston handed him his identity card. A few minutes later, he returned with a half-pint plastic glass of beer.

"The card says you've had three halves already," the steward said apologetically.

"I stopped in at the Chequers and the King's Head on the way," Winston replied.

"That's it for tonight then," one of the men said.

Winston gave a tight-lipped smile. He enjoyed the Red Lion. It was one of the best drinking clubs in town. At one time, it had been a pub, until, along with all other pubs, it had been closed down in 2026. A few had been allowed to reapply for licences as private clubs, serving regulated amounts of alcohol to registered users. The Red Lion was one of them.

Few people doubted that drinking - even drinking weak government-approved beer in clubs like the Chequers - was an endangered activity. Slowly but surely the weight of public opinion was being turned against it. Winston, and those like him, was becoming a pariah. The warnings on beer bottles were enough to convince him of that: "Drinking is an Anti-Social Activity", "Drinking Hurts You and Those Around You," and the blunt "Drinking Kills".

Even though he tried to sip his half pint as slowly as possible, it wasn't long before it was gone. Rising to his feet, he bade farewell to the group of drinkers at

the table and headed off into the night.

His route took him away from brightly lit streets into unfamiliar territory. With curfew only just over an hour away, such areas could, he knew, be risky. Soon, gangs of semi-feral youths would be on the rampage, their activities curbed only by occasional raids by the militia in bulletproof combat vehicles.

For the moment, everything seemed quiet, but it was with relief that he found the street he was looking for. Finding number 11, he knocked at the door and waited some time before an old-fashioned letterbox snapped open.

"Who's there?," a gruff voice belowered through it.

"Winston Swift."

"Password."

"Maris Otter."

The letterbox snapped shut and Winston heard the sound of bolts being drawn back. The door swung open, Winston was beckoned in, and his host took a quick look around before shutting and bolting the door. He was ushered through the kitchen into a room like a walk-in fridge. Three men stood around a table at one end holding pint glasses of dark beer. Winston was introduced and one by one they shook his hand in silence before his host filled a glass and handed it to him.

"Cheers," said Winston.

"Cheers," said the others, using the internationally recognised but now illegal salutation of those about to down a draught of ale.

Winston took a deep swig from his glass before launching into an encomium on its various merits, all of which met with grave nods and grunts of approval from his companions.

"He knows his ale," said one.

"And he knows a good drop when he tastes it," said another.

"One of the best pints I've had for ages," said Winston.

"It reminds me a bit of Courage's," said one of the men, a good deal older than the others.

"Here he goes," one of them groaned.

"It was a bloody good pint, I'm telling you. I can remember the time when you go down the pub of an evening and down four or five pints and nobody thought anything of it."

"And still have change from fifty quid - I know, we've heard it all before."

Winston said nothing. Although he couldn't remember the old days, he liked to listen to tales from old timers - of people going into pubs, buying beer over the counter and standing there drinking it without fear of the consequences.

"I can remember when you could a pint of beer for less than a fiver. When it went up to a fiver there was uproar - the five pound pint - I can remember the

headlines."

"Come on, Phil, give it a rest. Winston's only just walked in and already you've started boring him with your old stories."

"Actually," said Winston, "I find all that stuff about old pubs and old breweries quite interesting."

"I knew it," said Phil, "I could tell as soon as he walked in, he wasn't like you lot, just interested in guzzling pints and wittering on about specific gravity."

"What's wrong with specific gravity," said a dour-faced man, making his first contribution to the conversation.

"Nothing - it's just that beer has a long and honourable pedigree - there was a beer called Pedigree once upon a time, I seem to remember - anyway, that's by the by - all I'm trying to get through to you is that beer wasn't always about blokes standing cooped up in a sealed unit at the back of somebody's house. There were pubs - brilliant pubs, some of them, not like the poxy little club-pubs you've got today, where you've got to sit down and drink government-approved ditch-water - there were even beer festivals."

He was becoming excited, and Winston raised a hand to silence him before taking a sip from his glass.

"I have something to show you - something you may be interested in. I picked it up the other day from a friend of mine who does the flea markets."

He put down his pint, removed his jacket and started unbuttoning his shirt. The others fell silent, watching in astonishment as he pulled his shirt open to reveal a torn and beer-stained T-shirt. Although faded, the logo could still be clearly seen, as could the words below it: "Bristol Beer Festival 2007."

Suddenly, Winston felt someone shaking him firmly by the shoulder. He heard voices: "I thought you'd checked over here", "I thought you did.", "Come on, Rip Van Winkle", "Looks like he's had a good session."

Winston opened his eyes. A group of people was standing over him. He turned his head and saw racks of beer barrels, fading into infinity.

"W ... w ... where am I?" he groaned, thinking heaven a distinct possibility.

"The Bristol Beer Festival - as it says on your T-shirt - or at least you were. We chucked everybody else out a couple of hours ago. God knows how we missed you lying there. We've just come back to set up for the evening session."

"I ... I just had a terrible dream ... I dreamt I was ..."

The author would like to point out that the preceding story is pure fantasy and could not possibly come true. The idea that somebody could be overlooked after closing time at the Bristol Beer Festival is simply inconceivable.

Andrew Swift

Christmas in Wild Wales

LLANDEILO is a great little town. A market and centre for rural industries since at least Mediaeval times, it boasts many lovely old buildings dating mainly from the Georgian and Regency period, as well as an impressive bridge over the River Towy that was once the Wonder of Wales. And – if one includes the trans-pontine hamlet of Ffairfach – sports no less than nine licensed premises. Just off the main A40 road the town is one of few in rural Wales to maintain a rail connection – it is on the Swansea-Shrewsbury Central Wales line.

My own connection with Llandeilo is through the home there of my nephew and his partner, with whom I have spent the last two Christmases. On Christmas Day just gone, after the usual great feed and surfeit of TV, we decided to go in search of ale. We knew that the only place open was the Castle so we decided to give it a try. The **Castle Hotel** in the main street, Rhosmaen Street, was arguably the best pub in town in the days when Simon Buckley established the Tomos Watkin brewery there; Good Beer Guide (GBG) listed from 1998-2005 it was voted CAMRA's Carmarthenshire pub of the year in 1999. After the brewery moved to larger premises in Swansea the pub changed hands but remained an outlet for Watkin beers until it was sold to Enterprise Inns. Beers on offer were Hop Back Summer Lightning, Shepherd Neame Spitfire, Fuller's London Pride and the regular Hancock's HB, which was nice and fresh. So much for Christmas Day.

Boxing Day was sunny and crisply cool. We ventured out after an early lunch to visit the first of the Good Beer Guide-listed pubs. This was the splendid **White Horse**, GBG-listed every year from the year dot (except, strangely 2000 and 2006 just before the present regime revived it). Set back through an archway from Rhosmaen Street, this pub is a Grade II-listed former coaching inn with courtyard. Long owned by Bass Charrington and successors, it is now owned by Evan Evans Brewery (situated on the eastern edge of town) and carries their BB and Cwrw as regular ales. It was packed to the gunnels with people of all ages on the occasion of our visit and those two beers were supplemented by the seasonal Santa's Tipple from Evan Evans and Adnams Broadside as guest. All four were excellent. The landlord is very proud of the fact that he has recently been awarded Cask Marque accreditation.

Our next port of call was the **Salutation Inn** on New Road which reappeared in the Good Beer Guide last year for the first time since the 'eighties. Landlord Dave bought the freehold a few years ago and his prices are a little above average for the area – and you may have to ask for a top up! Beers on sale were Tomos Watkin Brewery Bitter, Adnams Broadside and St Austell Tribute, all in excellent condition. This lively two-roomed pub has a real piano in the lounge where live music sessions are held and, as long as Dave's in charge, seems set to be a GBG regular.

Opposite the Salutation a little further up

New Road is the recently reopened **Yr Hen Vic** (the Old Vic) a large, square, double-fronted building previously the private Athletic and Football club headquarters. Built as a pub in the 19th century it was named after Queen Victoria. Although my nephew had mentioned that it was "a kid's pub" and unlikely to sell real ale, we were pleasantly surprised. On entering through the central front door the main open bar faces you with modern lighting and a bare stone back wall; the bar is on the right. On the left is a separate 'snug' and just inside the door on the right up a short flight of stairs was the skittle alley, housed in a later addition to the main building. This has been tastefully converted into a restaurant cum function suite. Although the clientele was predominantly young, they were interspersed with some mature drinkers. Two real ales were on hand pump: the 3.7% ABV Cwrw Braf from Tomos Watkin and seasonal Winter Warmer from local Jacobi Brewery. Both were delicious and we realised why; the youngsters were drinking them, probably because, apart from two lagers there were no other keg beers available except for the rather rare Tomos Watkin Dark Mild. This is very seldom seen in cask form but, as we discovered, is surprisingly tasty for a keg beer. The fact that the young bar manager paused, while collecting glasses, to pass the time of day and talk about his and other local pubs' ales was an encouraging sign.

Time for a walk down Carmarthen Street past the late-lamented Three Tuns, regular GBG entry until its demise in 1998. It is now a boutique but also contains a shop selling secondhand books and records. Turning right at the main road we passed the white-painted, double-fronted house high above the retaining wall that had been a great pub until it closed in the 'nineties. Now a private house, it is still called "The Kings Head". Walking on down the hill we crossed the impressive granite structure that is Llandeilo Bridge. Erected in 1848 following the washout of an earlier low-level, two-arched affair which crossed at right angles to the River Towy at the end of a steep narrow hill, it features a single broad arch at a much higher level above stream. The arch is approached on either side by masonry embankments with a broad highway sweeping round in a gentle curve just like a modern motor road. Little wonder it cost £20,000 to build and was considered one of the engineering marvels of its day. Entering the hamlet of Ffairfach, the **Tregyb Arms** is on the right-hand side of the Swansea road just before the junction with the Llanelli road. A Felinfoel house, it was closed for a long time. However, the brewery refurbished it and it reopened in the summer of 2005. When we visited it last Christmas it was already on its second manager. He did us proud with very moreish Felinfoel Stout on special offer at £1 a pint. This year it was closed when we arrived at about 6.30pm despite having had a sign outside which read "open all day" when my nephew had driven past at lunchtime. A sign hanging on the wall over the door read "under new management" – this must be the fourth incumbent since reopening.

More of that anon.

We moved on along the Swansea road a few yards to the attractive little **Torbay Inn** set back from the road with its prominently illuminated red road-side inn sign visible a long way off. This traditional Welsh boozier was a Buckley house and a regular GBG entry until the early 'nineties. Under the enthusiastic management of Steve and Haulwen Laidler it has made the 2007 edition – I guessed it would when we visited last year. Three hand-pumped ales were on sale: Skinner's Christmas Fairy, Purple Moose X-Mws Llawen/Merry X-Moose and Robinson's Old Tom! Quality was excellent. After a chat with Steve, during which some of his forthcoming attractions were listed, we retraced our steps home for some dinner.

Before closing time we ventured out along Rhosmaen Street as far as the **Farmer's Arms** on the eastern edge of the town. Bearing the legend "A Crown-Buckley House" on the door, this basic, local pub was a sometime Good Beer Guide entry. We sampled the one hand-pumped real ale on offer, Brains Buckley Best Bitter – very drinkable if a little sweet on account of being forced through a sparkler. Although keg, the Brains Dark was rather pleasant too. Walking back along New Road we called in at the **Salutation** for a final pint of the moreish Tribute and I regaled the clientele with a few tunes on the piano. All in all a very pleasant day.

Wednesday 27th was a little more typical for this part of the world – a fine drizzly rain fell on and off all day. Undeterred we resolved, after thoroughly digesting our lunchtime turkey curry, upon further surveying. We drove to the GBG-listed **Brunant Arms** at Caio just off the A482 Tregaron road. On approaching the mini-roundabout at the eastern edge of Llandeilo, where the new A40 (by pass) joins the old A40, we saw the industrial units housing the Evan Evans Brewery. Owner Simon Buckley, never one to shy away from a grand scheme, had applied for, and been refused, planning permission for a new development on this site including a hotel as well as a much larger brewery. So it looks as though the irrepressible Mr Buckley will be moving on yet again.

Once at the Brunant we enjoyed an early dinner; the new managers Dave and Mike are maintaining the reputation this house has for good food. The pub is owned by Justin Jacobi and acts as a brewery tap for his Jacobi Brewery of Caio ales. These are brewed a few miles away along the main road at Pumpsaint. On the pumps were Light Ale (3.8% ABV), Original Bitter (4.4%) and Winter Warmer (5.0%). All were in fine fettle as was the beautiful little Broadwood upright piano!

My folks wanted me to see the National Trust-owned **Cwmdu Inn** at Cwmdu just south west of Talley. We drove there in the hope that it would be open even though it was extremely doubtful whether any draught beer would be available. We found it open and the barman about to clean the lines for Stella lager and John

Smith's Smooth! Fortunately he had a range of Shepherd Neame bottled beers in stock and this sufficed for a quick one while examining this interesting place. "We put a cask on for the Folk Evenings and it usually sells out on the night," said the barman. In the summer when the adjoining holiday cottages are let out and the village store is open – the whole terrace is National Trust property – there is normally one cask ale on tap. A display of pump clips behind the bar bore witness to this. The pub is basically a 'restoration' of a typical two-roomed rural Welsh pub; a central lobby to the left of which is a small tap room with bar; to the right is a larger separate room with huge open fireplace. It is in the condition it was in during the 1930-1960 period (apart from the keg fonts) and owes its continued existence entirely to the efforts of the National Trust members who staff it on a voluntary rotating shift basis.

Before returning to Llandeilo we called in at the GBG-listed **Telegraph Inn** in Station Road, Llangadog, adjacent to the level-crossing near the railway station on the scenic Central Wales line. The owner, Keith, has recently started brewing at the rear of the premises in the Black Mountain Brewery. I had just missed his trial brew at the CAMRA Welsh Beer Festival in Cardiff (sold out) and was keen for a second chance. As luck would have it, he had sold out of his latest batch the day before (at £2 a pint I'm not surprised) and ahead of the next lot in the cellar were some 'guest' casks which needed selling first. Bear in mind this is rural Wales in the middle of winter and there are four other pubs in Llangadog and one understands why it is only possible to tap and serve one ale at a time at the Telegraph. Today's ale was Winter Beacon (5.3%) from Breconshire Brewery with whom Keith has a reciprocal sales arrangement. It was delicious, especially at £2 a pint. Furthermore, Keith plans to hold a winter beer festival featuring nothing but ales from his native Manchester during a weekend to be arranged in late February. I intend to visit Llandeilo then and travel to and from Llangadog on the train.

For anyone of like mind wanting to learn more the 'phone number of the Telegraph is 01550 777727.

Back in Llandeilo we walked down to the **Angel Hotel** opposite the Castle in Rhosmaen Street. The Angel, owned by the couple who also own what had been the Three Tuns, had briefly appeared in the Good Beer Guide in 2006 in place of the White Horse. Already operating a no-smoking policy, this mainly food pub had been absolutely heaving on Boxing Day. Now fairly quiet, there was nonetheless an optimistic selection of four real ales on sale. Both the local ones, Evan Evans Cwrw and Santa's Tipple, were in good nick which is more than could be said of the "foreigners". The Black Sheep Bitter was barely drinkable and the Greene King Old Speckled Hen a little 'long in the tooth'. This should tell the management something.

We had to call in at the up-market **Cawdor Hotel** a few doors down from the Angel if only to check up. This nicely refurbished hotel is owned by Morgan's Hotel of Swansea who clearly operate a local policy. While it may have been unrealistic to expect cask ale here in winter, the keg bitter on sale was Tomos Watkin Cwrw Braf so at least they are making a token effort.

Over the bridge again for another look at the Tregyb. Admittedly it was 10pm by this time and, in spite of a notice placed in the window clearly stating the intended Christmas Holiday opening times (Wednesday-Friday 12-11pm), was once again closed. (At the Torbay later Steve sympathised, "If there's no custom they aren't going to stay open." Fair enough I suppose but they were on the premises and could easily have catered for any passing trade by leaving a note on the door to the effect, "Knock us up if you're thirsty". How would it be if other services closed earlier

than advertised in holiday periods just because they were quiet? Perhaps the sign outside should read "under new, un-enterprising, management"? Enough of that.)

Once safely ensconced in the Torbay again we noticed that the Purple Moose had been replaced by Jennings Redbreast which was in great form. The Skinner's Christmas Fairy had suffered a slight haze the day before from too cool a cellar. This problem had been sorted and it too was now sparkling in top form.

On my return to Bristol on the Thursday lunchtime I passed the Tregyb Arms on the way out of town at 12.45pm. It was closed again of course – I am beginning to fear for the existence of this pub. Although this is their only local outlet, it looks as though Felinfoel are going down the route being followed by so many 'pubcos', that is the all too familiar run-down prior to the change of use as housing. With alternative outlets available, sadly this pub looks set to join the other two lost to the town in recent years.

On the positive side, of the 22 real ales on sale in the 12 outlets visited, no less than 12 were from Welsh breweries, only one of which (Brains) could be termed a regional. Surprisingly, only one beer each came from the two English nationals (W&D and Greene King). Six came from English regionals (Adnams, Black Sheep, Fuller's, Robinson's, St Austell and Shepherd Neame) and one each from two English local breweries, Hop Back and Skinner's. While one long-established large Welsh brewer, Brains of Cardiff, was represented the other one, Felinfoel of Llanelli, was a 'no show'.

Henry Davies

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Pints West Editor, Steve Plumridge,
Garden Flat, 6 Royal York Villas,
Clifton, Bristol BS8 4JR.

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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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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.)

○ Wednesday 7th March - Hotwells pub crawl. Start Merchants Arms, 8pm.

○ Wednesday 14th March - Committee meeting, Cornubia. Start 8pm.

○ Wednesday 21st March - Whiteladies Road pub crawl. Start Port of Call, 8pm.

○ Wednesday 28th March - Branch meeting, Naval Volunteer. Start 8pm.

○ Saturday 31st March - Trip to Hidden Brewery. Depart from Cornubia 6.45pm.

○ Wednesday 11th March - Committee meeting, Fishmarket. Start 8pm.

○ Thursday 12th April - BADRAG meeting at the Robin Hood, St Michael's Hill, Bristol.

April.m Wednesday 25th April - Branch meeting, Commercial Rooms. Start 8pm.

○ Wednesday 9th March - Committee meeting, Cornubia. Start 8pm.

○ Wednesday 23rd May - Branch meeting, Naval Volunteer. Start 8pm.

○ Wednesday 13th June - Committee meeting, Fishmarket. Start 8pm.

Weston diary

○ Wednesday 21 March - The Oak House, Drove Road (RCH beers). 8.30 onwards.

○ Saturday/Sunday, 24/25 March - Weston-super-Mare Cricket Club Beer Festival - see separate article in "Weston Wispers" for full details.

○ Wednesday 18 April - The Red Admiral, Alexandra Parade. 8.30 onwards.

○ Wednesday 16 May - Kingsdown Crawl, Bristol. Travel arrangements from Tim Nickolls.

Non-members welcome at all of the above events.

Weston contact

Tim Nickolls - 01934 644925 (evenings) or email tim.nickolls@virgin.net

THANKS TO THIS ISSUE'S CONTRIBUTORS

Pete Bridle	Guy Newell
Richard Brooks	Tim Nickolls
Phil Cummings	Phill the Pint
Henry Davies	Colin Postlethwaite
Pete Dommett	Pennie Postlethwaite
Margaret Evett	Neil Ravenscroft
Laurie Gibney	Maggie Shapland
Dave Graham	Duncan Shine
Lesly Huxley	Norman Spalding
Dave Jane	Andrew Swift
Mark Jones	Pete Tanner
Dave McVittie	Robin E Wild
Vince Murray	Editor: Steve Plumridge

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A Soak at the Oak

ABOUT two years ago John and Becky were running the Hobgoblin in Bath. They decided to try running a winter beer festival and somehow contrived to arrange for the date of the festival to coincide with the birth of their first child. A bit of a struggle to juggle child production and to launch their new baby beer festival I should have thought. But not a bit of it!

John and Becky are now heading up the splendid Royal Oak on the Lower Bristol Road near the Oldfield Park Railway Station and they have just hosted their second winter beer festival there. And what happened? Yes, John got his timings wrong again effectively side-lining any help from his wife.

The Royal Oak promised in its promotional literature that there would be 30 to 40 rare winter ales to try. The tick sheet that was provided for customers had a list of 41. Not a bad guess John, and so the 1st February saw the start of a frenetic four days of ale sales.

For my part I was champing at the bit and not a little distressed that, rather than decamp directly to the Oak from work on the first night, I was obliged to join colleagues for an office bash. Thankfully that was at the Raven otherwise I would have been most unhappy. Consequently I arrived at the Royal Oak just as the band was setting up. The band was the Bourbon Street Blues Club whom I thoroughly enjoyed, especially when I found that other colleagues were members of the band. Saturday's entertainment was provided by a lass called Nicky Fermie who sang and played with a passion rarely seen.

John had organised the festival so that there would be twenty beers 'on' at any one time. The pub has ten beer engines so to achieve his goal John elicited the help of Bristol Beer Factory, who kindly provided a ten-firkin free-standing stillage, and Wye Valley Brewery who provided jackets and coolers. The beer list was indeed varied and country-wide as far as Cornwall (Blue Anchor) to Scotland (Islay) to Wales (Purple Moose). And folk came nearly as far to sample them. CAMRA groups were observed from Weston-super-Mare, Gloucester, Dudley and even as far as Kent. Gazza the Scoopergen honcho from Worcester tuned up and was astounded to find that there were ten new ales to add to his list of 15,000 plus. My own favourite of the festival was the Thatcher's Ale produced by Mayfields Brewery though many rated the Downton Chocolate Orange Stout.

I heard of one snuffling chap who turned up on Sunday, miserably read the list and declared that he had missed 33 ticks for his list but had been too ill to come and try them. He was in good company: John the landlord also missed the majority of the fun being similarly confined upstairs with lurgi or bird flu or whatever virulent strain that is doing the rounds right now. But oh, I do hope that babies and illnesses do not put John and Becky off trying more such festivals.

They just get better and better. The festivals that is!

Phill the Pint

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Guest Beer Writer

Guy Newell, Managing Director of Butcombe Brewery

May I start by wishing all Pints West readers a belated Happy New Year from everyone at Butcombe Brewery.

We are just approaching the second anniversary of moving into the new brewery at Wrington, and the fourth anniversary of taking over the brewery from Simon Whitmore. The last four years have absolutely flown by, so I thought it would be worth documenting just what we have been up to during that time:

- 2003 - complete re-branding of all products; launched Butcombe bottled range;
- 2004 - launched Butcombe Blond;
- 2005 - moved into custom-built new brewery in Wrington ... the largest new-build brewery in the UK for over twenty years; launched Ashton Press Cider.
- 2006 - brewed the "Official Beer for Brunel 200", Butcombe Brunel IPA; launched Cold Filtered Blond;
- Achieved 40% increase in beer volumes to 21,000 barrels in four years.

The building of the new brewery has represented (especially against a backdrop of declining beer volumes) a huge leap of faith in the Butcombe brand ...

idiotic or inspired – only time will tell!

Everything we do at Butcombe Brewery is focussed on producing the highest possible quality of cask beer available in the marketplace Never underestimate the *Value of a Brand*. Butcombe Bitter is our main brand, accounting for some 75% of all production, for as well as being the predominant West Country brand in the free trade, it is now the lead local bitter brand in national chains such as Beefeater, Brewers Fayre and Vintage Inns. A brewery without a consumer-led brand will always be vulnerable ... ask King & Barnes, Riddleys, Morrells, Gales, or Hardy & Hansons, to name but a few regional brewers taken over and closed over the past few years.

I am really worried about the demise of the independent regional brewers ... in the last couple of years W & D and Greene King have gobbled up Burtonwood, Jennings, Marstons and Belhaven. Who is protecting Britain's beer heritage? Centuries-old family brewers are disappearing, replaced by 100 new micros a year – the main reason ... "Progressive Beer Duty" (PBD).

Now the concept of PBD is terrific: give the smaller producers duty relief to counter the economies of scale of the bigger producers.

The only problem is that the politicians have got the sums wrong ... the duty relief at the bottom end is too large, creating an unfair playing field and destabilising the market place. I am in favour of changes to PBD at both the bottom and top ends of the scale ... it cannot be right that a brewery such as Butcombe, with a track record of investment in infrastructure, people, and brands, should be penalised to the tune of 50% extra duty payable, against a one-man-band micro-brewer.

Talking of duty, we should all be putting pressure on the Chancellor not to raise it at the forthcoming budget



on March 22nd ... with the smoking ban implementation of July 1st the licensed trade will face a big enough challenge without increased duty as well the duty element on your pint of beer is already almost 30% of the price!

Talking smoking ban for a moment, I am reminded that it is only 12 years ago that I flew to South Africa for the World Cup Rugby Final flanked on either side by the Chairman and Managing Director of Marston's Brewery, who both chain-smoked for the entire trip ... not very pleasant and therefore I endorse the ban... people still fly!

Changing times often mean a more modernistic strategic approach. It is well documented that younger drinkers grow up on "Super Chilled" / "Extra Cold" brands. Our "Bridgehead to Cask" campaign with Cold Filtered Blond (served circa 5% cooler than cask) seems to be working. JD Wetherspoon has decided to trial Cold Filtered Blond (along with our Ashton Press Cider) in the four largest Bristol outlets so we will watch with interest. I know Pints West readers are fascinated by the Bristol Airport saga of "will the Bitter be on or not?" ... I am flying out to Gran Canaria in late February, so I will let you know!

The beer industry has not been as proactive as the wine industry over the last ten years or so in clearly showing, with tasting notes, pump clips, bottled labels, etc, what the characteristics of that particular beer are. Watch out for an initiative (CAMRA backed) called Cyclops, where promotional material (pump clip backs, beer mats, etc, etc) will be giving clear and concise beer descriptions, as well as a bitterness and sweetness rating (from 1 to 5). Good stuff, and Butcombe are well involved.

Can I ask you to drink local wherever possible (my recommendation is of course to drink Butcombe!), and be aware what great value a perfectly crafted pint of Bitter is ... 25% cheaper than premium lager!

Finally, I hope Bristol Beer Festival (starting Friday March 2nd) enjoys its usual sell-out status (look out for Butcombe Blond and Brunel IPA). Regrettably I will not be there this year, as I have agreed fairly last minute to replace the sadly absent Miles Templeman as the keynote speaker at the SIBA Annual General Meeting in Leeds, on the same day ... lucky SIBA!

Have a great year ... and keep drinking the Butcombe!

Guy Newell



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Butcombe adds to its estate

2006 was a busy, successful year for Butcombe and included the purchase of five new houses, the latest two additions joining the estate in December. These two are both situated south of Bath, a little outside their existing homeground.

The Rose & Crown is situated in the High Street of Hinton Charterhouse. Occupying a corner position, it is an imposing stone building of some considerable age.

The front entrance leads directly into the large bar area, which is sub-divided into three. Wood panelling on the walls and the real fire at the end of the bar create a warm period feel to the room. Butcombe Bitter is currently on gravity feed but the proximity of the fireplace makes temperature regulation difficult, so plans are under way to install handpumps and to relocate cask beers to the cellar.

Located off the rear hall and car park entrance is another smaller open-ended room with bar, used when the pub is busy. Steps at the far end of this lead you down to an impressive dining room, which is ideal for parties and functions.

As with all good village pubs, it serves as a community meeting place for various groups and associations. It is very popular for food and also offers four superior B&B rooms for visitors.

It should be noted that Nigel and Jane, the new managers, have, in the past, been winners of Gloucestershire CAMRA Pub of the Year.

The second of the recent acquisitions, the **Cross Keys** in Rode, also occupies a High Street position, but has a more unusual appearance both inside and out. This relates to



The Rose & Crown, Hinton Charterhouse

its former life as the site and tap of the former Fussell's brewery and following that as a Bass depot. Not many public houses can boast of having their own well, but this one can, it being now a decorative feature at the top of a wide sloping passageway which links its two bars, in which Butcombe Bitter and Gold and a guest beer are currently available.

The bar at the rear of the pub leads into a large, pleasant dining room, serving excellent

food, and also, via steps, to an outdoor seating area, then up again to the car park.

Butcombe plan to refurbish the front bar and possibly extend the number of B&B rooms, which currently number three.

As with the Rose and Crown, the Cross Keys has become a meeting place for the local community since reopening in 2004, after a closure of ten years.

Currently both public houses are opening lunchtimes and evenings during the week and all day at weekends.

Margaret Evett



The Cross Keys, Rode



The well in the Cross Keys

Pub News

Sadly, the **Bunch of Grapes** in St Phillips is currently closed, and the freehold is up for sale. Another case of hoping for the best.

Just up the road, there is major work going on at the **Swan** in Midland Road. As has been mentioned in these pages before, the upstairs section is being converted into flats, but downstairs will reopen as a pub.

More bad news up on Old Market. The **Palace Hotel** has been closed for a while, but there is now a change of use application pending. This former hotel with its opulent frontage and magnificent and unique interior is listed on CAMRA's National Inventory of Pub Interiors. The round arched bar back with brass columns and roundels, and the pub's sloping floor, date from the hotel's build in 1869. Also of note is the fabulous cornice and the deep arched windows. Listed as a Grade II building, it is of paramount importance to pub-goers and historians that this building remains as a public house.

Elsewhere, at the top of St Michael's Hill, we've had reports of a particularly good pint of London Pride currently on offer at **Bar@155**.

In Bedminster, the **Cumberland** in St



The Star and Dove

Lukes Road has reopened as the **Star And Dove**. Very much designed as a gastro-pub, this may be the only pub in Bristol which has lettering outside advertising 'Charcuterie'. No real ales on sale when I popped in, but drinkers remain very much welcome.

Not far away, in St John's Lane, the pub we used to call the Engineers Arms is now thriving as the **Brunel**. Still aimed at a broad cross-section of the community, the Brunel offers Greene King IPA and Abbot Ale, as well as Old Speckled Hen.

The **Plough** on Bedminster Down Road sadly remains closed with no sign of any reprieve. A shame as it is a good example of 1930s architecture.

The pub on St Nicholas Street formerly known as the Elephant has reopened as **The Ivory**. Still a gay-friendly bar, there were no real ales on offer when we checked. Talking of name changes, the bar at 7-9 St Nicholas Street which has had more name changes than Zsa Zsa Gabor, and was most recently called Fusion, has now reopened as **Old Nick's**. Again, not offering real ale, but we hope they find a winning formula soon.

A famous old Bristol pub has been given a new lease of life with a great new range of beers. **The Cottage** on Baltic Wharf now offers the full range of Bristol Beer Factory beers as well as a couple of Bath Ales brews. Remember, this pub is only a few ferry stops from the Centre.

Up in Redland, the **Shakespeare** in Lower Redland Road is on fine form under the stewardship of Hayley and Marc Ruggles. Four or five real



The Brunel

ales on at a time, including two from Butcombe when I popped in recently.

Duncan Shine

The real ales at the **Lansdown** in Clifton are proving increasingly popular, now being the best-selling product in the pub. The hand-pumps on the bar can currently accommodate four real ales and a traditional cider (Thatcher's), with offerings such as Bath Ales Barnstormer, Otter Bitter, Sharp's Doom Bar Bitter and St Austell Tribute. The Tribute is reported to be the top seller at the moment.

SP

The **Princess of Wales** in Bedminster was taken over by Sue and Alan Davies a year ago when the Wickwar Brewery sold it. Courage Best and Bath Ales Festivity and Gem were in good condition when we visited end of January.

Pennie Postlethwaite

The **Shant** pub in Crown Road, Kingswood (near Soundwell College) has been selling Bath Ales Gem in the last few weeks. This is the first real ale other than Courage Best to feature there in more than ten years. The pub recently had a major refit after being taken over by John, the landlord of the nearby Chequers pub.

Vince Murray

Additional Choice for Members

Bristol Lawn Tennis & Squash Club has started to serve Otter Bitter as well as the regular London Pride.

The Club, known locally as Redland Tennis Club on Redland Green, is also home to Great Western Runners.

Pete Tanner

Nomadic Cider Festivals

If you're a cider lover, why not go along to one (or all) of the "Cyder Sunday" events held in and around Bristol on various coming Sundays. (See the advert here.)

Support local cider producers!

Dozens of Real 'n' Traditional Ciders to Swig!

Cyder Sunday

Nomadic Cider Festivals - Spring 2007

Date	Cropping up at	Featuring
Mar 11	The Apple	1 til 6 Wilma
		Welsh Back West Country 'n' Wonders
Mar 18	The Cornubia	1 til 6 Somerset
		Redcliffe Paddies
Mar 25	The Bird in Hand	12 til 5 Somerset
		Long Ashton Paddies
Apr 8	The Barn	12 til 6 Hog Roast
		Winstall

Apr 22nd - St. George's Cider Session - TBC
Apr 29th - TBC
May 6th - May Day Cider Frolic - TBC

Good Friday Cider & Cheese Feast
Friday 6th April
The Fleece 12 til 5
Live Music, Hot 'n' Cold Food and a Fine Festival Time!!!

WARNING
From the Management of the
HOPE & ANCHOR
Exceptional Public House
DON'T SPILL BEER

North of the border again

Although Vince Murray and I have visited and written several times about Glasgow and Edinburgh, there remain for us many pubs of interest unvisited. So it was with delight we each received a £25-off voucher from EasyJet as an apology for a cancelled flight on our previous trip, a visit to Krakow and Berlin which is recorded in a previous Pints West. (We had actually been delighted by the cancellation at the time as it had given us an extra day in Berlin!) So, combined with a rare sighting of a £26 room in the Edinburgh central Travel Lodge in St Mary's Street, we journeyed north of the border once again, this time for the princely sum of £20.98 each for two flights and one night's accommodation!

Our flight to Glasgow was enlivened by an aborted landing but undeterred we journeyed to Bridgeton station in West Glasgow. Our target ten minutes' walk away was a new venture, **West Brewing Company**, located on the North Eastern edge of Glasgow Green. Possibly the only British brewery to follow the German beer purity laws (*Any other contenders? Ed.*), West brews a range of authentic and tasty European style beers. Its



Home of the West Brewing Company

launch in March 2006 had attracted national news coverage for getting into trouble for failing to serve beer in stamped pint glasses. Somehow they have got past this, and they will serve beer in a pint glass on request. We arrived for opening time and enjoyed all four beers on offer, and the Oktoberfest beer was served in stone mugs, a new experience in a British pub for your author! The food is also based on solid German fare, ideal for soaking up beer! The drinking area is really a vast beer hall, simply furnished and decorated. The whole experience made a pleasant change and was a definite success.

Any trip to Glasgow without visiting the superb **Clockwork Beer Company** would be incomplete, so we headed over to Mount Florida, near to Hampden Park, and found the usual range of six of their own beers including a classic Red Ale, eight guest beers and a wide array of foreign beers, malt whisky and obscure foreign spirits, one of which was sampled for novelty value to the apparent disdain of the landlord! So in high spirits we went to get a train to Edinburgh and were dismayed to find it was not possible to buy a return ticket for the next day's journey. This meant we paid more for a train to Edinburgh from Glasgow and back than to fly to Glasgow and back from Bristol!

So after stopping off at our hotel we headed to **Cloisters** bar where there was the welcome sight of nine real ales and a very good whisky list. We moved on to the CAMRA National Inventory-listed **Bennett's Bar**, which sadly had a rather uncared-for feel. On our previous visit to Edinburgh we had narrowly failed to get to the **Prestoungrange Gothenburg** in Prestonpans, a distant suburb of Edinburgh. We were determined to right this error, but were concerned about transport. We needn't have worried. Edinburgh is blessed by a super bus service courtesy of Lothian buses. There was a bus to Prestonpans every 15 minutes until midnight, a service Bristolians can only dream of, and at a good price to. The pub itself is a



large multi-roomed affair, with an island bar serving three of Fowlers beers, which are brewed in the pub. The 80/- was very fine and the Porter quite superb. After having local fish and chips (I was bemused to find I had to ask for a "fish supper"!) we headed back, taking in the **Barony Bar** (another National Inventory pub) and finishing off at the classic **Halfway House**, a tiny pub above Waverley station serving, amongst others, two tasty Belhaven beers, 60 /- and Fruity Partridge.

Next morning, after the obligatory wander down the Royal Mile, we had a stiff but pleasant walk that took us to another National Inventory pub, **Leslie's Bar**, where we had an excellent pint of Timothy Taylor's Landlord. It was good to see a historic pub in pristine condition. For a change from pubs we visited the nearby Blonde restaurant and had an excellent lunch of seafood, washed down with a complimentary glass of Rioja, before heading back to Waverley to catch a Glasgow train, although we couldn't resist a visit first to the splendid **Bow Bar** – a must do in the Old Town of Edinburgh. A wide range of real ale is dispensed by old fashioned Scottish air pressure pumps, and there is an exceptional whisky list.

In *Pints West* number 71 we had written about Glasgow pubs and copies of *Pints West* were very well received in both the **State Bar**, surely one of the friendliest pubs in the city, and at the legendary **Bon Accord**, where we drank Adnams Old Ale and ate what is surely the best value pub food ever. Our final stop before leaving for the airport was the incredible **Pot Still** on Hope Street, home to over 500 malt whiskies besides real ale.

We were amazed upon handing over *Pints West* here when the barman revealed he had already read our article! It turned out he had picked up a copy at the Clockwork Beer Company where he had been working, helping with the brewing the previous afternoon!

The last flight of the day got us back to Bristol, and we could reflect on two days well spent!

Phil Cummings



The Bow Bar

Cheddar Ales brewery visit



ON Tuesday 13 February Bristol & District CAMRA branch members enjoyed a very pleasant visit to the Cheddar Ales brewery, which is located at Winchester Farm, Cheddar.

Jem Ham showed us around his spacious and modern site ably assisted by Toby. The

brewery looks well designed and appears to have plenty of room to expand its capacity. In addition to playing "guess the hops" there was of course some sampling of their beers. Unlike a lot of "bitters" the Cheddar Ales Best Bitter (4.0% ABV) really does live up to the name



Toby and Jem and the Cheddar Ales van with a pronounced bitter taste, and the Cheddar Ales fruity, full flavoured Potholer (4.3%) proved particularly popular with those present.

Cheddar Ales are currently looking to supply pubs to the south side of Bristol, so if you think you may be interested give them a call on 01934 744193.

Richard Brooks (words and pictures)

Peasants, pubs and postcards

SCOOPERS* had to be quick off the mark to catch the latest offering from Wickwar Brewery. Bottle-conditioned and weighing in at 4.8%, St Wulfstan was brewed to celebrate the 999th birthday of St Wulfstan, patron saint of peasants and vegetarians, and one time vicar of Hawkesbury in South Gloucestershire, before being elevated to the see of Worcester. He also helped to end the white slave trade from Bristol to Ireland, which is why he is being commemorated in 2006, the 200th anniversary of the abolition of the slave trade.

A celebratory service in Hawkesbury church on 19 January, organised by Mark Steeds, landlord of the **Beaufort Arms** in Hawkesbury Upton, included a talk on slavery by Derek Robinson, author of *A Darker History of Bristol*. As next year sees Wulfstan's 1000th birthday, further celebrations – and hopefully more St Wulfstan beer – can be expected.

The Beaufort Arms is also the venue for a new monthly postcard fair. For over 20 years, postcard fairs have been held on the second Wednesday of each month at Corinium Galleries in Cirencester. Dealers from as far afield as Southampton, Exeter and Birmingham attend the fair on a regular basis, attracting customers from all over the country. But although the building is being sold, with the last fair being held in March, the fair will carry on, thanks to Mark Steeds, who has offered the function room at the Beaufort Arms as an alternative venue.



The Beaufort Arms, Hawkesbury Upton

The first fair at the Beaufort Arms will be 11th April, with subsequent fairs on the second Wednesday of each month. The fair will run from 10am to 4pm and admission is free. The pub opens at noon, with food served till 2.30.

The Beaufort Arms can be contacted on 01454 238217 (www.beaufortarms.com).

Andrew Swift

*Those unfamiliar with scooping are invited to visit www.scoopergen.co.uk for enlightenment.