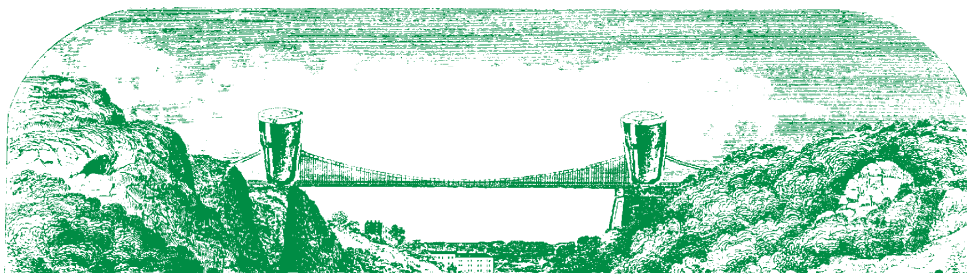




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No. 77  
Spring  
2008

CAMPAIGN  
FOR  
REAL ALE

# PINTS WEST

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

## Save Our Community Pubs

Bristol CAMRA launches its Community Pubs Campaigning Group

The Bristol Branch of CAMRA, the Campaign for Real Ale, has launched a dedicated group to try and halt the alarming rate of pub closures in Bristol and the surrounding areas.

The rate of pub closures in this area has accelerated in recent times. We have already lost many much-loved pubs in the last few years and we believe that something needs to be done before the community pub really does become an endangered species. The recent rate of closures has been alarming.

We believe that the retention of our existing pubs helps to maintain a healthy and varied choice of pubs as a social asset serving the needs of different communities.

We will be promoting the community pub as a great place to visit and enjoy. We want to help to ensure the survival of the essential character of the British pub as a place for responsible social drinking.

There are already some areas in and around Bristol that are almost without pubs. The loss of community pubs can have a devastating effect on communities.

The campaign group intends to:

- Lobby Local Authorities to give greater planning protection to community pubs;
- Encourage communities to support their local pubs;
- Encourage local communities and interest groups to hold their meetings in pubs wherever possible;
- Encourage pubs to promote themselves within local communities;
- Lobby pub-owning companies to sell pubs as going concerns when they wish to dispose of them from their estates rather than turning them to other uses such as flats, restaurants or offices.

Many people are telling us that they are fed up seeing much-loved local pubs being turned into flats or restaurants. There is a need to halt this trend and action is required now.

Also, cheap supermarket alcohol is undermining the public house by creating a huge price incentive for consumers to drink alcohol on the streets or at home. The public house provides a safe and supervised environment for the consumption of alcohol.

The British pub is the envy of many who live abroad. It is vital that the trend to close pubs is halted. Once a pub closes down it seldom reopens. We need greater protection for pubs from the planning authorities and we also need to get communities to support their local.



Photo by Richard Brooks

George Ferguson, renowned architect, addresses the Bristol Community Pubs Campaigning Group's launch meeting at the Albert in Bedminster

The Bristol Community Pubs Campaigning Group intends to lobby for change to give pubs greater protection as well as encouraging local communities to use their local pub.

The Group was officially launched with an event held at the Albert in Bedminster on February 18th. The meeting was very well attended, with interested parties including CAMRA members, local licensees, and leaders of the Tory and Lib Dem groups on the city council. The media also showed much interest in the launch, which received great coverage in the local press, and featured on both the radio and television.

*Pete Bridle, Group Spokesman*

## Wickwar's Station Porter is Champion Winter Beer of Britain

IT'S great news for a local brewery as Station Porter from Wickwar in Gloucestershire is declared the Supreme Champion Winter Beer of Britain 2008.

Turn to the back page for the full story.



(Photo by Richard Brooks)

# Butcombe's Colston Yard

**"Out with the Old and in with the New"**

THE end of the year saw Butcombe Brewery's latest and most adventurous project reach fruition with the opening of Colston Yard. Situated at the top of Colston Street on the site of the former Smiles Brewery and Tap, this venture is very much "in with the new!"

It is a modern, chic, open-plan pub, bar and grill, featuring a central bar area with counters on four sides (two with handpumps) and a coffee service area. Wood predominates in furniture and floor along with a contemporary combination of stools and banquettes in complementary colours of brown and cinnamon. Light olive green, cadmium red and neutral colours adorn the walls and ceilings.

The restaurant area at the back features large windows, giving a view over the rooftops, softened by an array of window boxes, while an optional opening section of the frontage provides a nice facility for summer months. A small room to the right of the entrance provides some privacy, which could well be appreciated by parents with children in tow, especially relevant with the Children's Hospital in close proximity.

A plaque, giving a brief history of the site, is situated at the top of the stairs which lead down to the lower floor, where the kitchen,



The very first pint being poured at the start of the first trading session (photo by Terry Evett)

cellar and toilets are located. The walls of the stairwell are sympathetically hung with jazz related prints.

Butcombe wish this venue still to be seen and used as a pub and to this end a great variety of beers are available. Cask beers include their own Bitter, Gold and Brunel IPA – the latter being replaced by Blond from April to September – and Fuller's London Pride plus monthly changing guest beers from SIBA members. (Tring and Hopback breweries have

featured so far.) Premium cold beers on draught include Sierra Nevada Pale Ale (USA), Schneider Weisse (Germany) and a monthly changing speciality, which has, so far featured Bosteels Kwak and the Westmalle Trappist beer Dubbel from Belgium. De Koninck is next in line. There is also a varied list of specialist bottled beers (thirty!) with strengths varying from 4.5 to 14 per cent, from breweries such as Anchor and Goose Island (USA), Chimay, Eggenberger, Huyghe, Liefmans and Leffe (Belgium), Kostritzer (Germany), and Menabrea (Italy). Also available are Butcombe's cold filtered Blond and Ashton Press Cider, along with a good selection of wines and soft drinks from people such as Fentimans.

An establishment such as this needs, of course, good food and this is offered in both bar and restaurant menus. An emphasis is put on quality ingredients, locally sourced and organic where possible. Food, which can be enjoyed in all areas of the pub, is available from the bar menu from 11am to 9.30pm, and the restaurant menu from 12 to 2.30 and 6 to 9.30.

Opening hours are from 11am to midnight Sunday to Thursday and 11am to 1am Friday and Saturday.

Margaret Evett





# The Thunderbolt

## Great news for real ale drinkers in Totterdown

THE Thunderbolt opened for business on October 20th 2007 having been given a smart internal refurbishment. The pub, previously a rather run-down boozer known as the Turnpike, is located along the busy Bath Road (A4) close to Totterdown Bridge, and is already attracting custom from locals and further afield too, with their positive real ale focus and varied live music policy.

Up to four ales (and Thatcher's cider) are usually available, and at the time of writing these are RCH Pitchfork, Sharp's Doom Bar, Bath Ales Gem and Abbey Ales Bellringer.

Running the pub are Dave and Sophie, and as well as promoting mainly local brews, their entertainments policy ranges from more well-known acts such as The Christians to older acts such as Dr Feelgood, Eddie & the Hot Rods and John Otway. There are also quiz nights, blues nights, open mic nights and other music themes on a regular basis.

Dave told me, on a recent visit, that plans have been prepared for an external make-over too, including the landscaping of the beer garden, seemingly hidden away at the rear. Should be great on sunny summer days and evenings! In addition to the music, they are also planning film nights (free admission) on Thursdays. And in time, there may be changes to the beer range too, with bottles of Milk Stout from the Bristol Beer Factory due for imminent stocking.

The bar itself is a reclaimed 19th-century design which complements the wooden floors with a selection of sofas, chairs and tables, and often illuminated with candles. It's the perfect place to enjoy a pint and whilst away the time by yourself or with friends. The small stage is set at the far end of the bar room.

Winter opening times are 7 to 11.30pm Mondays to Thursdays,



David (centre), partner Sophie, and a friend

5pm to midnight on Fridays and Saturdays, and 5 to 11pm on Sundays, although expect earlier opening times in summer. Full details on the pub and forthcoming events are available on their website at [www.thethunderbolt.net](http://www.thethunderbolt.net).

The pub is easy to find, with bus stops for routes 1, X39, 178 and 349 close by, and although there is no car-parking available, there are side streets near by. The most difficult thing (for the reviewer at least!) is the stiff walk up towards the Wells Road and home after a few beers! Totterdown is known to have a few steep hills, after all.

So, the next time you think that south Bristol has nothing to offer the real ale drinker, think again, and drop in at the Thunderbolt. And with the Good Beer Guide-listed Shakespeare less than 10 minutes' walk away (usually with five real ales on), you'll see how the area is steadily improving and giving the real ale drinker a real choice.

*Tim Proudman*

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# Triple celebrations for Wye Valley

THE West Midlands CAMRA 2007 Beer of the Year Competition, held at the Barton Arms, Birmingham, turned out to be very successful for Wye Valley Brewery.

For the second year, Wye Valley Brewery won gold for Dorothy Goodbody's Wholesome Stout in the 'Real Ale in a Bottle' category. Dorothy Goodbody also received an award for her Golden Ale which was judged 2<sup>nd</sup> in the 'Golden Ale of the Year' category. To complete the hat trick one of Wye Valley's core brands, HPA, was judged 2<sup>nd</sup> in



the 'Best Bitter of the Year' category.

Vernon Amor, Managing Director of Wye Valley Brewery was on hand along with other members of his staff to accept all three awards; he said, 'We are delighted to receive these awards for our beers. As a regional brewery, winning three awards within our region is extremely significant for us'.

Pictured with the awards are, from the left, Simeon Davis (Brewer), Jamie Craddock (Assistant Brewer) and Jimmy Swan (Head Brewer).

## WANT TO SAVE YOUR LOCAL?



Is your local pub:

- ☐ Currently closed?
- ☐ Threatened with closure?

If yes, do you want to try and save it?

**The Community Pubs Foundation can help.**

We're here to support community groups fighting to keep their local open. We can assist with:

- ☐ Information and guidance on campaigning tactics
- ☐ Small grants, which could be used, for instance, on:
  - Publicity material
  - Hiring meeting rooms
  - Securing professional advice

You can find out more by visiting our website at:

**[www.communitypubs.org](http://www.communitypubs.org)**

Contact us by email: [communitypubs@camra.org.uk](mailto:communitypubs@camra.org.uk)  
or telephone: **01727 867201**

**"This is a seriously important and welcome endeavour. Any initiative that helps a community keep its local pub open has my immediate support."**

*Bill Bryson (Travel Writer)*



## Bristol Community Pubs Campaigning Group calls on Local Authorities to give greater protection to community pubs

Across the UK, pub numbers are declining at an alarming rate. A survey in 2007 indicated that around 56 pubs are closing every month. The causes of this continuing trend are various but include changing leisure patterns, cheap supermarket alcohol, drink-drive legislation, and the smoking ban which has yet to deliver a surge of fresh-air-loving drinkers. Further pressure comes from the overheated housing market where huge profits are to be made from the conversion of pubs (or anything else for that matter) to flats and houses.

The Bristol Community Pubs Campaigning Group is concerned that pubs of real value to communities are being lost.

The Group therefore proposes the following categories of pub whose value is greater than its purely functional role as a purveyor of intoxicating liquors:

- Listed Buildings and buildings which are valuable to Conservation Areas or other environments.
- Pubs which play an important part in communities, are well-used by a range of ages and occupations, often with various social amenities (cricket club, quiz night, live music etc).
- Pubs which have cultural and historical value and tourist interest; many such buildings are not otherwise protected by statutory or

local listings.

- Pubs which are alone in serving large areas or populations.

The pressures noted above are no respecters of any of the qualities listed. The Group therefore seeks better protection for such worthy cases before many of them are lost forever and proposes the following:

- To encourage statutory heritage bodies\* to review and increase the number of pubs "listed" and to upgrade the most worthy examples, (particularly interiors) to give better protection.
- To encourage Local Authorities to be more robust in administering Listed Building Consent and to encourage the addition of more modest buildings to Local Listings where their role and architecture contributes to the urban environment.
- In both cases, to encourage awareness of the importance of interiors, especially in buildings of mid-Victorian to pre-second-world-war age where interior design is integral to the form and function of the pub and which is particularly vulnerable to and incompatible with changes of use.
- To encourage planning and development

policies to recognise the value of good pubs in balanced communities and to distinguish between bars/clubs/chains and pubs which offer a wide range of social amenities. Such pubs may be popular and profitable yet still be vulnerable, e.g. to the housing market.

- The Group will seek to make the value of such pubs a consideration in the forthcoming Development Framework with its requirement to create balanced, vibrant and inclusive communities. To this end the Group supports the universal adoption of the Statement of Community Involvement\*\* (which is currently being evaluated in two areas by Bristol City Council) as a prerequisite in all planning applications.

- To encourage the adoption at a statutory level of the CAMRA National Inventory of Pub Interiors.\*\*\*

Sam Kendon

\* Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment, English Heritage, etc.

\*\* The SCI requires a dialogue between developers and local amenity groups, leading to a joint statement by both/all parties explaining the discussions and accommodations made. The process has several possible advantages to either or both sides:

- ◆ To help clearer understanding of different points of view.
- ◆ To introduce beneficial ideas at an early stage thus enabling more thorough incorporation.
- ◆ To guard against deliberately running down of premises for speculative purposes.
- ◆ To co-ordinate regeneration.
- ◆ To inform local residents and increase the involvement in democratic action.

\*\*\* The CAMRA National Inventory of Pub Interiors of Outstanding Historic Interest lists some 250 pubs rigorously selected from Britain's nearly 60,000 for their architectural and historic importance. The criteria used are in some ways significantly more stringent than those used in statutory listing.

## Bristol Community Pubs Campaigning Group calls on local MPs to support a cut in beer duty

THE Bristol Community Pubs Campaigning Group has written to all the local MPs in the area requesting that they support a fairer deal for beer drinkers by reducing duty on beer. In their letter they point out that:

- Keeping tax at the current high level would result in yet more community pubs closing as more people drink at home because higher beer tax means drinking in the pub is less affordable.
- During the first seven months of the 2007-2008 tax year, UK beer production has fallen by 7.9 per cent. Should this trend continue for the final five months of the year then 2007-2008 will see the largest fall in UK beer production since 1948-1949.
- Less consumer choice as higher beer tax means brewery closures as companies seek to drive down the cost of production at the expense of quality, diversity and provenance.
- The Society of Independent Brewers

(SIBA) has reported that the wet summer has led to the cost of barley increasing by nearly 40 per cent and some hop prices increasing by up to 100 per cent.

- The UK has the highest rate of excise duty on beer in the whole of the European Union!

Bristol Community Pubs Campaigning Group spokesman Peter Bridle said: "Beer is the UK's national drink and we are calling on our MPs to support our request to reduce duty. It is totally unfair that UK drinkers have to pay so much more than people in other EU countries. The issue of high duty not only hits the consumer in the pocket, it also threatens the future of many more community pubs of which we are already losing too many."

The Campaigning Group calls on its MPs to urge the Government to therefore cut duty on beer by one penny a pint to address the dramatic fall in UK beer production and the closure of around 56 pubs a months – many in the Bristol area.

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# Pubs in Peril

RARELY has there been so much news from the pub trade; rarely has so much of it been bad. There's the issue of binge drinking, of course, bubbling along under the surface, but I've banged on about that before, and there are more pressing matters – a whole raft of them – so many, in fact, that it is no exaggeration to say that the challenges facing the licensed trade today are probably greater than at any time in its history. We may not be looking at the death of the English pub, but we may be witnessing its imminent metamorphosis into an endangered species.

The greatest and most obvious challenge, of course, is the fallout from the smoking ban, but on top of that there's the more insidious threat from the off trade – in particular supermarkets – as well as an astronomical price rise in the cost of raw materials (especially malt and hops) and the continuing 'economic downturn' or 'credit squeeze' or 'loss of consumer confidence'. Call it what you will, on top of everything else, it means a bleak time ahead for Britain's pubs.

If you believed some people, of course, you could be forgiven for thinking that everything in the pub garden is rosy. In a recent *Spectator* article, Rod Liddle fulminated against Dawn Primarolo, MP for Bristol South, who claims that "the smoking ban ... has not remotely damaged the pub trade." He goes on to argue that "only an imbecile would swallow the

statement that our pub trade has not been catastrophically reduced as a direct result of the smoking ban." He cites reports from across the country: a drop of 50% in pub sales in part of Oxfordshire, 40% in two pubs in Norfolk, 25% in Lewes in Sussex, 20% in Bexhill ... the list goes on.

Mark Brumby, an analyst with Blue Oar Securities, has told his clients that he expects up to 6,000 pubs to close in the next decade as the industry struggles to cope with the smoking ban, changing drinking patterns and an economic slowdown. In an interview in the *Observer*, he explained that the smoking ban "affects the people who also tend to be session drinkers and spend time on the gaming machines."

The British Beer & Pub Association (BBPA) has attributed a 7% fall in sales in 2007 directly to the smoking ban, with 14M fewer pints being served in pubs every day. Punch Taverns report a 5% drop in takings over the Christmas period, claiming this was largely due to the smoking ban, while Scottish & Newcastle (shortly before their takeover!) forecasted that the ban would cut £10M from their annual profit.

A survey by the British Institute of Innkeeping and the Licensed Victuallers' Federation has found that pub sales fell by 7.3% in the five months following the introduction of the ban. Over half of nearly 3,000 licensees surveyed claimed that customers who smoke

visit their pubs less regularly; almost three-quarters said they were spending less time there.

The anticipated surge in the number of non-smokers eager to quaff and trough away in a squeaky-clean smoke-free environment (anticipated, that is, by people who either by misapprehension or design were talking through an orifice not usually associated with intelligent discourse) has failed to materialise – as anyone who knows anything about the trade could have told them. That's not to say that the odd non-smoker hasn't dropped into a pub for the occasional half pint – but, way before the ban was introduced, there were loads of pubs with well-regulated smoke-free areas. At the risk of stating the obvious,


the reason the vast majority of non-pubgoing non-smokers didn't go into pubs before the smoking ban was introduced was because they don't particularly like pubs. The fact that they're now smoke-free is a matter of supreme indifference to them.

It seems eminently likely that the fallout from the ban will continue to bite in the coming months and years. There is something of a Dunkirk spirit among many smokers at present, but, without wanting to sound patronising, the novelty of that will eventually wear off. Save a miracle – or the adoption of common-sense policies and a respect for natural liberties by those who govern us (which probably amounts to much the same thing) – the smoking ban is not going to be rescinded – if anything restrictions will become even more stringent. Smokers in their twenties, if they don't give up, will, all things being equal, come to realise that they face another half century or so of standing outside pubs smoking, exposed to the vagaries of the British weather. It's not that enticing a prospect – and it seems inevitable that some of them will drift away and spend their leisure time elsewhere.

Then there's competition from the off trade, especially supermarkets. The figures speak for themselves: in 1975 pubs accounted for 90% of beer sales; by 2006 the figure had fallen to 58%. With the unstoppable rise of 'deep discounting' the situation's only going to get worse. The chairman of the All Party Parliamentary Beer Group, John Grogan, Labour MP for Selby, recently described Tesco boss Terry Leahy as 'the godfather of binge drinking' in a debate on the problems of cheap supermarket alcohol. He cited Competition Commission research which showed that, during the 2006 World Cup, Tesco, Sainsbury's, Asda and Morrison's (the 'big four') sold £112.7M worth of beer, lager, wine and spirits below cost. This so-called 'deep discounting', with customers enticed into stores by 'loss leaders', in particular alcohol, is no doubt good news for Tesco shareholders – less good news for the society that has to deal with the consequences of such wanton irresponsibility. Yet the Competition Commission has cleared them of any wrongdoing, concluding in a report published last October that 'below cost selling by national retailers is not part of a predatory strategy aimed at convenience stores and is not having significant unintended effects on smaller stores' – or pubs, presumably.

It's a funny old world. Tesco, founded by Jack Cohen in 1924, now accounts for £1 in every £8 spent in this country. It's expanding all the time, adding scores of 'express' stores to its portfolio to increase its penetration of the 'corner-store' market. Local councils who stand up to its plans discover not only that Tesco will robustly challenge all refusals of planning consent, but that, when cases are referred to a government inspector, permission is usually granted.

Although Tesco boss, Terry Leahy, may not be John Grogan's favourite person, not all Labour MPs share his animadversion. The MP for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath, Gordon Brown, thinks so highly of him that he's invited him to join the Business Council for Britain. This



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<b>Landlord's Choice</b> 4.5%alc Dark, strong and smooth happy bitter	<b>Moel Moel</b> 6.0%alc Wonderfully warming Winter ale
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unelected body meets two or three times a year to advise Mr Brown on how to make Britain a better place to do business (big business that is). The chairman is Mervyn Davies of Standard Chartered Bank, who is also on the board of Tesco. Not much chance, I would have thought, of the council advising him to curb Tesco's trading practises.

At the same time as dealing with deep discounting, pubs are having to charge considerably more for beer. The 1% hike in excise duty widely expected to come in the budget is likely to be a drop in the ocean compared with the knock-on effect of steep rises not only in the cost of malt and hops (due to last year's dreadful summer and the increased use of farmland for environmentally-friendly biofuel crops) but also aluminium (for barrels) and oil (for distribution).

As Paul Hegarty, spokesman for Coors, has pointed out, barley prices have risen between 50 and 100 per cent over the last year. Closer to home, Carl Beeson of Summerskills Brewery in Plymouth also predicts a hefty price rise over the next few months. "The problem is down to a shortage of grain and hops in the UK", he told a Plymouth Herald reporter, "so the cost of buying barley or hops is becoming very expensive. It will hit my trade and the pub trade hard over the next few months – as well as the drinkers themselves." The £4 pint is now a common mantra in the trade, with many confidently predicting it will be standard by the end of the year.

And then there's the economy. This affects not only how much is spent in pubs; it also affects the pubcos that own them. A recent business article in the Observer concluded that: "listed pub owners are no longer the flavour of the month in the city. In the 18 months prior to last summer's credit crunch, pub shares shot up between 25% and 60%, thanks to a strong property market and legislation that allowed companies to turn themselves into tax-efficient property investment trusts. Following the smoking ban and increasingly pessimistic economic forecasts, however, property values have dived, and, with them, share prices. M&B is in the spotlight after taking a massive hit from a failed property venture ... Punch has made a takeover bid, but others are circling ... If Britain moves into a recession, some companies could struggle to stay afloat, paving the way for what analysts call 'mercy killings' by stronger, leaner predators."

Unlike the big breweries that preceded them, pubcos have no interest per se in selling beer. Breweries make beer, pub companies have real estate portfolios, with an obligation to manage their estate in the best interest of their shareholders. In the boom years that now seem to have come to an end, incredible amounts of money were made as deals were struck and pub estates changed hands. This had little or no impact on pubgoers, who were generally unaware that anything had happened. At grass roots level, it was generally the case that nothing did happen. Despite the vast sums made in the city, many pubs had little or nothing spent on them, nor, in many cases, was money invested in improving training for licensees new to the trade – so that pubs clearly on a downward spiral

simply get worse, leaching their customers, until they became unviable, abandoned by all but a handful of diehards, and ripe for conversion into something more lucrative, like a block of flats or an office development.

There is also the long-standing issue of the high rents and inflated beer prices paid to pubcos by licensees. A recent early day motion by Tim Farron, MP for Westmoreland and Lonsdale, and signed by 25 other MPs, has called for an end to the 'exploitation' of licensees by pubcos. Mike Hancock, MP for Portsmouth, told the Morning Advertiser that licensees in the city were "hanging on by their fingertips. High rents make it impossible for them to make a living, but it's clear that the pubcos are not listening. They seem intent on pushing through their demands on rental charges which are simply too high". David Anderson, MP for Blaydon, added that "three pubs I have spent many happy days in are now run down as a direct result of exorbitant rises in either or both beer prices and rent". Don Foster, MP for Bath, pulled no punches when he declared that "this kind of behaviour from certain suppliers and breweries really threatens our vibrant and diverse pubs, which are at the heart of local communities. I have heard too many cases of pubs being forced out of business because of hiked-up rent charges."

Although some of the challenges facing the pub trade are new, they only exacerbate an established trend. The BBPA reckon that major British brewers saw a 78% fall in profits between 2004 and 2006 – before the smoking ban, before a steep rise in the cost of raw materials, before the credit squeeze. Are Britain's pubs – and Britain's breweries – entering free fall? It depends who you talk to. There are – as always – those that are bucking the trend. Certain sections of the market – family food pubs, gastropubs, pubs that successfully attract 18-30 year olds and, of course, outstanding real-ale pubs – are all sectors that seem to be weathering the storm.

Elsewhere, though, it's not a rosy picture. As Rob Hayward of the BBPA points out, the past 20 years have seen beer sales drop from

about two-thirds of an average pub's turnover to less than a third. Ted Tuppen, the chief executive of Enterprise, seems clear about where the axe will fall: "looking ahead, the pubs at risk are those where people do little more than hanging round drinking draught ale. But that's not the same as saying there isn't a market for pubs that specialise in serving quality beers and lagers. The key is to do things well, and for pubs to decide what they do best." The business correspondent of the Observer spells out the priorities in a world of dwindling beer consumption with pubcos' profits pared to the bone: "the chief executives running stock-exchange-listed pub companies today target specific areas of the market: the 18-to-30-year-old crowd, families with children, or affluent top-end gastronomes seeking haute cuisine." To which of course we should add the real ale pubs – heritage and otherwise – where traditional values and traditional ales are upheld and whose reputation extends far beyond their immediate area. But that still leaves thousands of pubs that may not be particularly outstanding but at the same time aren't that bad – pubs that you might not consider it worth making a special trip to visit – unless of course you happen to live just up the road – and it's the only pub within walking distance – in which case that ordinary little boozer suddenly isn't quite so ordinary any more – and it's not just the beer (or the price of it) that matters, but the plain straightforward fact that, if it goes, the last vestiges of community spirit go with it.

Assailed on all sides – by government and government-endorsed supermarkets, by the pubcos, by economic downturn and the rising cost of malt and hops – the pub is under threat as never before. Casualties – on a massive scale – seem, on the face of it, inevitable. That doesn't mean, however, that your local has to close. Fights to save pubs have succeeded before. Now, with the odds stacked ever more firmly against them, they can – and they must – succeed again. Think globally but act locally – your local may be in peril.

Andrew Swift

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# News from Arbor Ales

BREWER Jon Comer, true to form, is producing new ales for forthcoming events.

For the Old Tavern Beer Festival on 23rd and 24th February he prepared a **Blonde** at 4.7% ABV and a strong bitter, weighing in at a stonking 7.1%, named **General Sherman** after the (reputedly) oldest tree in the world.

For the CAMRA Bristol Beer Festival in mid-March he is planning to brew a single hop beer, **Motueka** (4.0%), featuring the New Zealand hop of that name, and the popular occasional, **Snuffy Jack's Old Ale** (5.9%).

St Patrick's Day will be celebrated with an **Oyster Stout** of around 4.6% ABV and **Slumberjack** (6.9%) should be available at the Tucker's Maltings Beer Festival, Newton Abbot in April.

Finally, good news for lovers of easy-drinking low-gravity beers, for Jon has promised to brew a **Mild Ale** for CAMRA's Mild Month in May.

*Henry Davies*

# There has never been a better time to visit your local pub!

## Bristol Community Pubs Campaigning Group says "Now is the time to rediscover your local!"

LOCAL pubs have changed and improved a lot in recent years. **Cleaner air**, better ambience, good quality food at reasonable prices, and a much wider range of drinks than ever before. These include a range of different beers and often cider, not to mention various fruit drinks. You can even pop in for a coffee or tea in many locals now while out shopping. Landlords and landladies also recognise the importance of cleaner toilets and pubs are diversifying in what they offer, both in consumables and services.

CAMRA's Community Pubs Campaigning Group asks, "When did you last visit your local pub?"

○ It may be offering various types of entertainment on different nights, such as quiz nights, karaoke, TV sports, DJs and bands with varying styles of music. Pubs vary so much from each other as a result, so don't judge them all by the style of one. Your local has probably changed in some way during the past year. With the smoking ban now in place, landlords are working even harder to satisfy

their customers.

○ Pubs are the talking shop now! Flats and apartments are more common for housing nowadays, so there are fewer garden fences for neighbours to chat over. Have you heard all the latest gossip in your neighbourhood? Leave the tinnie at home and meet the neighbours!

○ Are you aware of the range of beers available now? You're not limited to the narrow choice of a few years ago. The choice has expanded vastly over the years, with micro-breweries introducing new ones all the time. Flavours from bitters and blonds, to porters and stouts, vary immensely. And within each type of beer, there can be such a very wide, but satisfying, difference. The choice of other drinks is also much more varied.

○ If you belong to a local interest group or club, why not ask your local landlord if you can hold your regular meetings at the pub? Many pubs are happy to reserve a space or a room for groups of people to hold meetings.

*Tim Belston*

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## Bristol Community Pubs Campaigning Group

### A publican's view

IT is hardly an exaggeration to say the community pub is in crisis.

To understand the position we must go back a generation to the Government's Beer Orders of 1989. Laudable in aim, disastrous in practice. The legislation was designed to break the monopolistic control of the 'Big Six' brewers. Bass, Whitbread, Allied, Watneys, Greenalls and Courage had, by dint of 1960s and 70s takeovers, come to dominance. In essence they had to sell off thousands of pubs and allow the ones they kept to sell one 'guest' cask ale. Thus, many pubs would be free to buy whatever beer they wanted, and many more allowed more choice. Small brewers would flourish with new outlets now open to them.

The Government badly underestimated the skill of the brewers with their centuries of experience. The swathes of pubs were not in the main sold to individual entrepreneurs. Instead, huge chunks were off-loaded to dedicated, newly-created pub companies ('pubcos'). Curiously, these pubcos decided on supply contracts with the original brewery owners! The tenants in these pubs lost their guest beer rights as the properties were no longer owned by the brewery. The shock came when the periodic time came for rents to be renegotiated. In the past, tenants were tied to buying beer at high prices from the brewery, but in return paid relatively low rent. However, the new pubcos wanted their profit margin on the rent too, so pubs were stuck with expensive beer and high rents.

As years passed, the pubcos got bigger by merger, until today when the top two, Enterprise and Punch, own far more pubs each

than any of the old brewers did. Quoted companies, they need to show ever-rising earnings via ever-higher rents to their hapless tenants.

If too many tenants come and go, unable to make a living, the pubco can declare the site unviable – but highly valuable once converted to flats.

In recent years the guest beer law was repealed as the Big Six brewers became unrecognizable. Greene King and Marston's have taken full advantage of this and now have huge tied estates nationwide of their own.

The other big brewers found that once their original supply deals expired their offspring pubcos proved doughty negotiators. They have abandoned tricky real ale in favour of mass-produced smooth beers and lagers, with large volumes sold through the increasingly popular supermarkets.

Twenty years ago a case of premium lager cost well over £20 in the supermarket. Now it can be found on offer as loss-leaders for half that price. Meanwhile the wholesale price to pubs, and therefore the pub customer, has more than doubled. Many people 'pre-load' with cheap booze at home before going out, or don't go out at all. Undoubtedly a significant proportion of drinkers have been discouraged by the smoking ban. Few publicans have seen enough of an increase in food or new customers to counteract this.

Large, managed pub operators have created high street 'superpubs' in an effort to compete. Nearby community pubs often cannot even buy in for the same prices as these superpubs sell for!

Thus we get the disorder and binge-

drinking that has unfairly tarnished the whole industry. '24-hour' drinking is a tabloid myth. Very few community pubs open much later than they ever used to.

Meanwhile, red tape strangles small businesses, and of the 60,000 pubs in the country 50,000 are run by self-employed traders, often families. The pub is their home as well as their seven-day, 80-hours-a-week livelihood. A small but illustrative example of extra legislative burden is the botched licensing reform. What used to cost a pub £30 every two years (licensing renewal) is £180 every year and rising.

This year, brewers wholesale price increases are coming in at four to six percent as the sharply higher costs of ingredients and fuel feed through.

A pub spends many times more than a house on electric, water, gas and rates so the current rises there will hit hard.

All at a time when drinking in pubs has fallen sharply. The latest figures from the pub trade body showed a near ten per cent decrease in November compared to a year earlier to the lowest level since the Depression of the 1930s. Small wonder 56 pubs a month shut their doors for good.

There is a glimmer of hope, however. The only part of the pub trade that is in growth is the small brewery, real ale market. Those pubs that are able to offer interesting beers, well kept and served frequently, buck the trend. A huge amount of the credit goes to consumer organisations like CAMRA that have so raised the profile of craft brewers. Even some of the giant pubcos allow local brewers to deliver direct to nearby pubs (albeit at very low prices to the brewer and very high prices to the pub!). Better for the customer, better for the environment too. Not a panacea, but hope indeed.

*Glen Dawkins*

## Proposed new plaque for Seven Stars

LOCAL people are getting together to raise funds for a new plaque for one of the most important pubs in the country: the Seven Stars, St Thomas Lane, Bristol (next to the Fleece).

The pub is so important because it was here in 1787 that the great anti-slavery campaigner Thomas Clarkson gathered some of his most crucial evidence.

With the help of the then landlord, Thompson, he was able to change public opinion. Firstly, regarding the plight of British sailors involved in the trans-Atlantic slave trade, and then the appalling treatment of Africans.

The Bristol Radical History Group is behind efforts to make the plaque a reality, and local artist Mike Baker (of Living Easton plaques fame) has been commissioned to do the work.

If you would like to find out more, please log on their website at [www.brh.org.uk](http://www.brh.org.uk).

*Mark Steeds*

### The Seven Stars (from a history card, found in the pub)

IT was an inn in the latter half of the Seventeenth Century, for in the Reign of Charles the Second, Richard Pope, Linen Draper, one of the sons of William Pope, merchant, granted to the feoffees of Saint Thomas a yearly rent of 30/-d. out of the tenement called "The Starrs then in the possession of Michael Jaine, victualler, in accordance with his father's will."

It is interesting from its connection with the slave trade. On May 22<sup>nd</sup> 1787, the association for the abolition of the slave trade was founded and immediately afterwards Thomas Clarkson, one of the founders, came to Bristol. He was determined to enquire into the truth of the report that seamen had "an aversion to enter and were inveigled, if not forced, into this hateful employment." He was introduced to John Harford and Matthew Wright and other Quakers. He also found supporters in Doctor Camplin and Dean Tucker.

By then he was advised to make the acquaintance of Thompson, landlord of the Seven Stars. He was, Clarkson says, a very intelligent man who was accustomed to receive sailors when discharged at the end of their voyages, to board them and find them berths on other ships. He avoided all connection with the slave trade, declaring that the credit of his house would be ruined if he was

known to send those who put themselves under his care, into it.

With Thompson as a guide, Clarkson made nineteen visits to various public houses in Marsh Street which were frequented by masters of slavers to pick up hands. They used to set out about twelve midnight, and usually finished between two and three a.m. From his own observations and from information given him by Thompson, Clarkson was assured that his suspicions were correct, and that crews were obtained by lies and fraud.

Towards the end of his visit he was asked by Thompson to assist a man named Sheriff who had shipped on a slaver as mate. He had been compelled to sign Articles of Agreement without reading them. At great personal risk with Truman Harford, Clarkson boarded the vessel and took Sheriff off. In the evening he called on the captain and left his name as that of the man who had taken away his mate, but he heard nothing more of it.

*The current landlord of the Seven Stars, Stephen Niven, believes the source of the above may be from St Thomas' church records, opposite from the pub. We would like to find out more about landlord Thompson, so if any readers can help, please let us know.*

# 2007 - a year of increased choice but at a price

Vince Murray looks back at 2007 in terms of the local pub and brewery scene

IN my previous two annual reviews for *Pints West* I remember pointing to the enormous amount of change that was occurring within the local real ale scene, with pubs opening and closing and licensees changing constantly. My impressions of 2007 were a little different – whilst there was still a lot of change going on, it does seem to have slowed down somewhat. Instead I have noticed two main themes – a massive increase in the availability of independently brewed real ales, and a significant increase in the price of drinking them in a pub.

Think back a few years and remember how many pubs, if they served real ale at all, offered Courage Best and / or Bass only? It says a lot about how things have changed that these two beers, both owned by large corporations and becoming pale shadows of their former selves, have now become a much rarer sight on bar tops. Instead you are much more likely to see beers from the likes of Butcombe, Bath Ales, Sharp's or St Austell breweries. This has surely got to indicate a change for the better. Much credit is due to SIBA (the Society of Independent Brewers) for their innovative direct delivery scheme. However, I feel that there are also signs that more of the massive pub owning companies (pubcos) are allowing greater freedom of choice to their managers and leaseholders. Whilst Greene King and Wolverhampton & Dudley (Marston's) still tend to sell mainly their own beers (including those from breweries that they have bought up and usually closed down), other pubcos are allowing a bigger variety of beers in. I do, however, suspect that this is at some cost to the licensees in terms of rent increases, as prices at the bar seem to have risen sharply at the same time. The £2.85 pint is becoming common and the £3 pint is getting close. Indeed several pubs have long since been charging over £3 – take the Port Of Call and the Albion in Clifton, amongst others! With prices like that, ensuring that the beer served is in top-condition and a full measure has never been more important. Thankfully, many pubs seem up to the challenge.

On the local brewery scene, things look healthy. We gained one new brewery in 2007 with the opening of **Arbor Ales**, based at the **Old Tavern** on Blackberry Hill, Stapleton. This is the brainchild of Paul and John Comer and the pub normally offers one or two of the house beers plus guest ales. Good food, live entertainment and occasional beer festivals also feature. Another new venture, the **Great Western Brewery** at Hambrook, is in production and the beers should be out by the time that you read this – initially at the **Rising Sun** at Frampton Cotterell, owned by the

same family and still a great pub in its own right.

Of the more established breweries, **Cheddar Ales** are thriving with their *Potholer* in particular popping up on a lot of bars. A new seasonal *Porter* was also tried and enjoyed recently. **Cotswold Spring** also seem to be gaining market share and acclaim for their beers. **RCH** beers continue to gain rave reviews but be frustratingly elusive locally. **Bath Ales** increased their estate with the purchase of the **Live and Let Live** in Frampton Cotterell and rumours abound of a new pub in central Bristol. **Zerodegrees**, although their colder carbonated beers are not appreciated by all ale drinkers, continue to produce high quality continental-style beers for their brewpub. **Keynsham**, after a short break from brewing, are busy preparing their lovely *Stockwood Stout* for release soon. **Wickwar** brewery have just started 2008 by winning Champion Winter Beer of Britain with their *Station Porter* – try it at the **White Lion** on the centre. **Newman's** brewery have been relocating to South Wales.

Two of our local brewers were responsible for two of the most impressive new additions to the local beer scene in 2007. **Bristol Beer Factory** took over the old "Shoots" restaurant on a moored boat in Hotwells and converted it into the **Grain Barge** selling the full range of their beers and with great views of the SS Great Britain. **Butcombe Brewery**, having added three more pubs from outside our area to its burgeoning estate, then pulled off a real triumph by opening the **Colston Yard** on the site of the old Smiles Brewery and Brewery Tap, which had looked to be gone forever. If you haven't been in there and didn't know where you were, you would be very hard pressed to recognise it, so dramatic is the change.

It has been a good year for pubs "coming back from the dead" with several more reopening. Two that spring to mind are the **Albert** in Bedminster and the **Spotted Cow** in Fishponds. That said, pubs are still closing at a pace. The Old Market area alone has at least four pubs currently closed – the (Gin) **Palace**, **Printers Devil**, **Seven Ways** and **Punchbowl**. Other pubs have become suddenly more "real ale friendly" with notable examples including the **Assembly** in Bedminster, the **Bank** off Broad Street, the **Robin Hood** on St. Michael's Hill and the **Thunderbolt** (formerly the Turnpike) on the A4 near Temple Meads. There are many others. The **Seven Stars** in Thomas Lane deserves a special mention for serving six or seven beers (mainly

Bath Ales and Sharp's) and its very keen pricing – all beers £2 between 2.30 and 6.30pm and all Sharp's beers £1.50 on Wednesdays. That price even undercuts Wetherspoon! Speaking of them – the **Robert Fitzharding** in Bedminster and **Berkeley** on Park Street, Clifton have been picking up good reviews for their beer lately. With the excellent **Commercial Rooms** becoming the first JDW pub to make the Good Beer Guide around here for some years, it has been a much improved year for them. A special mention too for the **Naval Volunteer** in King Street, now free of tie and often featuring beers from the likes of Cotleigh and Moor in Somerset.

There were some notable new entries when the 2008 Good Beer Guide was published in September. These included the **Windmill**, Windmill Hill (Bristol Beer Factory beers), the **Duke Of York** in St Werburghs, the **Pied Horse** in St George, the **Eldon House** in Clifton, the **Cross Hands** in Fishponds and the **Red Lion** in Staple Hill. **Dawkins Taverns** opened their third pub – the **Victoria** in Southleigh Road – and it immediately joined the other two in the guide. As they are about to open their fourth – the **Portcullis** in Clifton – we wonder if they can do it again? Further afield, new entries included the **Fox** at Easter Compton, the **Poacher** in Portishead and the **New Inn**, Blagdon. Three old favourites also made welcome returns to the guide – namely the **Ring O'Bells**, Hinton Blewitt, the **Black Horse**, Clapton in Gordano, and the **Princes Motto**, Barrow Gurney. Remarkably, the tiny village of Cross near Axbridge found both its pubs in having had none in recent memory! The **New Inn** and **White Hart** were voted in but I recently discovered that the latter is for sale and the landlord is leaving.

A few of our better licensees sadly left the area, at least for now anyway – Les and Carol at the **White Lion** on the Centre, Ross and Karen at the **Cornubia**, and Phil at the **Cross Hands**, Fishponds are some that spring to mind. Happily all three pubs are still doing well. On the flip side, some of the pubs that changed hands in 2006 are now back thriving and pushing for inclusion in the 2009 Guide – some that spring to mind are the **Adam and Eve** in Hotwells, the **Orchard** in Hanover Place and the **Annexe** in Horfield. We are only allowed to enter 39 pubs in Gloucestershire and Bristol, and 24 in our part of Somerset, into the Guide, so when I don my other hat to chair the selection meeting in March I am expecting problems for the attendees deciding who to leave out – still it's not a bad problem to have!

Vince Murray



# News from the Bristol Beer Factory

JUST six months after opening, the Grain Barge (their 'pub on a boat') has won the Venue magazine 'Top Banana' award for Best Bar in Bristol. The Bristol Beer Factory have said that this came as a great surprise and shows that all the effort put in by the team on the Barge has been worth while.

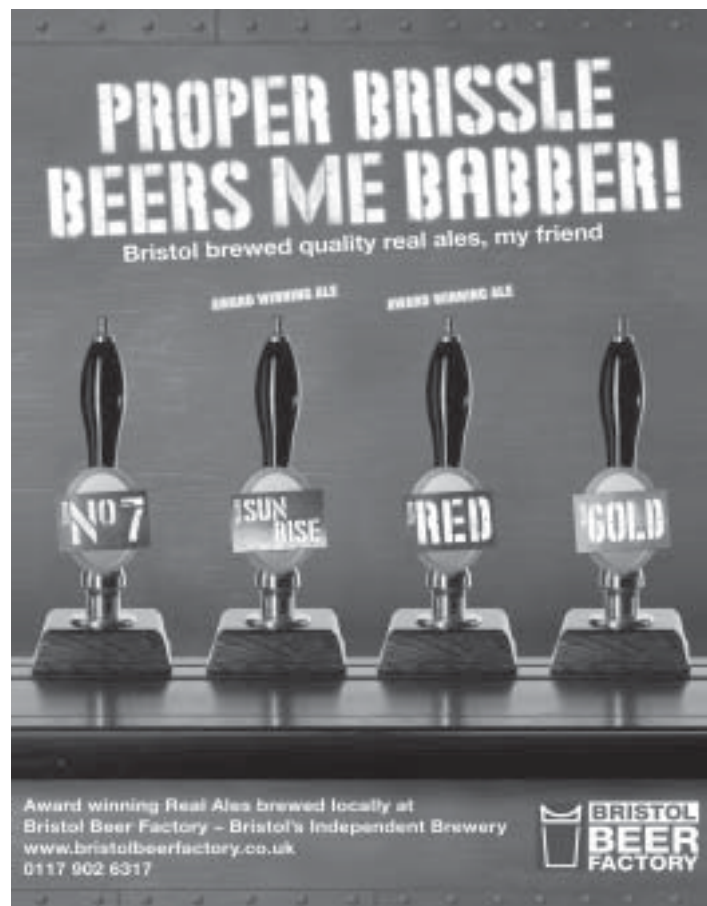
They are also boasting about their new chef on the Barge – Vivi, who is apparently bringing some real style to their offerings. She used to be head chef at Boconova many moons ago and since then has run an award-winning restaurant in China.

There are special offers at the Grain Barge on Tuesdays (three tapas dishes plus a pint for £6) and Wednesdays (a Pieminster pie plus pint for £6).

The BBF will be brewing their Bristol IPA (5.5%) for the Bristol Beer Festival this year, plus of course their double champion Milk Stout. Bristol IPA is brewed just how IPAs were intended, strong and very hoppy. Both the high alcohol and high hop content provide a very unfriendly environment for growth of bacteria which made them ideal for long voyages to far away lands such as India – hence the name India Pale Ale.

The Bristol Beer Factory will be having a face-lift on various fronts in the forthcoming months. They are looking to launch a new website which will provide more information and an on-line shop. This is under construction at the moment, but keep an eye on [www.bristolbeerfactory.co.uk](http://www.bristolbeerfactory.co.uk) to see when it goes live. Currently the brewery is tucked away and can prove a little difficult to find, so they are now hoping to gain a presence on the North Street side of the brewery so more people will know where they are.

*Richard Brooks*



# Local beer sales on the up

BEER from local breweries is bucking the trend of falling volumes with strong sales growth, according to a report by the Society of Independent Brewers (SIBA).

In 2007 locally brewed beers saw an average volume growth of 10.7 per cent year-on-year, despite being sold in just four in ten pubs. This compared with a decline in overall beer sales during the same period of 6 per cent.

SIBA figures show that locally brewed beers have outperformed total beer volumes since 2004, which marks the point total beer volumes in the on-trade entered decline.

The report claims that the introduction of cask ales can increase total beer sales by as much as 20 per cent when compared with pubs that don't stock local beers.

SIBA also found that more than a quarter of pubs (29 per cent) that do stock local brews price them at an average 6 per cent to 7 per cent premium over their usual cask ale.

"Limited availability has traditionally been the biggest threat to the continued progress of local beer," the report states.

"The high concentration of ownership of the UK on-trade has long meant that market access is our members' biggest issue. Progress is being made as seen but availability of local beer in the on-trade is restricted."

In recent months the decline in overall beer sales appears to have increased markedly with the British Beer & Pub Association reporting a 9.7 per cent year-on-year decline in November on the back of a 7.7 per cent fall in October 2007 and an 8.2 per cent drop in September 2007.

*Christopher Walton*

*Taken from [www.siba.co.uk](http://www.siba.co.uk)*



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# Watering Holes in the Desert

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## A Round with Robin

WHAT a winter eh? Some wonderful dark beers were around at beer festivals from Bradford on Avon to Exeter – but not just dark beers, some quality old ales, spiced ales and even some uncommonly good bitter beers too.

This round starts with the *North Petherton Community Centre's first beer festival* held on one day only – 8<sup>th</sup> December 2007. Although details were on the web and it was well publicised in the Somerset CAMRA branch, there was not much other publicity. With it being an appallingly wet day, it was hardly surprising that it got off to a low attendance, which was a pity as it had a lot going for it: plenty of tables, a well stocked kitchen and food at reasonable prices, and 19 beers on stillage including the first public outing for the Moor JJJ IPA weighing in at 9% ABV. The usual suspects from the Weston sub-branch arrived by bus, and I tried a few favourites (Taunton Tinsel, 4.5%; Thornbridge Jaipur IPA, 5.9%; Abbey Ales Twelfth Night, 5%; and Abbeydale Black Mass, 6.6%) and as well as the JJJ a few new ones. These were: from North Curry brewery, Withy Man, 4.6%; from Olde Swan (Ma Pardoe's), Bumble Hole, 5.2%; and my favourite of the festival, the Wold Top Mars Magic, 4.6%.

Again the "usual suspects" went to the Bath *Royal Oak Organic Beer Festival* on December 11<sup>th</sup>. With a choice of 37 beers over the festival it was predictable that not all would be on at the same time. But from the eleven beer engines and eight casks I decided to concentrate on just one brewer at a time. This being the case, my chosen first brewer was Marble. Now I'd never had any of these before and so soon my taste buds were reeling from the assault on them from Ginger Marble (4.5%), Chocolate Marble (5.5%) and Marble JP Best (4.3%). I then moved on to two Spectrum ales I'd not tried before and was equally pleased with Spectrum Dark Fantastic (3.8%) and Captain Scarlet (4.5%). With a "mouthwash" of Butts Bit O' Posh (4.2%) to cleanse the palette, I finished the session with

one not from the festival list but the "must try" Downton's Chocolate Orange at 5.8%.

A few evenings later the Chalice Morris Men were invited to dance at Wedmore for their *Wedmore by Lanternlight*, a similar idea to *Minehead by Candlelight*. When we got to the George Inn we were disappointed to find it had completely run out of all its four real ales. So being particular about what I drink, I took my tankard down to the Swan, but before I got there I was shown a most welcome sight. The Glastonbury Ales brewery had a stall on the High Street and was offering free samples; they also had some bottles and so I purchased their autumn special dark ale, Black As Yer 'At (4.3%). They also had samples of their new winter special, Holy Thorn (4.2%), but regrettably this was not yet available in bottles. Whilst there I picked up a copy of the free paper the *Mendip Messenger* and was amused by an article in it on the *Plough Inn* at Wrington, where you may remember that they had a stunningly good beer festival last year. Anyway, the correspondent not only wrote these words that follow, but also his editor put them in large bold type by the photograph accompanying the *Food for Thought* article: "Now the Plough is owned by Young's, the Wandsworth brewery, famed for its London Pride & Special bitters, so I was able to resample this excellent beer for the first time in many years". Sorry Mike, wrong on two accounts!

The annual Weston crawl for Christmas in seasonal ales went ahead as planned and we had a very good turn out. Disappointingly a few pubs which normally have had seasonal ales in the past did not on this occasion. However, those that had made the effort, the *Regency*, the *White Hart*, the *Dragon*, and *Off The Rails*, were rewarded by CAMRA members staying for a beer or two.

This year I spent Christmas Day in Weston for a change, and after visiting the *Regency* for a couple of pints, the remainder of the day was at

the *White Hart* in Palmer Row, where they have had a succession of splendid beers from the better breweries of Elgoods, Church End, Hidden and others in the last few months. They even had a repeat from last year of the easy drinking Archers Marley's Ghost (7.2%) with the strength not noticeable until after the beer had been consumed! This is not to say that the only current Good Beer Guide-listed pub in Weston, *Off The Rails*, was not far behind in its choice of real ales this quarter; Colin has got us beers from Yeovil, Hidden, Cottage, Cheddar and most notably the Springhead Puritans Porter (6%). He has also had a few firkins of RCH Santa Fe which have gone down well with CAMRA customers.

On the 5<sup>th</sup> January the usual suspects had a Bath pub crawl by bus with the express intention of trying a few pubs which we'd not been to for aeons. Having to break our journey at Bristol centre we felt obliged to pop into the *White Lion* where I had a quick half of the excellent Wickwar Station Porter (6.1%), before proceeding to Bath on the X39.

Making our way across Trinity Square we looked into the Trinity which I had thought was a Wadworth House, but all they had there was Bombardier and Old Speckled Hen, so we went on a bit and into the *Garrick Head* which is attached to the Theatre Royal. With a choice of four beers I was torn between Palmer and Stonehenge brews, but opted for the Danish Dynamite (5%), which was very pleasant. Friendly bar staff, an interesting menu, and a real fire completed the convivial atmosphere which included well behaved children (reading books!).

Moving on from there we couldn't seem to pass the *Raven* without going in for a game of jenga and some really good ales – we were spoilt for choice. I had halves of Abbey Ales Twelfth Night (5%) as it was indeed twelfth night, and the brilliant (both in name and flavour) Stark Raven Christmas (6%) ale that is brewed for them by the Blindmans brewery. Following a chance conversation with another group in there, we walked the short distance to the *Salamander* where the guest ale was Okells St Nicks (4.2%) which was well worth the diversion. We were still heading for "new pubs" but by then our auto pilot led us to the *Old Green Tree* where I partook of a half pint of RCH Pitchfork (4.3%) as my brain needed a change from seasonal ales. Just around the corner we found the *Coeur de Lion*, an old favourite, with the guest ale Hidden Treasure (4.8%) worth its weight in gold. On our way back to catch the bus we popped into the *Hobgoblin*, where I had not been for probably twenty years, so there was some catching up to do there. The half of Wychwood Hobgoblin (5%) was added to by a half of Brakspear Oxford Gold (4%), but the resulting mix was truly blood-curdling which fitted the décor! Unfortunately we just missed a bus so to pass the time popped into the *Kings of*

How come every time Pints West comes out we have to do this crawl and I have to think of something to say to you?





Wessex for an excellent pint of Bath Ales Festivity (5%), and you won't get it anywhere cheaper than there in Bath.

I must briefly make mention of the winter ales festival at the *Robert Fitzharding* in Bedminster, which I visited on two occasions, the Monday on my own and on the following Saturday when I met up with the "usual suspects" there. All the beers were top quality and my favourite was the West Berkshire Spiced Porter (4.5%). On the Monday I followed this with a visit to the *Coronation* in Southville where I delighted in the Downton Chimera Dark Delight (5.5%) before proceeding to the old city pubs the *Seven Stars*, the *Crown* at St Nicholas Market, and the *Commercial Rooms*.

Having been to the *Exeter Festival of Winter Ales* last January at the Coaver Club, the usual suspects (aka Graham Pillar, Graham Teague, Mike Coleman and I) with the addition of Laurie Jackson, visited this year's festival by train, which was held at the University Exhibition Hall, a much easier venue to get to. We had picked another awful day for rain, and all our best laid plans for travel were much disjointed. The good news was that the festival went very well, with good tasting notes for the 61 beers, six ciders and a perry, and good seating arrangements. The Editor hasn't room for me to put in all the beers we tried, but suffice to say I tried 11 beers I'd not had before, one I had, and there were still over 20 ales I hadn't tried before. The most amazing beer was the North Cotswold Arctic Global Warmer, a very dark ale – a cross between barley wine and an old stout, not dissimilar to Harviestown's Old Engine Oil, except this is a 15% beer (no, not a misprint, 15%). It was only sold by the third of a pint (at £2) but was the equal of any Belgian dark beer. It was apt that my own favourite of the festival was a local beer, the Exe Valley Winter Glow (6%), subtly mixing flavours of burnt malt and fudge with a long chocolate and spicy finish.

On the 16<sup>th</sup> January the sub-branch contributed to BADRAG Dark Ale Day with the *Dragon Inn* having RCH Old Slug Porter (4.5%), *Off The Rails* with Cheddar Totty Pot (4.5%) and the *White Hart* favourite Church End Stout Coffin (4.6%).

The *Bradford on Avon Rugby Club Winter Beer* weekend had somehow evaded the infamous four, as it is not the easiest place to get to from Weston-super-Mare. However, with a bit of work on the web for bus times and location of the clubhouse at Winsley (just north of the bypass) we visited there on 19<sup>th</sup> January. We had to make an early start, so Graham P missed his breakfast in Weston, but by chance we had a 45-minute interval between buses in Bath so we had breakfast at the *Kings of Wessex*, not far from the temporary bus station (the old one is being knocked down). Mike and I were delighted to find the Dark Star Hophead (3.8%) was on sale there, so he had a half with coffee and I had a pint with breakfast (my second breakfast – I think I may becoming a hobbit!). We found the clubhouse, in the rain as usual, without problems (the goal posts are a bit of a giveaway from a distance) and all was well with a table reserved, and a good list of 12 local brews and two from Leicestershire, plus two ciders and two perries. Half of these were new to me, so my education is much improved this winter. The club house always has at least two real ales on and judging by their collection of pump clips, Winsley must be a good place to live. That day they had Brewster's Rutterkin (4.6%) on the beer engine and that vied with the Moles Sunrise Celebration (4.3%) or the Stroud Tom Long (3.8%) for the tastiest bitter of the day. Dark ales were many too: I preferred the Box Steam Dark & Hand-some (5%) to the Matthews Hayeswood XA (5.3%), but none of us doubted the extra quality you get from serving Wessex Russian Stoa (9%) straight from the barrel. Cheers!

Robin E Wild

## Weston Whispers

○ Steve Beasley and Rose Cunningham who run the Butcombe-owned **Woolpack** in St Georges won a crystal decanter for getting to the last six in the National Licensee of the Year competition.

○ The **Cross Tree Store**, Walton-in-Gordano stocks a wide range of bottled beers from micro-breweries.

○ **Puxton Park farm shop** has an excellent range of bottled beers, including practically every one produced by a brewery in the Bristol and Somerset area, including rarely seen items such as Bristol Beer Factory's great Milk Stout.

Tim Nickolls



## The Royal Artillery

Further to the article in the last edition of Pints West on the Royal Artillery at West Huntspill in Somerset, which is readily accessible via public transport, news reaches us that this excellent freehouse has been by Somerset CAMRA members as runner-up in the judging for their Pub of the Year award for 2008. This accolade follows hot on the heels of the pub receiving new entry status in the latest edition of CAMRA's Good Beer Guide.

A new beer that has recently featured twice at the Royal Artillery is JJJ IPA from the Moor Beer Company at Ashcott in Somerset. This is a 9% abv "triple" IPA created by the co-owner and brewer, Justin Hawke, who hails from California in the US and is a big fan of aggressively flavoured beers.

This was meant to be a one-off brew, but it turned out so well that they have decided to add it to their varied range of regular beers. Another good reason to drink "Moor" beer!

Note that Somerset CAMRA's Pub of the Year for 2008 is the Halfway House at Pitney, which was the national winner back in 1996.

Dave Graham

## BREWDOKU

The winner of the brewdoku competition in Pints West 76 was JE Green from St Albans, who won a copy of the new book *Somerset Pubs* by Andrew Swift and Kirsten Elliott.




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# The Painter and the Publican - *part 5*

LOTS of people wonder what makes a good pub and my reply is usually “people make places”, and it’s very true of pubs; from the landlord to the local character, every body contributes to make a place memorable. One such person who made a good pub was John Stone who ran the Old Duke in Bristol. A former Royal Marines bandsman, his regular instrument was the euphonium, but he was also a mean trumpeter. He took over the Old Duke in King Street in 1978 and set about making it one of the most famous jazz pubs in the world.



The pub had formally been the Duke of Wellington but ‘morphed’, firstly becoming the Duke Ellington (after the famous jazz pianist, bandleader and composer) and then the Old Duke, still paying homage to the “King of Keys”. The pub already had a reputation as once being a place for jazz, but with John’s coming it went stellar, showcasing regular local talent and complementing them with stars from all over the world. My dad, George Steeds, remembers the pub’s heyday:

“A typical week would feature Roger Bennett and his Blue Notes (Monday), Alice’s Wonderland Jazz Band (Tuesday), The Severn Jazzmen (Wednesday), Tulane (Thursday), then the Avon Cities Jazz Band (Friday). At weekends you’d have the great Pete Martin and his Bath City Jazz Band topped up with ‘imported’ bands such as Harry Golding and his Pieces of Eight.

“If Kenny Ball or Acker Bilk were playing locally they would ‘look in’, and most people in the jazz world dreamed of playing on the stage of the Old Duke. One memorable night the jazz section of a United States Army Band, after appearing at the Colston Hall, decided to pop into the Duke and play.

“The pub was packed to the gunnels with punters and players, and with so many instrumentalists around they had to take it in turns to get on stage, curing the access problem by going outside and coming in through the window! All the while a bemused lady soldier pianist watched over proceedings whilst tickling the ivories.”

I used to regularly accompany dad on his sojourn to jazz heaven, and marvelled at John’s sense of theatre. My favourite moment was always on a Monday night when at closing time, John would challenge the Blue Notes to first accompany him on some obscure piece of music, and then try to hit (and sustain) a higher note than Roger Bennett could on his soprano sax.

There was always a ritual prior to this display: first one of John’s minions would parade around the bar with a placard stating ‘last orders, please’; a few minutes later the placard would be reversed and with the legend ‘sup up and sod off’ paraded around again. Next he would call for his sheet music and stand, glare at the music (whilst pumping the valves

on his trumpet), then attack the number whilst an assistant popped his gold lamé bowler hat onto his head. Pure magic!

The place where most of the jazzers gathered was called the ‘Bog End’ and to this day you’ll still find lovely people there like Brian, Jean and Joe, with the odd musician thrown in for good measure. Dave Hibberd used to love sitting high at the back smoking his roll-ups, reluctantly getting down to join the band on stage and do a brilliant rendition of ‘Mac the Knife’. He was a great drummer as well. You could also rely on the Bog End to provide some community ‘singing’, with the crowd joining in on certain marching numbers with perfectly timed “oi, oi, oi’s” – the crowd were usually wound up to do this by John himself.

Mr Stone ran the pub with a rod of iron, and anyone who didn’t like it was politely shown the door. He once had new black and white chequered linoleum put down and the newness of it alarmed him. On its first night John merrily went round at the end of the evening, throwing ashtray contents onto it. He knew what a bastion for jazz his pub had become, and when he commissioned new frosted glass for the windows, he wanted the term ‘world renowned’ emblazoned for ever – it was only after the windows had been put in that he realised he’d spelt ‘renowned’ wrong!

The pub also produced a lot of new talent, and one such star was that fantastic jazz singer, Hannah Wedlock, who debuted in the pub at the tender age of sixteen, singing her mum’s favourite song ‘Summertime’ – accompanied by the Blue Notes. It was a sad night in 1995 when John decided to take the opportunity to retire when Scottish & Newcastle became the new pub owners. All is not lost for the Duke however, as the subsequent landlords have maintained an excellent reputation for the acts put on.

If you would like to find out more about Bristol’s jazz heyday, try and get a copy of Dave Hibberd’s excellent book compilation “Recollections of Jazz in Bristol – My Kind of Town” published by Fiducia Press in 2000. In his introduction to the book, Acker Bilk says “... Venues included the Crown and Dove, the Foundry Inn and the Ship on Redcliffe Hill, all of which have since been flattened and built on at least once.” So you can see this is not a modern phenomenon.



Adding to our woes on the perilous state of local pubs is the plight of the Queen’s Head in Willsbridge (closed at the time of writing), another rare National Inventory gem. Ian Cryer has fond memories of this pub in its heyday: “When my wife and I moved to Willsbridge twenty years ago the Queen’s Head naturally became our local. The pub had been run by Gwen Tucker for nearly forty years and she was assisted by her nephew Paul who lived in the pub with Gwen. In many





**The Queen's Head, Willsbridge** (photo by Duncan Shine)

ways it was more like a private club than a public house and to be accepted by Gwen as a regular felt like a great honour – everyone had their own seats and Wendy and I, as recent members, would perch in the corner of the bar by the window. The closer to the bar one progressed the higher one's social standing!

"There was never any trouble and strangers would be monitored with suspicion. I remember Paul quietly asking me to keep an eye on a couple who were not known, at Gwen's request. Having a late drink with Gwen was the highest honour that could be bestowed on a regular; I was turned down for that honour one evening on the grounds that Wendy and I were not regulars as we didn't come in every Saturday night despite coming in most other nights!

"Paul's pleasure was a Monday lunch-time trip into Bath to the Star, much frowned upon by Gwen as Paul would return in an unfit condition for further service. Despite being on the main road, trade was never excessive despite the volume of cars passing outside, the "passing trade" according to Gwen's late husband. But running the pub was a way of life rather than a make-or-break commercial enterprise and I think it's a great sadness that a gentle culture like this has little chance of survival nowadays, even though today's politicians continually spout off their buzz words about tolerance, inclusiveness and community. This was true community, a delicate wild flower, not today's fit-all GM crop."

As you can see, both Ian and I are passionate about pubs, real ale and the traditions that are associated with this way of life. I hope you've enjoyed this little series on local pub culture and our efforts to record it.

*Mark Steeds (Publican)*

(Ian Cryer's web site: [www.iancryer.com](http://www.iancryer.com))

## Butcombe Brewery Arthritis Research Campaign - Mendip Walk

TWO of Butcombe's pubs, the Swan at Rowberrow and the Ring of Bells at Compton Martin, will soon feature as the start and finish points of an Arthritis Research Campaign charity Mendip Walk. This will take place on Good Friday, 21<sup>st</sup> March and will involve an eight-and-three-quarter-mile outing across the Mendips, taking in contrasting landscapes, an Iron Age fort, a nature reserve and the old lead flues used in the resmelting industry at Charterhouse.

Butcombe are sponsoring this event with walkers enjoying a glass of mulled wine to send them on their way and a well earned supper at the completion of their labours. The walk will start at noon from the Swan with walkers meeting from 11 am. Return transport will be provided after supper at the Ring of Bells. Sue Gearing, who was involved last year in producing a booklet called "The Butcombe Trail", will lead the walk. Further details and registration forms can be obtained from Suzie Ladbroke – tel. 01934 713906, email [s.ladbroke@arc.org.uk](mailto:s.ladbroke@arc.org.uk).

*Margaret Evett*

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# Mild Month Activities

MAY is National Mild Month and your local CAMRA branches are all encouraging pubs and clubs to stock mild ales (milds) through the month. We are also organising all-day trails every Saturday during May, which you are welcome to join. Of course you could do them on your own if you wish at any time during the month. The local Mild Month campaign is being coordinated by BADRAG, the Bristol and District Rare Ales Group.

Milds are generally (but not exclusively) dark in colour, and not very bitter. They could be under threat of extinction if drinkers don't keep asking for them. However, milds have actually been growing in popularity of late, perhaps partly as a result of campaigns like CAMRA's. Of over 2,000 beers listed in a recent CAMRA Good Beer Guide, there were 171 cask-conditioned milds (and the similar Scottish 60/- ales) in regular production – an increase of 11 per cent over the previous year – plus another 24 (up 20 per cent) that are produced seasonally. A lot of mild is brewed by regional brewers, some by national ones, and some by much smaller micro-brewers. Also there are 125 stouts, porters, old ales, light bitters or milds now available in the form of "Real Ale in a Bottle" (RAIB), an increase of 7 per cent in a year.

Drinkers are encouraged to make May

Mild Month every year. This is supported by activities organised by CAMRA branches, including tastings and trails around pubs selling milds. Brewers and pub chains also lend support. Posters and leaflets to promote mild are available from CAMRA HQ (email [camra@camra.org.uk](mailto:camra@camra.org.uk)) or locally – you can email [BADRAG@camrabristol.org.uk](mailto:BADRAG@camrabristol.org.uk).

Local Mild Month events at the time of going to press – and subject to confirmation on the web at [www.camrabristol.org.uk](http://www.camrabristol.org.uk) – are shown below.

**Thursday 1st May** starts the month with a tutored tasting at the **Robert Fitzharding** in Bedminster at 8pm. Run by members of the tasting panel, there will be several milds to taste, followed by a mild crawl to the Albert and Assembly.

During the first bank holiday weekend, on **Saturday 3rd May**, a Bristol Harbourside & Centre mild ales trail led by Henry Davies will probably follow a route taking in the **Orchard, Cottage, Nova Scotia, Adam & Eve, Grain Barge, Bag O'Nails, White Lion, Bank, Commercial Rooms, Famous Royal Navy Volunteer, Old Fish Market and Cornubia.**

All will be welcome to join BADRAG for a gathering on **Thursday 8th May** at the **Ship** in Bristol's Lower Park Row. Theakston's Mild and Old Peculier are on draught there throughout the year.

On the **Saturday 10th May** BADRAG is planning a mild trail through South Gloucestershire and North East Bristol by mini-bus, coach or bus. If you are interested in joining us please email your full contact details to [BADRAG@camrabristol.org.uk](mailto:BADRAG@camrabristol.org.uk) or telephone the trail leader Laurie Gibney on 01275 798479.

Please book early to enable a decision to be made about hiring a mini-bus or coach, otherwise we will travel by public service buses. The pubs we plan to visit are the **New Inn** at Mayhill, **Rising Sun**

at Frampton Cottrell, **Red Lion** and **Staple Hill Oak** at Staple Hill, **Cross Hands** at Fishponds, **Old Tavern** at Stapleton, and the **Miners Arms** and **Duke of York** at St Werburghs.

You may fancy a mild seaside saunter in Weston-super-Mare on **Saturday 17th May**. If you make up a group of three or four and travel by train from Bristol to Weston, ask for "Groupsave" tickets and the third and fourth members of the group travel free. Graham Teague is the mild trail leader and the pubs he is planning to visit may include the **Major from Glengarry, Raglan, Cabot Bars, Royal Hotel, White Hart, Dragon** and **Off The Rails**.

Back in Bristol, the second bank holiday weekend will see Henry Davies leading a Clifton and Kingsdown mild ales trail on **Saturday 24th May**. Pubs which might be included are the **Portcullis, Hope & Anchor, Eldon House, Berkeley, Quinton House, Victoria, Highbury Vaults, Robin Hood, Micawbers, Hillgrove Porter Stores, Hare on the Hill, Full Moon, Colston Yard** and **Ship**.

And last but very much not least, on **Saturday 31st May**, Mild Month will be seen out with a Bath mild ales trail led by Kirsten Elliott, who with Andrew Swift devised and run the "Great Bath Pub Crawl" and have written various books on Bath pubs. If travelling from Bristol by train think of using Groupsave as for the Weston trail above, but buy appropriate tickets to travel to Oldfield Park station for the start of the trail that will end at Bath Spa station. Pubs that might be included are the **White Horse** and **Royal Oak** at Twerton, **King of Wessex, Raven, Star, King William, Curfew, Bell, Old Green Tree, Volunteer Rifleman's Arms**, and **Coeur de Lion**.

All trails are expected to start in the middle to late morning and end early in the evening, and they will allow extra time for a bite to eat once or twice during the trail. Keep an eye out for final details nearer the date on [www.camrabristol.org.uk](http://www.camrabristol.org.uk). It is planned to have leaflets in pubs but that depends how early information comes in.

If you are a licensee or patron of any of the pubs covered by the trails or even a pub which is en route and might be included, please let BADRAG know what plans you have for stocking mild during the Mild Month and particularly on the days your pub is scheduled for a visit. Preferably email any information to [BADRAG@camrabristol.org.uk](mailto:BADRAG@camrabristol.org.uk) or telephone Laurie Gibney, the BADRAG coordinator, on 01275 798479.

Laurie Gibney

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# Inn and around Portishead

## The Royal Oak

It is some time now since "The Oak" has featured here so it is without apology that I've put together a bit of a splash on it now. It can be found at the top of West Hill and is a good 15 minutes' walk up Avon Way hill from the High Street. The original pub dates back to the 1890s but was reconfigured in the 1970s. It had been a Courage pub, and before that Georges, and is now an Enterprise Inn. Because of its location it serves as a local pub for residents of West Hill and is often used as a stop-off early doors on the way down into town and as a last port of call for those who have walked back up the hill at the end of the night.

It was 10 o'clock on a cold and wet Friday in January that I popped in to round off my night and I started in the lounge, which was found to be busy and friendly. The regular cask ales available were Courage Best and a personal favourite, St Austell's Tribute (£2.60). Guest beers are usually available and Theakston's XB often appears. Thatchers' Dry looks after the cider drinkers although bottles of the lovely Thatcher's Gold also featured as, refreshingly, this is a Magners-free zone.

The Oak is the only pub in town with a separate bar and lounge, and so I moved on to the bar to have a look. The bar proved to be bigger and a bit of a tardis, opening up at the far side and back to another area (the original bar), then the skittle alley and an outdoor patio with a heater for smokers. Again, the Oak is unique now in being the only pub in town with a surviving skittle alley. I met the landlords, Mike and Ange, in the bar. Now, the Oak's bar is noisy and lively. A lot of the customers were thankfully younger than this old bloke and like their music loud. The Tribute kept flowing and I have to say I loved it.

Food is limited but a bit different. There is café food Saturday morning until 1pm and Mike provides a carvery on Sunday lunchtimes when he looks to sell forty portions.

The bar provides the entertainment. On Thursday night there is a popular karaoke and live music on Saturday nights.

Thanks to the extended hours (it was open till midnight), to the good company, to the generosity of one of the customers, but mostly to the tastiness of the beer (it was by far the best Tribute I've had outside of Cornwall) I am afraid this lightweight overdid it a bit and suffered on the Saturday but, on reflection, I had a great night!

Mike describes the place simply as a "good boozer". I have to agree.



The Royal Oak's landlords, Mike and Ange Roles

## Meet the Landlords

**Name:** Mike and Ange Roles, landlords of the Royal Oak, Portishead for the past 12 years.

**Age:** Mike is 56 and Ange is in her 40s.

**Where from:** Mike is from Bridlington, Yorkshire and Ange originates from Gloucestershire.

**Previous lives:** Mike's family ran pubs in Yorkshire going back a couple of generations and he spent some time there before joining the Forces, the RAF Regiment. He has since worked in printing, then trained as a chef and moved back into the pub industry. He and Ange worked together for a while in the Beaufort Arms, Hawkesbury Upton.

**Other life:** Mike travels the country during the week driving car transporters while Ange holds the fort.

**Favourite other pubs:** Ange doesn't get much time to sample other pubs. On the other hand, Mike's other life provides a good opportunity and his top "trucker's tip" is the Stockyard off junction 1 of the M18 in Yorkshire which provides truckstop facilities plus a restaurant and pub. He also has fond memories of the family pub, the Globe in Bridlington, and finally mentioned the Star in Wootton Under Edge.

Neil Ravenscroft



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# Wassail at Wilkins

A TRIP to Wilkins Cider Works in January was too good an opportunity to miss. Not only did it give me a chance to experience a Wassail, it also gave me three "firsts" – my first visit to a cider producer, my first experience of the night bus from Bristol back to Yate and my first ... err, well, I'll tell you about that later...

There seemed to be a lot of beer drinking going on at the Cornubia as our party met up, personally I much enjoyed a half of the guest cider, Hecks Kingston Black before we piled onto the coach and headed south to deepest Somerset. Eventually we arrived at Wilkins Cider Works and found the Wassail in full swing.

Wassailing is a traditional folk custom and ceremony intended to begin the process of waking the fruit trees and bring luck to the growing season. The ceremony started with the crowning of the Wassail Queen and then everyone moved out into the yard to watch the Wassail in the orchard, conducted by Old Father Time. The Queen poured cider around the base of an apple tree before the crowd proclaimed the Wassail chant – a toast to the apple tree really.

The firing of a shotgun frightened away evil spirits and then we all sang the Mudgley Wassail, which fortunately is too long to print here! One line from the chorus is worth repeating though – "Drink up your glass lets fill another bowl" – and nobody needed any



Some of the Wassailers

second bidding to do that. There was warm, spiced cider, or a choice of Wilkins dry or sweet cider from two enormous barrels. No shortage of drinking went on that evening and the split-level nature of Wilkins' barn with steps of varying heights proved a challenge for some.

The evening was not just about drinking though. There was entertainment in the form of the Somerset Levellers, a group whose music came from a variety of traditions including English, Irish, Scottish and French. Another local band whose music included folk and covers followed them.

Music was our accompaniment as we left Mudgley just after 11 pm. There were some interesting renditions of Delilah and Bohemian Rhapsody, but for some strange reason the

songs of The Wurzels were particularly popular. This is where I confess my final "first" – I had spent part of that morning listening to The Wurzels as a warm-up for the evening to come. My husband had decided to dust off his vinyl of their "greatest hits" for my delectation!

Thank you to Andrew Pike to arranging the Wassail trip. It was well worth going, and I am glad I wore my walking boots and thermals as the barn was none too warm.

Kathy Matthews

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**PRIDE IN EVERYTHING WE BREW**



# Bristol Beer Festival ticket sales success

WE have now held our two sales sessions for Bristol Beer Festival tickets. The first was for CAMRA members (or those wishing to join) at the Commercial Rooms in Bristol on Sunday 13th January and the second was open to all at the Old Fish Market, Bristol on Sunday 27th January (the queue for tickets is pictured). Simultaneous sessions took place at Off The Rails in Weston-super-Mare.

We are pleased to report that selling the tickets this way has overall proved to be very successful. The queues were very good natured and were processed quite smoothly, although the sheer number of people meant that this did take some time, particularly in the first half of the session at the Old Fish Market. As well as selling the tickets in record time the branch also recruited 127 new CAMRA members.

The adoption of this radical new approach for 2008 was driven by the massive demand we are now experiencing for tickets and the fact that in 2007 the majority of people that applied to us for tickets were unsuccessful. Apart from a tiny number of detractors, the feedback from customers this year was overwhelmingly positive, with many people saying how pleased they were with the new approach which enabled them to know straight away whether they had a ticket without wasting postage or driving around a variety of



pubs in a fruitless search for tickets. Indeed, some people told us they had applied by post for several years, but this was the first time that they had been able to secure a ticket.

Unfortunately at this time there is no suitable venue in the right location for us to be able to expand the number of people that can

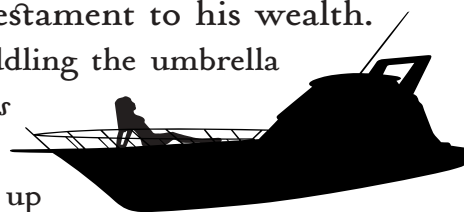
attend the festival. We apologise to anyone who feels disadvantaged by this new method, however please remember that thousands of people were disappointed last year and the huge success of the festival has made the old approach untenable.

Richard Brooks

## “He was the man who had everything, except *Theakstons* OLD PECULIER”

We'd been muçkers at school. Then he went into property and made so many millions they ran out of multi's to describe them. Some years later and here I was in the Med, a guest aboard this floating testament to his wealth.

*“Aye, I've got plenty of ACKERS,”* grumbled my friend, twiddling the umbrella in his cocktail, *“but no bloomin' pub and no bloomin' Theakstons Old Peculier, that's for sure.”* *“Why don't you just go home and get some?”* I asked. He snorted, glancing at his trophy wife soaking up the rays beside him, *“It's the missus, won't go anywhere it rains.”* *“Ah, I see.”* I replied, wondering how the leggy Latino lovely liked being referred to as the MISSUS. Then, wistfully, I thought of my very own special rain-spattered corner of Yorkshire. The lady I loved would be there now, behind her bar serving pint after pint of Theakstons Old Peculier, dark, rich, and deliciously strong. With my return ticket burning a hole in my pocket, I turned to my mate in exile. *“Fancy another Pina Colada?”* I enquired, smugly.



# Bath & Borders Branch

## Pub and brewery news

### Bear, 6-10 Wellsway, Bath

This pub, which is owned by Punch Taverns, is currently closed with a message in the window stating that the closure is due to staff illness. But a banner, put up by Punch Tavern, reads "Make a Difference to this Pub", suggesting that a new licensee is being sought. Landlady Denise Ashworth took on the Bear in June of last year. One of her first acts was to hold a competition to name the distinctive white bear, consequently christened Snowy, which stands the main entrance to the pub. The Bear was built in 1956.

### Golden Fleece, 1-3 Avon Buildings, Lower Bristol Road, Bath

Now has two beers on gravity as well as two on handpump. Range includes beers from Matthews and Newman's.

### Griffin Inn, Monmouth Street, Bath

Believed to have closed permanently, but in fact reprieved at the last minute, the Griffin has re-opened with a new landlady. Nothing has been changed and no refurbishment is likely to be undertaken until the future of this pub is more certain. Bath Ales Gem and Barnstormer were found to be available during a recent visit.

### Olde Farmhouse, 1 Lansdown Road, Bath

Following a four-month period of closure this favourite jazz venue re-opened shortly before Christmas. Jazz lover John Bradshaw ran the pub for 30 years before retiring towards the end of 2006. The Olde Farmhouse was then refurbished and re-opened by brothers Matthew and Mark Warburton. But last August they unexpectedly announced that they were to leave the Wadworth-owned pub. The pub has now re-opened under landlord Barry Thomas, who also runs the Robin Hood pub on St Michael's Hill, Bristol. Mr Thomas intends to run the Olde

Farmhouse as a traditional pub and live music venue. He said, "This will be a music pub as opposed to a pub that puts music on. It won't be a purely jazz music venue and we will be hosting up-and-coming bands and trios." The venue will offer a live music line-up of jam sessions on Mondays, bands, duos and trios on Wednesdays, an open mike night on Thursdays and more bands, duos and trios playing on Friday nights. Mr Thomas also intends to offer a wireless internet connection for customers and to launch an official website. He added, "We are taking a traditional pub and marrying it with modern technology."

### Ring o'Bells, 10 Widcombe Parade, Bath

We gather that this food-oriented pub sold recently for a cool million.

### Royal Oak, Lower Bristol Road, Bath

Now an annual fixture, the Royal Oak's Organic Beer Week was held over the week beginning Monday 10 December, with a selection of around fifty beers and live music every night.

### Weston Hotel, 1 Newbridge Road, Lower Weston, Bath

This pub has been closed for a massive £250,000 refurbishment. It had been due to re-open shortly before Christmas but owners Punch Taverns is still seeking a new licensee. Contrary to local rumour the Weston has not been turned into a gastro-pub. Rather the intention of Punch Taverns is for it to have a family and community focus with a strong food offering. The owners are hoping also to bring in a good selection of real ales. An application to convert some of the redundant floor space into office accommodation has been made to the local planning authority.

### Foresters Arms, Goose Street, Beckington, near Frome

Has been acquired by Abbey Ales and becomes the third pub, along with historic Bath pubs the star and the Coeur de Lion, in the brewery's estate. The pub closed for a few weeks for the start of an ongoing refurbishment but re-opened shortly before Christmas under new manager Mike Grieve. Refurbishment of the bar has been completed whilst a new kitchen is to be installed and the letting accommodation completely redecorated.

### Horseshoe Inn, Bowlish, near Shepton Mallet

We have heard a rumour that this pub, which we believe has been closed for some time, is shortly to re-open.

### Bear Inn, 26 Silver Street, Bradford-on-Avon

This pub remains closed. Planning permission is being sought to convert this former Usher's house into retail and residential accommodation.

### Riverside, 49 St Margaret's Street, Bradford-on-Avon

Under new management. New landlord seems to be real ale enthusiast with three or four cask beers available, including beers from Milk Street.

### Three Horseshoes, Chapmanslade, near Frome

This pub has recently re-opened following an extensive refurbishment under its new owner, and former owner of the Westbury Hotel, Ashley Hunt. According to an article in a recent *Wiltshire Times* there is likely to be a strong emphasis on quality food at this pub.

### Lamb, Clandown, near Radstock

Visited for the first time in many years by the branch on Thursday 22 November. It was the last stop on a minibus of the rural area to the north of Radstock. The Lamb is an unpretentious friendly locals' pub with a regularly used skittles alley. Three cask beers are normally available at any one time. At the time of our visit these were Bath Ales Gem, St Austell Tribute and Hidden Old Sarum. All were in first-class condition.



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## George, Long Street, Croscombe

This pub has just won the major accolade of the Good Pub Guide's *New Pub of the Year*. The real ale enthusiast Canadian landlord holds a regular spring beer festival and recently held a winter mini-beer festival over the weekend of Saturday 17 November.

## Lamb, Christchurch Street East, Frome

Following a major renovation the Lamb re-opened on Friday 18 January. This is Blindman's first estate pub. The whole character of the interior has been transformed. A special feature is the slate floor. The Lamb now offers accommodation with seven bedrooms. No beer is dispensed under top pressure. The eight hand-pumps offer five beers from Blindman's itself, two of which, the Lamb Ale and Lamb Gold, are exclusively brewed for the pub. There are two guest beers and, on the remaining pump, Rich's Farmhouse cider. The official opening night was held on Monday 11 February.

## Old Ham Tree, Holt, near Bradford-on-Avon

This Wadworth-owned pub has new landlords. Chris and Sue Metcalfe moved in during October. The couple have brought in a new chef and have revised the food menu to take it back to traditional wholesome pub fare such as sausages and mash, steak and ale pies, mixed grills and Sunday lunches. The main cask ales are Henry's IPA and 6X. The Old Ham Tree was the featured pub in the *Wine & Dine* section of the 23 November edition of the *Wiltshire Times*.

## Tollgate, Holt, near Bradford-on-Avon

This pub has received a Gold Dining Pub Award in the *Taste of the West 2007* competition. Anonymous judges visit establishments across six counties in the region and assess businesses on their quality of food, cooking and service, ambience, staff knowledge and local sourcing. It is the fourth time that the pub's owners Alison Ward-Baptiste Alex Venables have won the gold award since taking over the Tollgate in 1999. The pub was visited by the branch during a very well attended social on 5 December, during which Julie Patterson of the Alzheimer's Society was presented with the branch's donation for £230 raised at this year's Bath beer festival. The pub's policy of sourcing local food is reflected in the beer range, which during our visit comprised Sharp's Doom Bar and Atlantic IPA, and Ramsbury's Flint Knapper, all of which were in excellent condition.

## Rose & Crown, on A36, Limpley Stoke

Harry Patch, the 109-year-old last surviving veteran of the trenches of the Western Front, was guest of honour at the re-opening of this recently revamped roadside inn. The pub has been completely refurbished and redecorated in the last few months with two new bars and new furniture installed and new carpets fitted. The re-opening night included a jazz band and free buffet. Meanwhile Mr Patch, who fought at the Battle of Passchendaele, sat by the fire and signed copies of his autobiography *The Last Fighting Tommy*. For new landlord Bill Fawdry, who had previously had run the Bear in Melksham and the Crown Hotel in Trowbridge before more recently moving to Pontefract, the Rose & Crown represents something of a home-coming.

## Red Lion, Melksham

This pub lies slightly outside the branch area. It is, however, one of the oldest pubs in the town and currently up for sale for £200,000. The current pubco owner is attempting to have the premises de-licensed but, we believe, may be facing resistance to this from the local planning authority.

## King's Arms, Monkton Farleigh

Business partners Simon Blagdon and Vince Hanley took over the pub around eighteen months ago. Quality cask beer is important feature of the pair's business aims. The pub recently gained a Cask Marque accreditation. The King's Arms has recently linked up with Neston Farm Shop to provide free-range meat for the pub's impressive dinner menu. Cocktails are also a feature of this pub.

## Globe, Newton St Loe, near Bath

Under new management. This pub, situated on the very edge of the

branch area, was flooded during the January heavy rains.

## Rising Sun, 61 Woodmarsh, North Bradley, near Trowbridge

This friendly village local, which closed suddenly around the beginning of October, has now re-opened, presumably under new management.

## Oakhill Inn, Fosse Road, Oakhill, near Shepton Mallet

This pub is now under the new ownership of the people who have the King William and Garrick's Head in Bath. To celebrate the acquisition the new owners hosted a beer festival featuring ten real ales and four ciders along with live music on the weekend of Saturday 1 December.

## Anchor & Hope, Frome Road, Trowbridge

A launch night was held on Saturday 24 November to mark this pub's recent refurbishment. Since being taken over by Mike Lee improvements have been made to the pub both inside and out.

## Sir Isaac Pitman, Market Place, Trowbridge

The November Wetherspoon's Beer Festival at this pub was remarkable. Over the two-and-a-half weeks of the event dozens of beers from near and far featured, mostly in excellent condition, making the pub a genuine oasis of real ale within the town. Manager Rob has made a special effort to promote real ale here since he took over the Sir Isaac Pitman around nine months ago. Box Steam is to become the regularly featured local brewery in the normal range of around seven cask beers. A beer speciality evening, which was quite well attended by the branch, was held on Monday 12 November.

## Organ Inn, 49 High Street, Warminster

Has at last been given planning permission to replace the front window in the style of the original pub, which closed in 1913. The current window was vandalised towards the end of last summer and has been boarded up since then.

## Seven Stars, Winsley, near Bradford-on-Avon

The new landlord, who has been at this pub for around six months, is a real ale enthusiast and keen to try out different beers at the pub. He is planning a mini beer festival for the summer. His range consists of three regular beers, Butcombe, Sharp's Doom Bar and Wadworth's 6X, and a single guest in winter and two guests in the summer and at festive times. The guests are sourced from Wiltshire and Somerset micros which, in recent weeks, have included Cotleigh, RCH, Hidden and Box Steam.

Steve Hunt



## Forthcoming events

### ● Thursday, 6th March, starting at 8.30:

Social at the Forrester's Arms, Beckington, near Frome, recently bought and refurbished by Abbey Ales.

### ● Wednesday, 12th March, starting at 8.30:

Social at the Kings Arms in Monkton Farleigh, near Bath.

### ● Thursday, 20th March, starting at 8.30:

Social at the Green Park Tavern, Lower Bristol Road, Bath.

### ● Tuesday, 25th March, starting at 8.30:

Branch meeting at the Horse and Groom, Westbury.

### ● Friday 25th to Sunday 27th April:

Mini Beer Festival at the Cross Keys in Rode.

The Cross Keys will be hosting its first beer festival. Landlords Steve and Jess White intend this to be the first of many.

# The Road Less Travelled

ELSEWHERE in this issue you will read about the plight of community pubs in and around Bristol, though the pattern is, sadly, repeated right across the country. Pubs are closing down forever at an alarming rate. This is nothing short of a tragedy for a number of reasons.

First of which is that the pub is (or at least should be) a vital hub of the community which it serves. It has always provided a local coming-together point where residents can eat, drink and actually talk to each other. And if a pub is part of a community, then it actually helps to engender a sense of community togetherness.

Where a pub is run, staffed and frequented by locals, then there is a natural policing to ensure that drinkers and revellers respect the area in which they live. Where community pubs work, you will find locals engaged in activities centred around the pub, whether it's the pool or darts team, the local football or rugby team, karaoke or open mic night, mother and baby groups, quiz nights, charity events or just a right good laugh of an evening.



Giant Goram

Disputes are settled (usually peacefully) by two people going for a drink to sort things out, business is done when the local plumber meets the accountant and agrees to sort out his new shower unit, while the accountant does the plumber's books.

Now, convert that local pub into a number of flats and what happens? Well, a property developer makes a short-term profit before going on to do the same elsewhere. But something else happens too. The community loses that hub. There is nowhere to meet up for a game of pool, the plumber and the accountant never bump into one another. In short, the community becomes disconnected and fragmented. When this happens, people frustrated by the privations of their lives care less about their local community, and are more likely to cause trouble within it.

In fact, what tends to happen is that, left with no local amenity, a lot more people get on the bus or in the car and head for the city centre. Bristol City Council have recently launched a consultation to find out how to stop the problems associated with binge drinking in the centre. Well, here's an idea. Stop granting planning permission to close community pubs all over the place. Allow people to keep the right amenities in their own area, and they won't need to head for an area in which there is little or no

sense of community. In fact, you may even find this frees up the community of genuine residents and workers in the city centre a little so they can feel a little less invaded.

Now, am I saying that the way to solve the problems of any troubled community is to open a pub; or that pubs never bring with them their own problems; or that saving a pub in Fishponds will mean no one goes to Oceana or Panache any more? No, of course not, but what I am saying is that a pub is almost always a force for bringing the community together, and that is more necessary now than it has been at any.

*Pints West* recognizes we have a role to play in this. Because of our unashamed love of, and desire to promote, real ales and traditional ciders, there is a tendency for us to continually feature pubs committed to providing top quality beer. Many of these pubs become destination venues in their own right (though real ale drinkers do seem – anecdotally at least – less likely to trash the place afterwards than your WKD and Extra Cold Lager crowd). So *Pints*



Penpole Inn

*West* tends to promote those pubs, and so many get featured again and again, leaving other pubs largely unpublicized within these pages.

In recent issues we have tried to address this through the *Pub News* pages, and also by printing articles on specific areas, where we look at all the pubs.

However, we are acutely aware that there are great swathes of Bristol where the pubs rarely get a mention. Either because they are not predominantly 'real ale' pubs or, let's be honest, because they are not in an area often visited by the contributors to this newsletter. However, these pubs still serve the community, and we need to keep hold of them for all they provide.

With that in mind, I had a look through back issues of *Pints West* and on the [www.britishpubguide.com](http://www.britishpubguide.com) website to see which pubs had gone the longest without a mention or an update. Then I went to visit them. What follows is my own view of these pubs from just one visit.

One area which gets little or no mention from us is *Lawrence Weston*. Let's be frank, it's not really on the way to anywhere, and I'm sure the residents won't mind me saying it's an unlikely destination for the average tourist. But that's the whole point, it's a small community, not loaded with cash, where the local pubs play a

vital part in everyday life.

First pub on my list was the **Giant Goram** in Barrowmead Drive. Like much of Lawrence Weston, it has a 50s/60s brick-built estate pub look to it. The car park is all hard-standing and, frankly, this pub is not going to be on the front of a postcard any time soon. Worse still, when you get inside there is no real ale on offer, nor traditional cider. So why bother with an ugly building with no decent beer? Well, because pubs are much too important to be only judged by these narrow criteria. When I popped in I was greeted by a very friendly black Labrador, while around me there were several people putting the world to rights. The walls were adorned with the artwork of Rothko and Kessler, there was a karaoke night planned for the coming Sunday, and the whole place was a buzz. Now, does *Pints West* want to fill its pages with pubs that don't serve real ale? Emphatically not. But the way to change things is not to ignore these pubs, it is for locals reading this to go in and ask them to put a real ale on. The more the community takes the trouble to influence its local, the more that local will serve the needs of that community.



Long Cross

Next was the **Penpole Inn**. Bit of a theme developing here. Big estate building – though with a sort of Cotswold stone look – with an overgrown hard-standing car park, and now a couple of smokers' canopies sponsored by Stella Artois. But again, a pleasantly done out interior, with the main area served by a single long bar. Again, don't expect the Penpole to be in the Good Beer Guide any time soon (though we'd love to tell readers of any new or interesting real ales that get added), but don't ignore the Penpole either. Everything about these pubs screams 'community'.

How about the **Long Cross** in, er, Long Cross? This is a delightful Georgian building with ornate marble-work decorations and... OK, no it's not. It's another 60s brickwork estate pub with, in my humble opinion, all the architectural charm of the away end at the Memorial Stadium. The most common drink when I visited appeared to be cans of Natch. Again, no real ale (note to the publicans of Lawrence Weston: this is a growth market, if you put an interesting local real ale on and look after it, people will come and drink it), but the people inside were friendly and helpful. Quiz and karaoke nights were scheduled for the weekend, and the pool table was in constant use.

The **Mason's Arms** was also on my list but, alas, was closed at the time of my visit (not





Masons Arms

closed down, you understand, it just opened in the evening and my visit was in day time).

The next most neglected pub (by us, not the staff or customers) was the **Hope & Anchor**, in Lower High Street, Shirehampton. This pub is actually on the beaten track down to Avonmouth, and does have a recently-refurbished look about it. Inside is light and airy, and



Hope &amp; Anchor

there is a kids' play area and a big telly showing Sky Sports football. I also found my first real ale of the day, Courage Best. Now, I am no fan of Courage Best, but the whole point of this article is that it is better for pubs to be preserved selling whatever works than to be lost forever. I would love to see one of my favourite beers here, but this pub has the air of one well cared-for and oft-frequented, and we can't knock that.

Another pub very much on the beaten track but nonetheless under-represented by us is the **Old Crow** in Henbury (on the main road out from Westbury-on-Trym to Cribbs Causeway). A large, two-bar affair with children's playthings in the garden, and a pool table, dartboard, etc inside. No real ale on when I visited, but Westons Old Rosie provided the day's first traditional cider, and very nice it was too. While I was there I overheard the landlord say to a customer, "So and so was looking for you, 'cos you did some work for him. He wants to know if you're free to do some more." Which kind of sums up the value of these pubs.

Now, this is a publication of the Campaign for Real Ale, and yet this article has mentioned hardly any real ales. Firstly, we make no apology for this, as it is vital that the pubs above are supported so they are not lost forever. Please try and use them, and when you visit these and others we hope you will encourage them to stock real ales. Well kept and sensibly managed, they can attract repeat business to pubs in ways that *Stella* or *1664 Extra Cold* never will.



Old Crow

### Recommended pub to try

However, it is also true that we want to promote those pubs which do keep and serve a good variety of real ales. My last pub for the day, therefore, was the **Mason's Arms** in Stapleton. Now, you only have to go back to 2005 to find this pub boarded up with its future in doubt. But now this a storming pub that is



Masons Arms

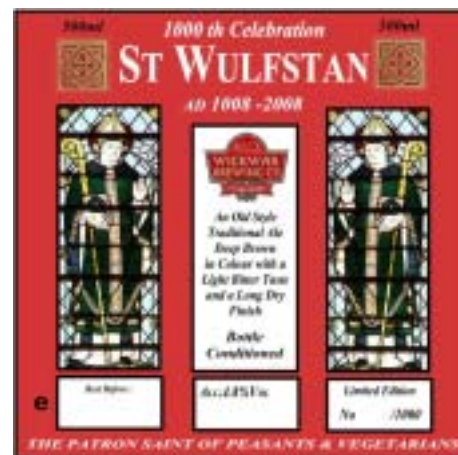
everything a pub in a residential area should be. There is a real sense of belonging in there, but not of the intimidation of feeling like an outsider. There are almost always six real ales available, from breweries like Bath Ales, Cheddar Ales, Bristol Beer Factory and ones from farther afield. Traditional ciders are also available, with the dangerously drinkable Black Rat (made by Thatcher's for Mole's) prominent among them. This pub is a great example of what can be done with a little care (and a lot of commitment from licensee and staff).

So what about your local? Does it get missed out in the press and on the web? Well, in future issues we shall be seeking out pubs that don't get the coverage and putting that right. But bear in mind we are a Real Ale newsletter, so if you know a pub we haven't featured that serves a decent pint, please let me know and I'll pop along. As it is, I see the pubs of Highridge, Bedminster Down and Bishopsworth have not had too many mentions recently, so let's see what we find there.

Duncan Shine

*Full details and photographs of all the pubs mentioned can be found on the [www.britishpubguide.com](http://www.britishpubguide.com) web site. Landlords and regulars in these pubs are welcome to update the information on the website whenever they like. Is there a pub in Bristol & District CAMRA's area that you would like to see featured in this column in the next issue? If so, send an email to [duncan.shine@britishpubguide.com](mailto:duncan.shine@britishpubguide.com) and we'll see what we can do.*

# Breweries in the community



QUITE rightly, there's a lot of talk about pubs in the community, but breweries play their part as well.

Before the recent demise of Scottish & Newcastle (talk about being hoisted by your own petard!) they sponsored a major 'Kidnapped' sculpture for Edinburgh – what a shame their visit to Bristol was so brief.

In 2006, when asked to participate in the Brunel 200 celebrations, Butcombe Brewery produced a beer that was so good (Brunel IPA) that they decided to keep it on as a mainstay of their output.

RCH Brewery produce a bottled beer called 'TLC' ... and donate 10p per bottle to Weston Hospice Care.

Wickwar Brewery have also been very good at supporting their local community and apart from supporting Hawkesbury's Horticultural Show for many years, they have even produced special beers for various causes, most notably Long John Silver Beer for the LJS Trust (going national in March via Beer Seller).

Just recently they supported the 1,000<sup>th</sup> anniversary of St Wulfstan's birth with a bottle-conditioned 'St Wulfstan Ale' limited to just 1,000 bottles. Proceeds are going to a fund in order to make more people aware of Hawkesbury's very own Patron Saint.

Wulfstan is the Patron Saint of Peasants and Vegetarians, and was the first to try and abolish the Slave Trade in Bristol. Support your local brewer (and pub) and they'll support you!

Mark Steeds

## 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](mailto:steve.plumridge@bristol.ac.uk)

### Smoking in pubs

Are we losing pubs more now because of the smoking ban?

Me and my girlfriend, for example, have stopped going to the pub all together because of it. And I wonder, how many more do the same?

Although I still enjoy a good pint, but now in bottles at home rather than in the pub. It keeps the brewery going, but not the pub...

Recently I spent some time in Germany and Austria. In Germany, Baden-Wuerttemberg, pubs are allowed to have a smoking room. What a difference! I am allowed to enjoy my visit to the pub! And what a democratic solution! And as of now in Austria there is no smoking ban. And we enjoyed that very much.

So, why can't Britain employ a more democratic solution? Why ban the smokers from enjoying a pint in the warm inside? In a smoking room?

Felix Mathais.

(by email)

### RAFA Club

Dear Sir,

Why not mention clubs as well?

One of Westbury's and indeed Bristol's best kept secrets! The Royal Air Forces Association (RAFA) Club in Westbury-on-Trym. Run by a group who are nuts about good beers. Started in 1946 for RAF personnel returning from the war, boasts standard draught beers St Austell Tribute, Bass, Sharp's Doom Bar, Wadworth 6X, Cotswold Spring Codrington Codger, and draught Rattler cider, and guest beers like Bristol Beer Factory No. 7, Shepherd Neame Spitfire, Bath Ales Gem, St Austell Proper Job, etc., plus a good selection of bottled beers and ciders.

Hot delicious food every lunchtime from J2 catering and our real ale (if you join our real ale club) is just £2.00 a pint. Membership £20 per year with lots of off-road, well-lit parking, live music Saturday nights with skittle and darts teams. Rooms for hire and pool table. Remember you no longer need to be ex-RAF, but if you are you will receive a very warm welcome.

Thank you CAMRA for all you have done to keep good beer flowing.

Philip Lowndes

RAFA Club

38 Eastfield

Westbury-on-Trym.

We were intrigued by this, so sent one of our members, Mike Wilson, to investigate. He

reported back saying:

*"I have tried the RAFA Club now and the beers I sampled – Tribute, Codger and Doom Bar – were in excellent condition. The club is like all clubs, a bar on one side and lots of room to sit down. They have a bar downstairs as well. I asked about visiting and he said, 'No problem, just turn up on the door and they will let you in.' To get to it is easy. From Westbury village go up past the Mouse and take the third turning on the right called Eastfield. It's about 100 yards down on the left-hand side. Coming the other way from Henleaze Road, Southmead Road, up Eastfield Road and third on the left, and it's about 100 yards down on the left-hand side. Worth a visit and only £2 a pint."*

### Redland pubs

I read with interest your article "Shine on Redland" in the last edition of Pints West regarding the pubs in Redland, Bristol, particularly the rather dismissive comments about the Jersey Lily. I have no doubt those comments were deserved at the time and I would have agreed with them until a few weeks ago but things have changed. The pub is under new management and your experience today would be altogether different.

Current beers as I write are Butcombe Bitter, which will be on permanently as the landlord likes it; Spitfire, semi-permanent, will swap out once in a while with another; and a guest beer, at the moment Old Speckled Hen, which will change regularly once the new management have settled in.

The current incumbents keep their beer exceptionally well. This is one of the many reasons I have changed my allegiance from the Shakespeare to the Jersey Lily. Their prices are also competitive in comparison to other pubs in the area.

Food: typical pub food but very good quality. Locally sourced, occasional, specials sourced from the farmers market held twice a month.

Lily: Regarding the eponymous lady, you should have looked on the other side of the pub sign. She is up there is all her glory on the other side to the Lily. So they haven't entirely missed the point!

Enough of a sales pitch for them. As a resident of Redland, a frequent visitor to a couple of the pubs mentioned in your article and occasional visitor to the others, I was also surprised at a few of the comments about the other pubs too. While I appreciate timing is everything and comments are obviously subjective, I couldn't say the article matched my experience. I should say I like proper pubs. To define that, in my view:

- \* The Port of Call [which you may know is in Clifton just across from the Jersey Lily] and the Shakespeare, two different establishments are very much pubs.

- \* The Jersey Lily is what I would call a bar rather than a pub but the quality of the beer, food and people make up for that.

- \* The Kensington Arms is no longer a pub – it was – nor even is it a gastro pub. It's a bistro that happens to sell beer. Just my opinion but that may shed light on my

definition of a pub.

Bob Esson.

(by email)

Duncan Shine, author of that article, replies:

*Firstly, thank you so much for taking the trouble to write and give us your feedback. It is great to know what other people feel about the pubs I visited, as mine is only one opinion based on a visit on one given day.*

*I know the editor was also delighted to get the feedback and, while I cannot speak for his editorial priorities, I know he is usually keen to print the feedback we get, so I expect he will try and feature all or part of your comments.*

*Now, to the specifics of your email.*

*Jersey Lily: Great news about the new management having three beers on. I will have revisited the Jersey Lily by the time the next issue comes out, and will make sure the new range is mentioned in Pub News. As to the sign, well that's embarrassing. I guess I should always look at both sides! Delighted that Ms Langtry is still featured. I have also updated the Jersey Lily's entry on the British Pub Guide web site at [www.britishpubguide.com](http://www.britishpubguide.com).*

*Kensington Arms: A pub or not a pub. Funnily enough the definition of what is and isn't a pub exercises both the people on the web site and CAMRA members! For the purposes of Pints West and britishpubguide.com, my definition of a pub is simply somewhere you can go and order a pint of draught something without having to pay to get in, be a member or have a meal. To be of interest to Pints West, the pub should also offer at least one cask-conditioned ale. The Kensington satisfies these very broad criteria, and so is featured. I don't typically comment on the quality or price of food in my "Shine On..." articles in Pints West, though it may occasionally get a mention. I do take your point that the 'Kenny' these days is less like the traditional boozer, but in my articles I try not to pass judgement on whether this is a good or bad thing. I try to explain what sort of place I have visited, and then let readers decide if that's for them or not.*

*As I say, it is always great to get feedback, and to be honest, I'm just delighted that you actually read my incoherent witterings in the first place. Of course, there will be differences of opinion on these things. In the end, all that Pints West, the web site and people like you can do is let people know about these pubs. In the end, the quality of the beer (and food, and service) will determine whether each pub is successful or not.*

*Please do keep the feedback coming. If you visit a pub and are impressed – whether we have featured it or not – please do let both us know.*

## WARNING

From the Management of the  
**HOPE & ANCHOR**  
Exceptional Public House

**SPILL BEER**  
**DON'T**



# Portcullis joins Dawkins estate

GLEN Dawkins has just added a fourth pub to the Dawkins estate. As well as the Hillgrove in Kingsdown, the Victoria in Clifton and the Miners Arms in St Werburghs, the list now includes the Portcullis in Clifton, just a short distance from the Suspension Bridge. The pub's grand reopening (it having been closed a while) was scheduled for February 29th, just after this edition of Pints West went to the printers.

As with the other pubs, the excellent Matthews beers will be featured, with Brassknocker one of the two permanent beers on offer here. The other permanent offering will be Cheddar Best, another excellent beer, this one from the local Cheddar Ales brewery. In all we've been promised six real ales, usually from local micro-breweries, Weston's cider and perry, and Becks Vier, Budvar, Budvar Dark, Erdinger wheat beer and Leffe Blonde on draught. There will also be a dozen or more interesting continental bottles including Chimay White & Red, Duvel, Liefmans, Orval and Erdinger Dunkel, and 15 or more wines available by the glass. Glen also says: "The Portcullis won't be stocking draught Guinness, but we'll have a pump reserved for cask dark beers instead (the Hillgrove and Victoria usually sell at least one dark beer)."

Glen goes on to say: "The Georgian building is fascinating, converted to pub use in the 1820s, the first recorded licensee being John Evans in 1826-8. Interestingly, there always seems to have been quite a turnover of landlords, although this has certainly accelerated recently. I'm looking for that to stop! I've signed a new 25-year, completely free-of-tie lease with Pubfolio. The downstairs bar is very small, and we've taken out the modern backbar and put in more traditional fittings. New 'old' glass panels in the doors and stairway have lightened the place up along with a bit of Sheffield (my home town) in the shape of an original Victorian Wards brewery etched window in the entrance porch. The gas fire is replaced by a real fireplace. We're lucky to have a reasonably-sized, cool cellar for the cask stillaging. Up the refurbished steps to the next level: a relaxed lounge with reclaimed pews and pub memorabilia on the walls. Some Dawkins fake breweriana included of course! The large

windows fold in on themselves for summer sun. The catering kitchen is on this level. Ned and Natalie will be serving up traditional favourites from mid-March, using local suppliers and products wherever possible, such as hearty ploughmans, casseroles, soups and Sunday roasts."

Following the example set by the other Dawkins pubs, the Portcullis will be holding mini beer festivals, the first being a May Bank Holiday beer festival from 1st to 5th May.

As for the others, the Hillgrove will be doing another Irish real ale festival for St Patrick's from 13th to 17th March, hopefully including beers from the Hilden brewery. By their nature, all are rarely seen over here. The Miners Arms will have a Summer Beer Festival with 30 ales and ciders over the August Bank Holiday (21st to 25th). The Victoria will support St George's Day with 25 patriotic ales and ciders from 23rd to 27th April.

SP

## The Farmhouse strikes back

THE Old Farmhouse on Lansdown Road, Bath, renowned as one of the top jazz venues in the west, is back after shutting down twice in just over a year. The first closure came in 2006 when John Bradshaw, who had run the pub for the past 30 years, finally retired. Brad, as he was universally known, was originally at the Bell in Walcot Street, establishing that as one of the city's top music venues before moving up to the Farmhouse, so to say he was an institution is something of an understatement.

Everybody knew he'd be a hard act to follow, and so it proved. It was taken over by Matthew and Mark Warburton, who kept the jazz – although only on a couple of nights a week – and introduced a tempting gastro menu. Eight months later, however, they moved on, the pub closed once more and Wadworth started looking for someone else to run it.

It took over three months, but finally just before Christmas word got around that the Farmhouse was open once again. The new landlord, Barry Thomas, will no doubt be familiar to many Bristol drinkers, as he also runs the Robin Hood on St. Michael's Hill in Kingsdown. The Robin Hood is known not only for the quality of its beers but also for its eclectic mix of music and comedy most nights of the week. Given his track record, Barry Thomas seems just about the perfect choice to take over from Brad. He stresses that the Farmhouse will be a real music pub rather than a pub that just puts on music. There won't just be jazz on offer, however; he plans to showcase new bands and artists from across the spectrum and hold regular open mic nights. Already the Farmhouse has re-established itself as part of the Bath pub and music scene – and we should all raise our glasses to the return of a genuine community pub and the rebirth of a Bath institution.

Andrew Swift



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**Irish Beer Festival 13-17 March**

### The Victoria

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**CAMRA Good Beer Guide 2008**

Off St Paul's Rd, next to the old Lido. Six Real Ales, Real Cider. Open Mon-Fri: 4-11; Sat 12-11, Sun 12-10.30

**St George's Beer Festival 23-27 April**

### New! The Portcullis

WELLINGTON TCE, SION HILL, CLIFTON VILLAGE, BRISTOL

**Freehouse re-opened 29th February**

Near the Suspension Bridge. Six Real Ales, Real Cider. Open Mon-Fri: 12-2.30, 4.30-11, Sat 12-11, Sun 12-10.30

**May Bank Hol Beer Festival 1-5 May**

### The Miners Arms

MINA RD, ST WERBURGHES, BRISTOL 0117 9556718

**CAMRA Good Beer Guide 2007/8**

6 Real Ales. Outside drinking area. Pool. Function Room. Open Mon-Wed: 4-11; Thu-Fri: 4-12; Sat: 12-12; Sun: 12-11

**Summer Beer Festival 21-25 Aug**



The eight hand pumps from the front look very traditional ...



... but are state of the art when seen from the other side of the bar

## The Lamb Inn at Frome: official reopening

WHEN Paul Edney and Lloyd Chamberlain of Blindman's Brewery decided to open their first pub, the Lamb Inn at Frome, they little knew what an epic task they were taking on.

The pub they had chosen had been the brewery tap for the Lamb Brewery, which had closed in 2006. Cllr Philip Whitmarsh, born and bred in Frome, told me he had been surprised it had lasted as long as it had, and he never thought it would reopen.

As the projected opening date of September 2007 came and went, there must have been times when Paul and Lloyd felt the same. Not only was the building virtually ruinous, but there was officialdom to deal with, and the ever-changing building regulations, which, as anyone knows who has had any work done on their house, are becoming more stringent literally week by week.

But they persevered, and the pub opened quietly on 18<sup>th</sup> January. In fact, the opening was not as quiet as the pub staff would have liked –

not only did half Frome turn out to see what had been achieved, but the dishwasher broke down, and the hi-tech till refused to work – fortunately a rather antiquated one was available. Nor was the kitchen functional. So it was a good idea not to have the official opening until nearly three weeks later, on Monday 11<sup>th</sup> February, when all the glitches had been ironed out.

A fine array of Blindman's beers was on offer. First in the line of eight handpumps were the two house beers – the dark and delicious *Lamb Ale* (4.2%) and the lighter session beer *Lamb Gold* (3.9%). Then there was a selection of Blindman's regulars: *Icarus* (4.5%), which is perhaps one of my favourite beers; the pale and aptly named *Buff*, the weakest at 3.6% but still full of flavour; along with *Mine Beer* at 4.2% and *Siberia* at 4.7%. As the information leaflet made clear, this regular range will alter slightly, with the other regulars *Eclipse* and *Golden Spring* getting their turn at the bar. There may also be a chance to try one of the monthly

favourite breweries' beers available, it's almost enough to go and make me live in Frome.

However, the hot gossip of the night was that Milk Street Brewery and the Griffin are up for sale – which may explain the switch to Matthews. (See the article entitled '*Milk Street Moving*' - Ed.) Stuart Matthews was at the opening, but he had no need to worry about the way the beer was served – it was all in excellent condition.

The cider available was, appropriately for a Somerset country town, Rich's Farmhouse Cider, made at Highbridge – all the drinks on handpumps were local. There is, in addition, an excellent range of wines and spirits, although Paul and Lloyd have made the brave decision not to have any pressurised pumps for lager or foreign beer.

Like the beers and cider, much of the food is locally sourced and all is homemade. There's an attractive menu, the speciality of the house being the pies, some made with ales from the Blindman's range. Tasters of these were on offer to guests at the official opening, along with a range of other delicacies. This was served in the restaurant upstairs which also doubles as a conference/function room, if needed – although Paul Edney assured me that diners come first, and the room is only available for hire if it is not required as a restaurant for the pub.

This is also where you eat your breakfast if staying at the Lamb Inn. Many pubs call themselves inns when they do not offer accommodation – but the Lamb Inn in Frome has seven en-suite bedrooms, all decorated to the highest standards in a minimalist but attractive style. Even the furniture is solid oak – “no flat pack stuff here,” said Paul, proudly.

As he showed me round the upper rooms, I could see how difficult it must have been to renovate. As different parts were added over the years, they were tacked on at different levels, and the corridors twist and turn, with steps up and down. Putting in the ventilation for the kitchen was akin to designing a three-dimensional maze, apparently. But it all adds to the olde worlde charm of the building. Interestingly,



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Buff 3.6%	Golden Spring 4.0%
Mine Beer 4.2%	Icarus 4.5%
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specials, such as *Pints & Quarts*, a mid-brown malty ale, which I enjoyed recently at the Royal Oak in Twerton, although with the Six Nations championship on, you are most likely to find *Up N Under* on tap.

The remaining two handpumps are devoted to a guest beer and a cider. When Andrew Swift and I had called in the day after the pub opened, it was – very diplomatically, we thought – *Funky Monkey* from Milk Street Brewery, just up the road, but at the official opening it was Matthews' Brewery *Bob Wall*. With two of my





The Old Green Tree crowd and Stuart Matthews join in wishing the Lamb Inn every success

the modern understated décor, with some striking prints on the walls to relieve the severity, seems to work better here than what I call Laura-Ashleyfication – all pretty chintzes and floral flounces.

The official opening certainly went off well, with a strong Bath contingent from the Old Green Tree and the Royal Oak, Twerton, both supporters of Blindman's, as well as several of the Bath & Borders CAMRA. I am sure everyone wishes Paul, Lloyd and their manager, chef and staff at the Lamb Inn every success in the new venture. They certainly deserve it.

*Food is served Mon-Sat 12-2 & 6-9, Sun 1-7. Further details about Blindmans Brewery can be found at [www.blindmansbrewery.co.uk](http://www.blindmansbrewery.co.uk) with a page dedicated to the Lamb Inn, which also has its own website at [www.thelambinnfrome.co.uk](http://www.thelambinnfrome.co.uk).*

Kirsten Elliott

## Milk Street Mooving

PARDON the pun, but if you've visited the Griffin in Frome, the brewery tap for Milk Street Brewery, you won't have missed the cow theme running through the décor of this cracking little boozer. Using the word theme when discussing the Griffin, however, is a bit misleading – it's a community pub par excellence, with cracking beer and regular live music. It's also a cornerstone of the annual Frome festival, with many of the events taking place in the pub.

Even if you haven't visited the Griffin, the chances are you'll have sampled Milk Street beers – the bar at the Cheese & Grain in Frome, one of the top music venues in the west, is run by Milk Street, as is the Brewhouse in Poole, and Milk Street beers appear regularly not only at beer festivals but also at many pubs in Somerset and beyond. Regular Bath outlets include the White Horse, the Ring of Bells, the King William, the Garrick's Head and the Crown at Bathford. The selection of beers is wide ranging – including Gulp (3.5%), a mild session beer, Funky Monkey (4%), brewed with lager and Perle Hallertau hops, Beer (5%), a citrusy hoppy beer, Bobbled (6.5%), this year's winter ale, and – a particular favourite – Elder Fizz (5%), a wheat beer flavoured with elderflowers and unfortunately only available at the Griffin.

Now, however, Milk Street Brewery has become a victim of its own success. The six-barrel brew plant behind the pub is simply too small to cope with demand – and there's no room for expansion. Both brewery and pub have been put up for sale while Rik Lyall, the brewer,

looks around for premises suitable for a 15-barrel plant. He says that, although a town-centre site, with pub attached, would be ideal, such properties are hard to come by, and accepts that he may have to settle for a rural location. One thing he's clear about though – brewing behind the Griffin will continue until such time as the new brewery is ready to roll, so there'll be no break in production.

The Milk Street Brewery was established in January 1999 by Nick Bramwell, who, having renovated the Griffin from its derelict state, went on to build the micro brewery from scratch. His past experience in construction and engineering came in extremely useful here. In 2001 he was joined by his old school friend, Rik Lyall, who had been head brewer for Cotleigh, Hopback and Bunce's breweries.

The partners' love of beer dates back to when they first experimented with making alcoholic beverages at the tender age of 13. Back then they made beer from just about anything they could get their hands on – nettles, rice, even raisins, glace cherries and strawberries! Although nowadays they tend to stick to more traditional beer styles, their early experiments are echoed in the adventurous use of unusual ingredients in brews such as Elderfizz.

Not only will brewing continue behind the Griffin until the new brewery is ready to roll, the pub will stay open as well. The freehold of both pub and brewery is being sold through Moore, Wood & Cockram of Bristol.

Andrew Swift

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# Island in the sea

by your Nailsea correspondent Laurie Gibney

## Butchers Arms

The leasehold of the Butchers Arms at Yatton is for sale. The sign outside says details are available from 0845 601 3271 or to use the website [knightsbridge.com](http://knightsbridge.com) to search for more details, but that took the writer to a Hewlett Packard website, so try the website [www.knightsbridgeplc.com](http://www.knightsbridgeplc.com) instead. Once you manage to find the particular property, it says to contact their South West office on a Bristol number, 0117 922 0777, quoting reference 11953. The lease, with twenty-six years remaining, is marketed at £70,000 with an annual rent of £29,200. The website describes this as a grade II-listed, popular, wet-led pub with an attractive beer garden and scope for food sales, and having comfortable two-bedroom accommodation.

The current real ales here are three regulars, Wells Young's Courage Best, Bath Ales Gem and Butcombe Bitter. The pub is the most traditional village-style pub in Yatton. It is a two-room local, which has two small bars a quiet lounge bar with a regular following in the public bar that has a non-Sky TV. There is a retractable smoking shelter over the path to the garden from the front door, which is on the side of the building. A crib team plays here on Wednesdays and two ladies' darts teams are based there. Unfortunately the Butchers Arms has no car-parking and is hard onto the narrow and busy main B3133 road through the village, this road linking Clevedon with Congresbury on the A370.

## Prince of Orange

Only a stone's throw from the Butchers Arms is the Prince of Orange, a substantial pub owned by Enterprise Inns and leased on a free-of-tie basis for the last eight years by licensee Gill Sugg and her husband Andy. The free-of-tie lease allows Gill and Andy to offer one of the best selections of real ales in the district, which they have no problem selling within the relatively short life of cask real ale. Fuller's London Pride is the regular ale, with three guests drawn mainly from local and not-too-distant breweries such as Bath Ales, Blindmans, Bristol Beer Factory, Butcombe, Cottage, Newman's, RCH, Sharp's and Wickwar. BADRAG style dark ales don't always sell so well, but Blindmans Icarus and RCH Old Slug Porter, both 4.5% ABV, do sell quite well. On a recent visit the Cottage Vulcan at 3.8% ABV went down exceedingly well.

Ample parking is available at the front and to the rear, where there is a smoking shelter with heater and TV! The Prince of Orange has one long bar in a rather narrow room with a mixed but often young adult clientele and music suited to retaining their custom. At each end of the bar there are less busy areas with real fires leading to a single-table pool room, with a vacancy for a pub team at the time of

writing. There is also a skittle alley patronised by four resident teams and one pub darts team, with facilities for up to eight darts boards for tournaments.

Upstairs is a function room accommodating up to seventy-five people (phone 01934 832193 to book your function) but with limited real ale available unless you pop downstairs to the bar to fetch it. On the third Wednesday of each month the function room hosts a jazz evening, with bands from all over the South West, between 8 and 11 pm. Tickets are £8 at the door or £7 from the bar in advance. Support has increased recently following the closure of the Clevedon Jazz Club.

There is a generous carvery available on Sundays between 1 and 4 pm, offering two meats, six vegetables and potatoes at £6.95, with sweets at £2.95. From Monday to Saturday a lunchtime bar snacks menu is available, and early in the evenings between 5 and 7 pm a £5 main course or £7.50 soup and main course menu is available. Prior booking may be advisable. The bar is open from 12 to 3 pm and 5 to 11 pm on Mondays to Fridays, 12 to 11 Saturdays and 12 to 10.30 on Sundays. Between 5 and 7 pm Mondays to Fridays there is 'happy hour' with 30p off ales, ciders and lagers. The smoking ban appears to have resulted in a 20% drop in turnover, so the Prince of Orange needs your support.

## Back in the Nailsea area

On our previous *Pints West* distribution run, we noted Badgers Tanglefoot, First Gold, Fursty Ferret and Pickled Partridge at **The Olde Farmhouse**; Newman's Wolver's Ale and Moles Black Rat Cider at the **New Battle Axe**; Courage Best and Butcombe Bitter at the **Sawyers Arms**; on the bar or in the cellar at the **Star** at Tickenham were Courage Best, Butcombe Gold, Fuller's London Pride, Greene King Old Speckled Hen and Sharp's IPA; the **Moorend Spout** had its regular line-up of Bass, Butcombe Bitter, Marston's Pedigree and Thatcher's Traditional Cider; Butcombe Bitter and Wells Young's Courage Best were the line-up at the **White Lion** with no guest ale at that time, but Thatcher's Cheddar Valley was available to quench the cider drinkers' thirst; the **Courtyard** had Bass and Marston's Pedigree on tap; **Briggs** had Greene King Abbot Ale; and the **Mizzymead Social Club** had Butcombe Bitter and Wells Young's Courage Best, and on their ever-changing guest pump was a very palatable Young's Winter Warmer.

## And away from Nailsea

A group of us from Nailsea decided to visit

Bristol for the evening, starting at **The Ship** in Lower Park Row, where bar billiards, pool, giant-sized connect four, giant-sized janga and a poker night were on offer. Those with me plumped for bar billiards. Oh, you wanted to know what the real ales were ... the regulars were Theakston's Old Peculier, Mild and XB, plus guests Courage Best, Old Speckled Hen and Sharp's Doom Bar.

**Zero Degrees** followed, with Black Lager, Pale Ale and Cranberry Wheat Beer being the preferred ales. The next was **Colston Yard** (the old Smiles brewery tap) recently re-opened by Butcombe Brewery, fielding their own Bitter, Gold and Brunel IPA, with guests Bath Ales Spa, Fuller's London Pride and, on this occasion, Tring Ridgeway Bitter.

Dropping down Christmas Steps we popped into the **Three Sugar Loaves** and enjoyed Skinner's Cornish Knocker and Sharp's Doom Bar Bitter – a definite Cornish theme here – and noted that they offer Pieminister pies, mash, peas and gravy for £6.75 from 12 noon until late, and also curried goat with aromatic basmati rice for £5.95 and Gloucester old spot bangers (from the Bristol Sausage Shop in St Nicholas Market) and mash for £5.50.

The famous **White Lion** on the Centre followed where there was Wickwar's Coopers, BOB, Old Arnold, Mr Perrett's Stout and Station Porter. The latter had just been awarded the title of 'Supreme Champion Winter Beer of Britain 2008' that same day, so we had to celebrate!

Our final visit before the bus home was to JDW's **Commercial Rooms**, where beside the six regular ales, the guests on the front of the bar were Badgers Tanglefoot, Cottage Norman's Conquest, Phoenix Navy Bitter, Cotleigh Buzzard Dark Ale, Cottage Arrow and Plunge Bitter.

## And finally

A similar Nailsea group visited Bath one Sunday evening before Christmas for a seasonal ales crawl where we found Hardy & Hanson's Rocking Rudolph (sadly now tasting like other Greene King ales), Everards Sleigh Bells and Abbey Twelfth Night all at the **Star**. The **Old Green Tree** had Hop Back Pickled Santa and a delightful RCH Santa Fe. The **Raven** had Cottage Christmas Ale and Norman's Conquest plus Wickwar Christmas Cracker, Stark Raven Christmas by Blindmans, and Arbor Ales Snuffy Jacks Christmas Tipple, and at the **Salamander** there was Bath Ales Festivity. The evening ended with our favourite of the evening, a delightful Abbey Ales Twelfth Night at the **Coeur de Lion**, where we engaged in conversation with a couple from the Cumbria who later emailed thanks for our welcoming chat.



# Pint in Bath

I REALLY do enjoy the banter in a well used pub. It is far more sociable than sitting at home with a couple of bottle-conditioned brews. Recently, after a bit of a gap, I visited the Raven in Bath and got chatting to Tim there. Tim organises the beer at the pub and he showed me the pump clip for a forthcoming ale. At first glance the clip was for Great Bustard from Stonehenge. However, closer inspection revealed that the Great Bustard depicted on the clip had a man's head and the beer name had subtly changed to Gurt Bastard. (Could this be another tick? Errrr ... no!)

Apparently, a regular at the Raven is affectionately known as 'Sid the Bastard' and the merry jape had been conceived to warm the cockles of his heart. Good on yer Sid, keep drinking! And good on yer Raven for caring enough about the locals to dream up such a leg pull. With a bit of luck, and with a nickname like 'Phill the Pint', perhaps somebody will one day (fill my pint, that is ... OK, a poor attempt).

The Raven is the place to head for over Easter as they are planning a mini beer festival. Tim proposes to serve 30 spring specials starting on Good Friday and running for a week, dependent upon stocks. If you plan to visit and are not familiar with the pub, there is an upstairs as well as a ground-floor bar. Normally the beers upstairs are the same as downstairs but once again Tim is aiming to split the lines so that the stock upstairs will differ from those below.

On the subject of looking for unusual beers, I do feel not a little smug watching the email traffic between the BADRAG members. BADRAG is the Bristol and District Rare Ales Group and the appearance of unusual ales in Bristol sets the electrons racing as members are informed. But for me, every week is a mini beer festival since the Royal Oak, near Oldfield Park railway station in Bath, is on my way home from work. Last year I recorded that I had 306 new beers there which I had not tried before and that is not allowing for loss of records when my computer hard drive melted. But Christmas was a real shock for me due to a noise complaint that resulted in the Council giving notice of a licence review. Goodness knows what it must have been like for the publicans whose livelihood was directly affected. The good news is that the hearing was held on the 23rd of January and passed without any significant change to the licence conditions. Phew!

*Phill the Pint*

# New pub for Abbey Ales

BATH brewery Abbey Ales has added a third pub to its growing pub estate, namely the **Foresters at Beckington**. The pub, which situated in the conservation village, has been given a complete refurbishment by Abbey Inns, an off shoot of the brewery, which already runs the Star Inn and the Coeur de Lion in Bath's city centre.

Abbey Inns Director Simon Morgan, who lives in the village, said, "I have known the pub for a long time since my parents ran the other pub in the village, the Woolpack, and when it came on the market we decided to we would completely refurbish it and also introduce food."

Managing Director of Abbey Ales Alan Morgan added, "We will be selling our own beer Bellringer and other local cask beers and also a full range of national brands in the pub as well. It will also give us a base to introduce Abbey Ales beers to other pubs in the area."

Simon added, "The pub was looking very tired before but now that we have finished the refurbishment, which included a new bar, it's looking pretty good now. We aim to keep it in keeping with the village and make sure it's always open for the village community - in fact a traditional village pub."

The Manager of the pub, Mike Grieve, is well known in the village as he was formerly employed at the nearby Woolpack. He is selling the range of Abbey Ales beers, including their flagship brand Bellringer, and has launched a new menu (lunchtimes and evenings) offering traditional, home-cooked food, with ingredients sourced locally whenever possible.

## Curry Nights

Two of Abbey Ales' pubs, the **Coeur de Lion** in Bath and the newly acquired **Foresters** at Beckington, now run a weekly curry night every Monday (Foresters) or Thursday (Coeur de Lion) with a curry, rice, poppadoms and mango chutney, plus a free bottle of Indian lager or glass of wine, all for less than £6.

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SP

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# Pub news

The **Hillgrove Porter Stores** up in Kinsdown is now being run by Jamie Ashley as the Dawkins empire grows. If the Goffs, Cheddar and Matthews beers carry on in the same good nick, then you won't go far wrong Jamie!

Talking of Dawkins expanding empire... As we went to press we were awaiting the imminent reopening of the **Portcullis** in Clifton. This is a pub with a chequered history (as often closed down as open in recent years), but Ned and Natalie are hoping to bring the same emphasis on good beer and service that the others in the 'chain' have shown. I'm guessing local breweries will again be prominently featured.

We've also had an update regarding the **White Hart** in Lower Maudlin Street (by the bus station). Louise Allen is in charge down there and offering a good selection of beers from the Greene King stable. Lovely to see this old building preserved as everything gets rebuilt around it.

**Mother's Ruin** is the new name for the bar at 7-9 St Nicholas Market in Bristol. It has previously be Marz, Fusion and goodness knows what else. However, emphasis now will be on good local ales. They are starting with beers from Butcombe, and will also have Addlestone's cider on draught.

Another contributor, Dave Jane, adds: Landlords Marc and Emma Jane Griffiths hail from Worcester and are new to Bristol, though not to the pub trade. The Mothers Ruin is a sophisticated but relaxed bar intended to be a place of respite from the usual madness of Corn Street. They currently offer a Butcombe product – perhaps Bitter, Gold, Brunel IPA or Blond – as a regular beer and hope to introduce some of the real ales they have grown to love in Worcester from the likes of Malvern Hills brewery (e.g. Swedish Nightingale, Black Pear) and Wye Valley brewery (Butty Bach, etc). They also have Ashton Press cider and Addlestone's as well as Franziskaner Weissbeir and Bellvue Kreik on draught. Note that the opening times are Tuesday to Sunday from noon till close (and apparently they do a cracking Sunday roast).

Kelly Sharp is running the **Bishop's Tavern** on Cheltenham Road. Technophiles or harassed *businessfolk* might be interested to know that free wi-fi is available to customers. This is another tentacle of the Bury St Edmonds empire of Greene King, so expect to see IPA and Abbot on handpump.

Sadly, the **Leap** and the **Green Dragon** in Downend both appear to be closed at the moment. Given the massive number of chimneys in the

area, surely there is scope for these two pubs to thrive?! On the plus side, the **Huntsman**, all but destroyed last year by a fire allegedly caused during the construction of an outdoor smokers' area, is back open. It is a one-bar carvery, owned by Marston's, and offers Pedigree, but also a lovely pint of Jennings Cumberland Ale from the same stable.

Move down to Queen Square and you'll find the **Hole In The Wall** much changed from its former Beefeater days (and was it a Bernie Inn before that?). Anyway, these days offering Taylor Landlord on handpump. It is the first pub in Bristol for which we have received an update from its PR company! Thanks to Laura at Haslimann Taylor.

In Fairfax Street, the pub formerly known as the Prince Rupert, the Rat & Carrot, and Christopher's Café Bar among others, now basks in the monicker of the **Bliss Café And Bar**. Sadly no real ale when I visited, but we can hope.

Toni and Martyn Clarke down at the **Ship Inn** in Redcliffe are doing very well since last summer's refurbishment. Functions, skittles, karaoke, live music, hog-roasts, you name it, they do it here. Also offering Bath Gem and a changing guest. Very handy when visiting 'The Goodliest Church In Britain' next door.

Word from Dan Carroll at the **Cat & Wheel** in Stokes Croft. He is currently offering Bass, Caledonian Deuchar's IPA, Courage Best, Mole's Scotties Wheel Ale, Theakston Old Peculier, Theakston Paradise Ale and guest ales as well.

Since the last issue, the **Kellaway Arms** in Horfield has reopened, still offering Courage Best. This is a former multiple Good Beer Guide entry, so we hope the new people make a go of it.

Up in Thornbury, the **Wheatsheaf** remains on good form, offering Bass, Greene King IPA and a splendid pint of St Austell Tribute, as well as 'Flat Rat', which is the pint most likely to take me into that mythical land known as *Ciderspace* where everything is funny but also blurred.

Just round the corner in the High Street, the **Knot of Rope** has been refurbished and now shows sport in its massive HD screen. Marston's Pedigree and Bitter are on tap to slake that footie-related thirst.

Another pub that looked doomed was the **Lawns** in Yate. Closed down, boarded up and with a planning application to turn it into flats. But these days it is open again, refitted and very popular with families. Try the Bass, the Greene King IPA or the Speckled Hen why don't you?

Lucy Brady has been in touch regarding the **Masons Arms** at Rudgeway on the Gloucester Road. Bass and Butcombe plus sometimes Spitfire on offer here.

The **Badminton Arms** out in Coalpit Heath changed management just as we went to press last time around. Robert Furmage is the genial host these days, still offering the full range of Wadworth beers.

In Filton, the **Fox Den** is offering a very nice pint of Butcombe Gold these days, and you don't have to work for the MOD to get in (though you may be outnumbered by them!). Butcombe Bitter and London Pride also on tap when last I ventured in.

Travellers heading north on the A38 towards Slimbridge and Gloucester will have passed the **White Horse**, nominally in Buckover. Next time, drop in. This is actually a Brain's house, were S.A. Bitter, Reverend James and Buckley's Best vie for your attention, while the Thatcher's Cheddar Valley sidles up behind you and gives you the sensation – as Douglas Adams nearly put it – of being hit over the head by a slice of orange, wrapped around a gold brick.

Duncan Shine

Are you a landlord, a regular or an occasional visitor with news of a pub. Please email [duncan.shine@britishpubguide.com](mailto:duncan.shine@britishpubguide.com) or [steve.plumridge@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:steve.plumridge@bristol.ac.uk) and we'll share the information and try and feature it in a future Pints West.

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# News from Bath Ales



FOR a long time Bath Ales have known that they brew great beers but now they can actually prove it having recently taken on their own full-time biochemist. Stuart Tucker is working alongside their brewing and bottling teams to provide all the facts, figures and fancy graphs needed to run an efficient modern brewery. Recognisable by his white lab coat and safety glasses, Stuart used to work for Yeo Valley Yoghurt but is far happier now he can drink his staff allowance rather than eat it with a teaspoon. It is their intention eventually to offer these new lab and biotraceability services

to other small brewers operating locally and hopefully help to raise the standard of real ale across the region.

The other excitement is the welcome return of Dark Hare. Brewed for the first time last year, the 4% stout took a break from the brewing calendar over Christmas and the New Year to make enough space for Festivity. Now back on the pumps and in bottle and tasting every bit as good as we remembered it.

Bath Ales Head Brewer, Gerry Condell, said: "For a beer that is so new there was an awful lot of fuss when it disappeared over Christmas. It seems that there are a lot of rather vocal dark beer enthusiasts out there and somehow they have all managed to get hold of my email address!"

## Art at the Bridge

THOSE of you who have recently wandered along to the Bridge Inn, on Passage Street, not far from central Bristol, may have noticed the new pictures. The various older football posters have been replaced recently by a vibrant set of abstract art paintings.

I have chatted with Luke Western, who is the artist as well as working at the pub. He has painted these acrylics on the theme of movement, and martial arts. I myself am not 'officially' qualified to judge them, but I find them to be vibrant, cheerful and colourful, and to be nicely in keeping the pub's character.

Luke has also exhibited his work in other pubs and bars around the city, and has received wide media interest. The paintings are for sale; ask at the pub for details. You can find out more about Luke's work on the web at [www.homegrownart.co.uk](http://www.homegrownart.co.uk), and you can also sign up for a chance to win a free painting.

If you haven't yet been to the Bridge Inn, you're missing out on a classic, which was profiled in issue 74 of Pints West last year. It is a tiny pub, on Passage Street, in Bristol City Centre, close to the (defunct) Courage Brewery. It is one of Bath Ales's pubs, and serves a choice of very fine ales, including some of their seasonal ales, plus food at lunchtimes. They have an area of seats outside too, so it is a good choice for a pint as the weather warms up into Spring.

Conor O'Neill



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### The Bridge Inn

*Passage Street, Bristol*

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# Scottish & Newcastle takeover! Pub news

## CAMRA claims consumer choice and competition will be hit

THE announcement recently that Scottish and Newcastle (S&N) is to be acquired and divided between Carlsberg and Heineken has been condemned by the Campaign for Real Ale. S&N's UK activities are set to be acquired by Heineken and CAMRA will be seeking urgent reassurances over the future of S&N's real ale interests.

Mike Benner, CAMRA's Chief Executive, said, "The relentless obsession with pushing global lager brands is a failing strategy in the UK beer market and this is fuelling consolidation and hitting profits hard. The inevitable result of consolidation is brewery closures, brand losses and less choice for Britain's consumers."

Mr. Benner added, "The deal raises many questions for real ale drinkers in the UK. What impact will this have on traditional real ales such as John Smith's and smaller regional brands such as Magnet? We will be seeking reassurances from the new owners that they will invest in their real ale brands and breweries to meet the demands of today's beer drinkers who are increasingly demanding real ale."

CAMRA is concerned about the impact the takeover could have on Waverley TBS, a major distributor of real ales, the contract

brewing of Theakston's Best Bitter and the partnership with the Caledonian Brewing Company.

It is expected that the takeover will be considered by the European Commission and CAMRA is calling for an in-depth review of competition and consumer choice in the EU beer market.

Mike Benner continued: "The lager-led approach of the global brewers has been flawed for years and consumers demand choice, quality and provenance. Fortunately the increasing number of small and independent real ale breweries in the UK are rising up to fill the void in the market where demand for local and regional beer continues to grow."

Bob Stukins, CAMRA's Director of Breweries Campaigning, said, "This is a sad day for British brewing. S&N was the last remaining major brewer in British hands and the deal is unlikely to show any benefits for consumers."

S&N's main real ale brand is John Smith's cask. However has also been brewing Theakston's Best Bitter on behalf of T&R Theakston, and owns 30% of Scottish brewery Caledonian's brands. CAMRA will be seeking assurances from the new owners that these enterprises will be preserved.

The new licensees of the popular Bristol real ale pub, the **Cornubia**, have advised us that they will be open more from now on. Previously some people have been caught out by finding the pub closed on a Sunday or during the day on a Saturday. The new opening times are 11am to 11pm Monday to Friday, noon to 11.30pm Saturday, and noon to 6pm on Sunday. Food should be available up to 9pm.

The **Bank** in John Street, central Bristol, is selling three beers, two of which have been from the Jollyboat brewery. The *Buccaneer* at 5.9% has been especially good!

The **Punch Bowl** in Old Market is closed and the front covered in scaffolding. It is believed that the people who run Bar@155 in Kingsdown have an interest in the Punch Bowl, and rumour has it that it may reopen as a restaurant.

The **Queen's Head** at Willsbridge appears to be closed and the lease for sale.

The **Spotted Cow** on Lodge Causeway in Fishponds has reopened after being closed for over a year. Recently it was selling Courage Best and Sharp's Doom Bar.

The **Barley Mow** in St. Philip's is boarded up and the freehold is for sale. St Philip's has lost 13 pubs in almost as many years!

## Ale's well at Backwell Beer Fest 2007

WITH the winter nights drawing in, Backwell needed something to cheer the troops – so we held our third ever Beer Fest on 8<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> November. There was no lingering under cool shady boughs at that time of year – come to think of it there wasn't much at most of last summer's beer festivals either!

As always we aim to show Backwell Village Club members and guests the best and we again acquired the CAMRA Champion Beer. Hobson's *Mild* went down a treat – though less so with the real mild enthusiasts who felt it wasn't, er, a mild! Interestingly we brought a barrel of Hobson's *Bitter* back from the brewery to keep its illustrious stable mate company and that too was excellent. So if you're around Cleobury Mortimer in glorious Shropshire and have room in your boot – we'd thoroughly commend this traditional brewer. Talking of names in lights, we also featured a real Hall of Fame with Harviestoun *Bitter & Twisted*, Timothy Taylor *Landlord* and Crouch Vale *Brewer's Gold* among the star offerings. Talking of decorations, special mention goes to Robinson's *Flash Harry* which covered our skittle alley and two experienced cellar folk with its barrel contents before settling down! The picture of the bloke in the raincoat on the pump clip was obvi-

ously what you wear you tap it, not some guy exposing himself. Wonder if they do a really lively one called *Deep Sea Diver* with a guy in a wet-suit?

Our beer festivals have genuinely turned us into champions of local ale, cutting down those beer-miles. Having Butcombe and Berrow regularly is excellent and we're delighted to add Wickwar to that list; we featured *Station Porter* and *Mr Perrett's Stout*. However we must, out of indulgence, mention an East Midlands visitor – Frog Island *Croak and Stagger* – a gorgeous rich dark wonder at 6.8% ABV, brewed near Northampton railway station. These ales were part of our new "Connoisseur's Corner" feature and proved a welcome success.

We pride ourselves on a good range of local ciders and once again the award-winning *Janet's Jungle Juice* and our closest local *Tick'n'um Tiddle* proved among the most popular. This year saw a new range of bottled world beers, both top- and bottom-fermented offerings. The Belgians found their way into many a cognoscenti's shopping basket, and unexpectedly an Italian lager called *Menabrea* proved popular, though one or two American bottled 'English-style ales' seemed to be almost as good as the real thing and only twice

the price!

Meanwhile, real ale sales continue to reach new heights at Backwell Village Club – as a members' club we are proud to say that real ale now sells so fast we are considering introducing a second rotating guest beer as we now regularly shift a firkin in less than one trading day! This can be directly attributed to promotion through our annual Beer Fest – oh, and of course a genuine interest in natural products by the entire staff team at BVC, headed by Steward Paul and Assistant Steward Lisa! So come on, all you landlords and club managers – just see what can be achieved by arranging your own festival....

So now it's time to put away the taps, spiles and drip trays, try one last time to get the *Flash Harry* stains off the ceiling, fondly remember the excellent music provided by Generation and Jonathon Payne, and the superb Sunday evening Quiz, not to mention those gorgeous pasties and Devon apple cake. We can be grateful it's not always like a rugby scrum in both bars as it was all through Beer Fest 2007 and look forward to Beer Fest 2008 already being eagerly anticipated by members and guests alike.

Who knows, maybe we'll even see you there?

John Merriman and Martyn Howell



# The Assembly

WHEN I first moved to old Blighty in 2001, my first abode was the (sadly) now closed General Elliott, on East Street in Bedminster. As far as real ale was concerned, the only decent watering holes nearby were the Coronation in Dean Lane (still good), the Imp in Alpha Road (never the same since Roy retired) or the Ship in Cathay, Redcliffe (reopened and improved of late.) East Street itself I considered a desert, with the Globe selling moderate Courage Best in an intimidating atmosphere, the Bell being a Wadsworth pub with no Wadsworth beer, and the Fussells being a rundown Greene King pub with only their IPA poorly kept and served.

Wind the clock on seven years. Nothing has changed with the Globe. The Bell is no more – now it's a (unfortunately usually empty) "café bar" called "Quinns". But the silver lining in this cloud of gloom is the Assembly, on the site of the Fussells. In spite of Greene King's efforts towards world domination, this pub was bought by the Barracuda pub company, and opened on 29th November 2006 under the excellent management of Ian Newbold and his wife, Tracy. Ian had managed the Restoration in Cheltenham previously, indeed he took that pub into the GBG.

The Assembly is branded as a "Smith & Jones" and has gone from strength to strength, with an emphasis on good food, good service and well kept, quickly turned over real ale. Ale has been so successful here, it has indeed astounded

the pub company management to such an extent that they have authorised extra handpulls and stillage to be installed. The range is normally Wells Bombardier, Bass, St Austell Tribute and Wye Valley Bitter.

However to "celebrate" the arrival of his two extra handpulls, Ian ran a successful beer festival from the 24<sup>th</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup> of January. In addition to his standard ales, XB and Old Peculier from Theakston's, HPA, Ruby Ale and Dorothy Goodbody Wholesome Stout from Wye Valley, and Proper Job and Tinnars Ale from St Austell were all available and enjoyed. A proper stillage with water-circulation cooling was obtained (no silly messy wet bar towels to be seen!) and the bar was temporarily modified to allow easy service. All festival pints were just £2. Trade was so good, even the regular ales started to run out!

A word about pricing: Barracuda Group run a discount card system – it's £2 for an "S&J card" and this gives substantial reductions on food and, more importantly, ale. The card lasts months, and indeed if you get in just when it's due to expire you may get a free replacement! All ale is now discounted – £1.60 a pint at the time of writing. Also at present, and for a limited time only, Theakston's Old Peculier is being stocked, particularly towards weekends, at £2.80 a pint, though only £2.20 with the S&J card. The limited time may not be so limited if people keep drinking it though, Ian is at pains to stress! He's also always open for a chat with real



Photo by Richard Brooks

drinkers, and is keen to be involved in CAMRA.

So good ale and a big welcome await you at the Assembly!

Mark Hanrahan

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## Commercial Rooms wins real ale award

NOT only did it make it into the the current edition of the Good Beer Guide, but the Commercial Rooms located in Corn Street, Bristol has been named by J D Wetherspoon as the joint winner of their Real Ale Pub of the Year competition. Pictured above is Steve Binns, manager of the Commercial Rooms, with the plaque.

Two other Wetherspoon pubs worthy of a mention by us for their attention to, and promotion of, real ale recently are the **Robert Fitzharding** in Bedminster and the **Berkeley** in Clifton.

Richard Brooks

# The Fox, Easter Compton

THE Fox is a well used two-roomed village pub in the middle of its village, about a mile from the Cribbs Causeway junction of the M5. It was originally two cottages, which are believed to have been built when the railway came (Pilning station stood about a mile away).

By 1917, when the photograph shown on the postcard was taken, the two had been merged into one and sold teas; then soon afterwards it became the Fox Inn.

The pub has been in the same family since 1984. They try to keep it as a typical English pub, with separate lounge and public bar. Each room has its own open fire, and there is also a separate skittle alley – the pub boasts three league teams.

Food is available at most times, but does not dominate the pub. About half the dishes are home-made.

As well as the two spacious rooms, there is a fair sized garden with a safe children's play area at the rear. The car park is simply enormous, although much of it is unsurfaced. When the current licensee moved in, there were pigsties too!

The family have plenty of experience in the pub trade – they previously ran the Swan at Tockington, the Mill House at Sea Mills, the Glasscutters in Knowle West (which is now flats), the Post Office Tavern in Staple Hill and the Park Tavern in Bath. The current landlord has been in the trade for 42 years so far.

The Fox was formerly a Georges house, then passed to Courage; following the Beer Orders in 1991 it was part of the Intreprenuer estate, and now belongs to



The Fox today (photo by Duncan Shine)

Enterprise Inns. It has always sold real ale, and in 1984 that meant Courage BA, Best and Directors. When Courage closed the Bristol brewery, the Fox started selling other beers; the current range is Exmoor Fox, Bath Gem and at busier times a guest beer, often from Newman's.

The Fox is the only pub in its village, and open countryside is adjacent at the rear of the pub. It is a very pleasant place to while away a summer afternoon, and a cosy one when the winter weather comes along.

The number 624 bus service operated by Wessex Connect stops outside.

*Norman Spalding*

## If you don't like hops ...

A LOT has happened since co-owner and brewer, Justin Hawke, a native of California, took over the running of the award-winning Moor Beer Company at the beginning of last year. They upgraded the brewery to ten barrels brewing capacity and expanded the range of regular beers, winning recognition and a cult following across the UK for their aggressively flavoured beers. The latest beer to join the range is JJJ IPA weighing in at a massive 9 per cent ABV.

Founded in 1996 in Ashcott, Somerset, the brewery gained national notoriety by winning the Champion Winter Beer of Britain in 2004 with Old Freddy Walker (7.3%). The beer continues to be a regular favourite, winning three awards in 2007. Five of their other beers also won awards last year, including Milly's (3.9%), which won the SIBA National Bronze Medal Mild, Revival (3.8%) which was the Supreme Champion for CAMRA Devizes, and Merlin's Magic (4.3%) which won the Best Bitter category at the Bath and West Wessex Beer Festival.

However, it is JJJ IPA which is currently

getting all the buzz. Justin was chatting with James Scranner and Josh Whitlam from the Queen's Arms, Corton Denham, (hence JJJ) about their shared passion for great beers and were lamenting the lack of intriguing IPAs in the UK. So they decided to brew their own version of heaven as a one-off. Double IPA was just not good enough – they wanted a triple IPA. Triple the gravity, triple the colour, and more than triple the hops. With nearly 700 kg of malt and over 11.5 kg of hops this beer is big in every sense. "The hop bed was so thick in the copper that it broke our pump when transferring it!"

The result is an amazing beer that is deep copper in colour, over the top in aroma and flavour, but somehow still remaining somewhat balanced. They liked it so much that upon racking they decided to make it a permanent part of the range, and launch it in style. The Queen's Arms hosted an amazing launch night, attended by a bus load of CAMRA members, locals, and the press.

Brewery Liaison Officer Kerry Pridham was enjoying herself. "It is absolutely stonking," she

said. "It is full of flavour. I like hoppy beers. For a full-strength beer, the alcohol is disguised. Other beers I have had, you cannot have another one. But they have got the reach just right."

Colin Heapy, who has been a real ale campaigner since 1974, was also very enthusiastic. "It is great for a British brewery to be doing this type of beer," he said. "There are strong beers but not along these lines. This is going back a long, long time. These days they tend to dumb beer down. People want something different. This is pushing the limits – how we brew beer and how we taste it. It is an extreme beer but it is what we want to be the norm."

Justin was quoted as saying, "Some of our beers have been called extreme, either because of high hopping or alcohol content. But the truth is that we won't drink bland, boring beer – and neither should you! We brew beers to dazzle your taste buds, not just to pour down your neck."

JJJ IPA is one of two Moor beers to be featured at the Bristol Beer Festival. As one of our members, Vince Murray, says: "If you don't like hops, don't even think about it!"



# Bath pub festivals

TWO brilliant pre-Christmas festivals to report on...

First, the **White Horse Festival** in Twerton (30th November to 3rd December) with music every night. Beer included Banks & Taylor Santa Slayer (4%), Bristol Beer Factory Milk Stout (4.5%), Highwood Jolly Ploughman's (5%), Hook Norton Old Hooky (4.6%), Milk Street Bobbled (6.5%), RCH Steaming Santa (4.3%), Stonehenge Rudolph (5%), Sharp's Nadelik (4.6%), Vale Grumpling Old Ale (4.6%), Teignworthy Beachcomber (5%) and a very unseasonal Hop Back Summer Lightning (5%). A brilliant selection of beers – in a pub that just seems to get better and better, and with a real community feel.

A place of refuge from the blight of pre-Christmas office parties and for those once-a-year revellers who can't hold their beer – the annual **Organic Beer Festival** at the **Royal Oak** in Twerton, held on 10-16 December, was a world away from the increasingly frenetic goings-on in the city centre. As a showcase for organic beers, it was second to none, and showed that real ale isn't behindhand in the drive towards organic production. Six breweries were represented – Butts from Hungerford, Little Valley from Hebden Bridge, Marble from Manchester, North Yorkshire from Guisborough, Organic Brewhouse from Helston and Spectrum from Wymondham in Norfolk. There were 37 beers

in total, along with top-notch live music every evening, from the likes of the Ash Mandrake Project, Dudlow Joe, Cavalier and James Hollingsworth. In terms of variety and rarity (only beers from Butts are normally seen in Bath and then very rarely), the Royal Oak festival left most other beer festivals standing. Speaking personally, the Marble range was a real revelation, but there were superb beers from all of the breweries represented.

The next festival at the Royal Oak is the eagerly-awaited Winter Beer Festival from 21 to 24 February (over by the time this *Pints West* hits the streets), followed by the **Royal Oak Folk Festival on 17-20 July**. Unlike most other folk festivals, you don't have to camp out in a muddy field or use a chemical toilet; the music's every bit as good and you get to drink terrific beer. Not much competition really.

The annual **St Piran's Day Festival at the Star** on the Paragon in Bath is on **5th March**. St Piran is the patron saint of Cornwall (where landlord Paul Waters hails from) so naturally Cornish beers will feature alongside the Bass and Abbey Ales. Definitely worth a visit.

The next beer festival at the **Raven** in Queen Street in Bath kicks off on **21st March**. Tim Perry, the landlord, is hoping to introduce some rarities to the city, including Thomas Sykes from Burton Bridge (10% ABV and 1<sup>st</sup>

prize winner in the West Midland Winter Ales competition). Tim, incidentally has recently joined that elite group of people who have appeared on a pump clip. The clip for Cottage Brewery's Plunge Bitter in the Raven shows Tim plunging through space on a mountain bike having launched off what looks like a ski jump. One way of building up a thirst.

At the **White Horse in Twerton** (featured in a double page spread in the latest *Flavour* magazine) there will be some special ales in for community pub week; plans are already being made for the **Summer Beer Festival on 11-14 July**, with 20+ beers and live entertainment every night.

Not beer festival news, but midway between the White Horse and the Royal Oak in Twerton, the **Golden Fleece** is increasingly worth a look these days, with two generally local beers served straight from the barrel supplementing those on the handpumps.

Andrew Swift

## For the dog

SEEN on the menu at Ye Olde George Inn in Christchurch, Dorset, just below the section listing children's meals: "And for the dog..... Pedigree Chum with biscuits £1.99".

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# Join CAMRA today and help us make a difference!

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OVER the last thirty-six years, CAMRA, the Campaign for Real Ale, has been campaigning on all sorts of beer and pub issues. We have helped to save breweries and pubs, helped to introduce more flexible licensing hours, run numerous beer festivals, created the environment for new breweries to open and thrive ... but our work doesn't end there!

Research in February 2007 showed that we are losing more pubs now than ever before. A staggering 56 pubs close every month and CAMRA needs your help to campaign and save the pubs that are under threat from closure in the future before it is too late.

CAMRA now boasts over 90,000 members and we are striving to reach 100,000 members to help us with our current campaigns that include getting legislation that makes sure the consumer gets a full pint, reducing beer duty, promoting localism and supporting breweries and pubs.

By becoming a CAMRA member you can help to make a difference.

CAMRA membership represents great value. For just £20 a year, that is less than 39p a week, you can join our organisation and benefit from the following:

- **A monthly copy of our colour newspaper 'What's Brewing'** – this includes news on the pub and brewery industry, information on what is happening in your area, lists of CAMRA beer festivals around Britain, features on different real ale breweries, plus much more!
- **Free or reduced entry to over 150 CAMRA beer festivals**, including the Great British Beer Festival.
- **Discounts on CAMRA books** including our best selling Good Beer Guide.

○ **Discounted membership of the CAMRA Beer Club** – The CAMRA Beer Club has been set up to provide a home-delivery service to enthusiasts. As a member you will discover and enjoy a whole range of bottle-conditioned beers that are not widely distributed. All CAMRA members receive a £5 discount on each mixed case of 20 beers. For more information visit [www.camrabeerclub.co.uk](http://www.camrabeerclub.co.uk).

○ **The opportunity to become an active member of the organisation** – All members are welcome to attend branch meetings, socials, sign petitions to save pubs and breweries that are under threat from closure, and survey pubs and bars, etc. CAMRA membership means different things to different people.

○ **Complimentary Clubs** – These clubs are exclusive to CAMRA members and are free to join. Clubs currently running include Fuller's, Hook Norton, Everards and Woodforde's. Complimentary clubs offer members a variety of promotions including free pint vouchers, brewery trips, competitions and merchandise offers. Please visit [www.camra.org.uk/joinus](http://www.camra.org.uk/joinus) to find out more.

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If your friend or family member enjoys their beer and pubs then a year's CAMRA membership is the ideal present. Your present will consist of the benefits already mentioned earlier in this article and can be delivered to your address or direct to your friend or family member. If you want to find out more then please visit [www.camra.org.uk/joinus](http://www.camra.org.uk/joinus).

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# Gurt Lush - the new Avon Brewery

JUST as Pints West was about to go to press, we heard of the launch of a brand new local brewery.

Keith Smith contacted us to say that he and a colleague were setting up an all organic microbrewery in Bristol, and that they were just about ready to do a second trial brew of their first ale, which they are calling Gurt Lush.

Keith said: "We are intending to limit our environmental impact, and one of the ways in which we will be attempting to achieve this is by sourcing and selling as locally as possible."

The brewery is located at the old tram shed next to the City Academy, Lawrence Hill.

Keith went on to say: "I used to brew at the Bristol Brewhouse, but have been out of the industry and Bristol, and indeed the country, for a while. As a CAMRA member, I feel it is incumbent on those of us who are capable of increasing the choice and quality of the real ale available to ensure that we actively do so. Now, rather than doing my best by drinking vast amounts of the stuff, voting with my coin, as it were, I am taking another tack."

*Avon Brewing Company, Unit 4, Lawrence Hill Industrial Estate, Bristol, BS5 9LT. Telephone: 01179553353.*

SP



# It takes all sorts to campaign for real ale

## Join CAMRA today...

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I enclose a cheque for .....

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# The Frome Tunnels

I'D heard about the network of tunnels under Frome a couple of years ago, when they featured on a local TV programme, and was keen to go on one of the guided tours run by the group of volunteers who have taken upon themselves the task of mapping and clearing the tunnels. When I found out that two of the tunnels were accessed from inside pubs, I was even more determined to go along.

So it was that, one damp Saturday morning in January, I turned up, along with a group of about 15 others, equipped with welly boots and a torch, outside Frome library. We were issued with hard hats, asked to sign a disclaimer and given a quick briefing. The four organisers explained that the first part of the tour would be wet and slippery – indeed, they had gone on a recce earlier that morning to check that river levels, which had risen to record heights earlier in the week, had fallen sufficiently to allow us access to the first tunnels.



An old photo of the houses on the bridge at Frome

We set off, a band of intrepid explorers, hard-hatted and welly-booted, past Saturday morning shoppers, until we came to the back of WH Smith's. As an entry to the underworld it lacked a certain something, but, once through a narrow gate and, with the aid of a rope, down a very slippery river bank, the surroundings did start to appear authentically gloomy.

The bridge in the middle of Frome – over, appropriately enough, the River Frome – is something of an oddity, having a load of buildings on it. Once you get underneath it, it's odder still, with a veritable mishmash of vaults, arches, leats and tunnels added to the original medieval structure. There's also what looks like – and may well be – a paved Roman road leading down to what was originally a ford over the river.

Then came a short splash through a medieval tunnel, no more than four feet high, with water three inches deep flowing through it and displaced keystones jutting down from the roof. As it was underground, it was dark, and, as you were bent double, you couldn't shine your torch up to see the protruding stones. It was at this point I regretted wearing a backpack. Then, as my backpack hit one of the stones and I stumbled forward onto my knees, I regretted the fact that water was running into my wellington boots.

Fortunately, we didn't have to return the same way, heading along a much higher tunnel,

with the remains of a massive eleventh or twelfth century building – its purpose unknown – forming one of the side walls.

Back up the slippery bank and it was off to the **Wheaters** – otherwise known as the **Wheatsheaves** in Bath Street – for a drink and a trip into the cellar. The Wheatsheaves, one of the town's oldest pubs, has been transformed into a light, very modern-looking pub with a selection of four real ales, including Bath Ales Barnstormer. The cellars underneath this pub are extraordinary, part of them made up of buildings originally above ground level, before the road was built up, so it's as though you're walking in a lost subterranean world.

Then it was timewarp time as we headed up to the **Lamb & Fountain** in Castle Street. Although a substantial building, for the best part of a century it has functioned essentially as a cider house. Despite some alterations in the 1970s it retains a traditional two-bar layout, approached by a corridor with a jug-and-bottle hatch. Changes to the interior reflect the tastes of its customers, several of whom appear in paintings on the walls. It has been added to rather than stripped out and revamped, so that it remains essentially a prime example of a back-street country-town cider house from the early part of the twentieth century. Its preservation is due in large part to having what is claimed to be the longest-serving landlady in the country. It's built on the side of a hill and the picture window at the back has one of the most striking views over the rooftops of the town you're likely to get. Very much a locals' pub, with most of them drinking the excellent Rich's cider, if you want to see what a real Somerset boozer used to be like, then you should come here.



Inside the Lamb & Fountain

Its career as a cider house, however, is only the latest stage in an ongoing historical pageant stretching back over 500 years – maybe more. And Time Team like, after quaffing some of the local cider, it was down the stairs for a peek into the past. One floor down from the bar is, not surprisingly, the cellar. However, as I mentioned earlier, the building is on the side of a steep hill, so at the back of the cellar there is level access to a large garden. But that's not all. If you stand



Entering the Lamb & Fountain

outside the pub, you'll realise it's a very substantial building. Walking into the bar is a bit like entering a Tardis – only in reverse. Big building – tiny pub. Adjacent to the cellar are the substantial remains of an eighteenth or early nineteenth-century brewery and maltings, with an extensive malting floor. They have been untouched for many years, and items connected with brewing and malting are left lying around amid gardening tools and old beer adverts. The last record of brewing being carried out at the Lamb & Fountain is in 1904, when the building was put up for sale with a fully-equipped 3-quarter brewery.

That, however, does not exhaust the Lamb & Fountain's hidden treasures. One floor down again – and it's a case of sliding through a trap door and down a ladder for another journey back in time. Here are vaults dating back probably to the sixteenth century with a brick-lined conical icehouse. Filled with rubble for many years, this has recently been cleared out by a party of local volunteers. Castle Street, which runs past the Lamb & Fountain, has long been a back street, but until the eighteenth century it was one of the main routes into Frome, and the Lamb & Fountain was an important inn – hence the need for a supply of ice.

Standing in these vaults, two floors below twenty-first-century cider drinkers, is an evocative experience, conjuring up all sorts of reflections on the passage of time and the changes buildings like the Lamb & Fountain have seen – and the ideal way of building up a thirst.

Andrew Swift

To find out more about the Frome Tunnels and the Tunnels Tour, visit [www.frometunnels.co.uk](http://www.frometunnels.co.uk) or [www.askwhy.co.uk/frome/12frometunnels.html](http://www.askwhy.co.uk/frome/12frometunnels.html).



# PINTS WEST

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

**LETTERS:** please email any correspondence to: [steve.plumridge@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:steve.plumridge@bristol.ac.uk) or post it to:

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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](http://www.camrabristol.org.uk).)

- **Wed 12<sup>th</sup> March** - Branch committee meeting at the Cornubia, Temple Street, 8pm.
- **Thurs 13<sup>th</sup> March** - BADRAG meeting at the Cornubia, 8pm.
- **Wed 19<sup>th</sup> March** - Brewery trip to **Severn Vale Brewery**. Depart from the Cornubia at 7pm.
- **Wed 26<sup>th</sup> March** - Branch meeting, 8pm, at the Commercial Rooms, Corn Street, Bristol.
- **Wed 2<sup>nd</sup> April** - Brewery trip to **Milk Street Brewery**. Depart from the Cornubia at 6.45pm.
- **Wed 9<sup>th</sup> April** - Branch committee meeting at the Old Fish Market, Baldwin Street, 8pm.
- **Thurs 10<sup>th</sup> April** - BADRAG meeting at the Inn On The Green, 8pm.
- **Wed 23<sup>rd</sup> April** - Branch meeting at Horts, Bristol, 8pm.
- **May** - See the 'Mild Month Activities' article elsewhere.
- **Wed 14<sup>th</sup> May** - Branch committee meeting at the Cornubia, 8pm.
- **Wed 28<sup>th</sup> May** - Branch meeting at the Naval Volunteer, King Street, 8pm.

# Beer festivals

- **Star Inn, Bath** - St Piran's Day Festival on 5th March.
- **White Lion, Bristol city centre** - March 7th to 9th.
- **New Inn, Priddy** - March 12th to 16th.
- **Hillgrove, Kingsdown** - Irish real ale festival for St Patrick's from 13th to 17th March.
- **CAMRA Bristol Beer Festival, Temple Meads** - Friday 14th & Saturday 15th March.
- **Reckless Engineer, Temple Gate** - Friday 14th & Saturday 15th March.
- **Raven, Bath** - 21st March.
- **Bag O'Nails, Hotwells** - Thursday 17th to Sunday 20th April.
- **Victoria, Clifton** - St George's festival from 23rd to 27th April.
- **CAMRA Chippeham Beer Festival, Studio Hall, Olympiad** - 25th & 26th April.
- **Cross Keys, Rode** - Friday 25th to Sunday 27th April.
- **Portcullis, Clifton** - 1st to 5th May.
- **Bear of Rodborough, Stroud** - Easter Real Ale Festival, Friday 9th to Sunday 11th May.
- **Bradford-on-Avon RFC** - Friday 9th to Sunday 11th May.
- **White Horse, Twerton** - Summer Beer Festival, 11th to 14th July.
- **Royal Oak, Twerton** - Folk Festival from 17th to 20th July.
- **Miners Arms, St Werburghs** - Summer Beer Festival, 21st to 25th August.

# Weston diary

- **Wed 19<sup>th</sup> March** - Beer and Skittles evening at The White Hart, Palmer Row. 8.30pm sharp start.
- **Wed 16<sup>th</sup> April** - Yatton Crawl. Train from Weston at 19.48. Train back leaves Yatton at 23.25 (summer timetabling permitting). Will be visiting The Railway Inn, The Prince Of Orange, The Butchers Arms and The Market Inn.
- **Wed 21 May** - Red Admiral, Alexander Parade. 8.30pm onwards.

**Non-members welcome at the above events.**

# Weston contact

Tim Nickolls: **01934 644925** (evenings) or email [tim.nickolls@virgin.net](mailto:tim.nickolls@virgin.net)

# Bath & Borders

See centre pages for forthcoming events of the Bath & Borders branch.

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# Wickwar's Station Porter named Champion Winter Beer of Britain

IT'S great news for a local brewery as Station Porter from Wickwar in Gloucestershire is named as the Supreme Champion Winter Beer of Britain 2008 by a panel of judges at CAMRA's National Winter Ales Festival in Manchester.

The 6.1% ABV porter is described in CAMRA's 2008 Good Beer Guide as: "A rich, smooth, dark ruby-brown ale. Starts with a roast malt; coffee, chocolate and dark fruit then develops a complex, spicy, bittersweet taste and a long roast finish."

At the announcement, Steve Prescott, organiser of the National Winter Ales Festival congratulated Wickwar on its victory. He said, "It's great to see a porter winning the Supreme Champion Winter Beer of Britain competition as this beer style has been in danger from disappearing from the British pub. I sincerely hope people will be inspired to try more porter on the back of Wickwar's victory."

On hearing the news, Kevin Newbould, Wickwar's key accounts director said, "We are very pleased to have been voted the best winter beer in Britain and delighted that everybody feels the same way about this wonderful beer as we do. Let's hope we see a resurgence in people trying more porters in the near future."

Wickwar's founder and managing director, Ray Penny said, "What a fabulous start to our year; this couldn't have come at a better time. I would like to thank the whole team at Wickwar, as they all responsible for the way all of our beers reach the drinker, but in particular our head brewer, Philip Downes."

Although crowned as Champion Winter Beer of Britain, Wickwar Station Porter should actually brewed all year round. It usually pops up in local Wetherspoon outlets, and of course at Wickwar's own pubs, the White Lion in the centre of Bristol, and their recent acquisition, the Plough at Bradford Leigh. Other pubs in Bristol, Bath, Weston-super-Mare, Gloucester, Cheltenham and surrounding areas have also taken the plunge and stocked the beer.

We can fully expect to see it appearing in a lot more places now the word is out about want a wonderful beer Station Porter is. So look out for it in the good real ale pubs near you.

And to all you good pub landlords out there, if you haven't tried it yet, do give it a go and see what you've been missing.

Don't be put off by the strength – at 6.1% it is less than 1% stronger than a certain "premium" lager found in many pubs and bars, and once you have tasted it you realise that it doesn't drink anything like a 6.1% beer, but all the complex elements are there.

The Silver award went to Robinson's Old Tom and the Bronze to Hop Back Entire Stout.



Wickwar managing director Ray Penny and head brewer Philip Downes celebrate Station Porter's success



Beer style descriptions taken from CAMRA's *Dictionary of Beer*:

**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.

**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.

**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.

## The results in full

### Supreme Champion

**Gold:** Wickwar, Station Porter  
(Wickwar, Gloucestershire)

**Silver:** Robinson's, Old Tom  
(Stockport, Cheshire)

**Bronze:** Hop Back, Entire Stout  
(Salisbury, Berkshire)

### Category winners

#### Old Ales & Strong Milds

**Gold:** Purple Moose, Dark Side of the Moose (Porthmadog, Gwynedd)

**Silver:** West Berkshire, Maggs

**Magnificent Mild** (Thatcham, Berkshire)

**Bronze:** Highland, Dark Munro  
(Birsay, Orkney)

#### Stouts

**Gold:** Hop Back, Entire Stout  
(Salisbury, Berkshire)

**Silver:** Spitting Feathers, Old Wavertonian (Waverton, Chester)

**Bronze:** Spire, Sgt. Pepper Stout  
(Chesterfield, Derbyshire)

#### Porters

**Gold:** Wickwar, Station Porter  
(Wickwar, Gloucestershire)

**Silver:** E&S Elland, 1872 Porter  
(Elland, West Yorkshire)

**Bronze:** Acorn, Old Moor Porter  
(Barnsley, South Yorkshire)

#### Barley Wines

**Gold:** Robinson's, Old Tom  
(Stockport, Cheshire)

**Silver:** Durham, Benedictus  
(Bowburn, Co Durham)

**Bronze:** Mighty Oak, Saxon Song  
(Maldon, Essex)