



CAMPAIGN
FOR
REAL ALE

THE BI-MONTHLY REGIONAL
MAGAZINE FROM LST CAMRA

Free



L.A.S.T. Orders Edition 30 June/July 2010

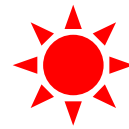
This issue ...



Beowulf Brewery Bash



Rhine Ramblings



Ales In Wales

This is the bi-monthly newsletter of the Lichfield, Sutton and Tamworth branch of CAMRA.

Contact us at

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or see

www.LSTCamra.org.uk

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The CAMRA newsletter for
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Coleshill, Kingsbury and Polesworth

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Tales of Ales in Wales

A recent trip took me to Wales where the Breconshire brewery tap in Brecon beckoned and so in the **Boar's Head** I had the softly hopped *Welsh Pale Ale* with its imaginative pump clip (pictured). This was followed by *Golden Valley* with its toffee-ish maltiness and citrus flavours, then *Cribyn* with its mix of English hops giving it a floral aroma and tangy hop taste. From Brecon I continued to Ystalyfera in Glamorgan which is home to the Bryncelyn brewery tap **Wern Fawr** which I visited in the evening having secured a pub B&B a ten minute walk away. The interior of the bar (pictured) has a fascinating collection of mining artefacts from



a long gone era when coal was king in the Welsh valleys. Four of the brewery's Buddy Holly themed ales were available so to see what I've been missing I started with an *Oh Boy*, a fruity and hoppy beer before sampling a *Buddy Marvellous* which was what the friendly locals must have thought as most of them were drinking it, it was akin to a hoppy mild. *Holly Hop* was pale and hoppy and the darker *CCH Bitter* was malty, fruity and citrusy and my last beer of the day.



After a hearty fried breakfast the next morning

I headed for Aberystwyth stopping off at Llangrannog, pictured below, a quaint coastal village. In the **Ship Inn** I had *Madog's Ale* from Purple Moose followed by another welsh offering *Celt Golden* from the Celt Experience brewery. I savoured the marmalade notes and tangy hoppiness of this beer before continuing on to Aberystwyth where I sorted a sea front B&B before checking out the town and its pubs. With its castle, cliff



and steam railways, promenades, narrow streets and other attractions it is well worth a visit. Dolphins are regular visitors and can often be seen cavorting in

Tales of Ales in Wales cont.

the sea. In the **Ship & Castle** I had *Preservation Ale* from Castle Rock and the contrasting *Sadlers Mud City Stout* from the four ales on offer. A rumbling stomach took me to the Wetherspoons **Yr Hen Orsaf** at the railway station to take advantage of their Tuesday steak club. I opted for the hearty mixed grill and a pint of Phoenix *Double Gold* for the grand sum of £6.99. The food was excellent as was the Phoenix beer with its juicy malt and hop balance. **The Belle Vue Royal Hotel** situated on the seafront was where I enjoyed two pleasant but unremarkable beers, *Cwrw* and *Spring Fever* from the Evan Evans brewery whilst watching the waves breaking and the setting sun.



Didn't I have a lovely time the day I went to Bangor and enjoyed a stroll on its impressive Victorian pier and the views of the Menai Straits as well as some ales in the local pubs. In the **Tap & Spile** which overlooks the pier I enjoyed a beer, the dark and roasty *Midnight Stout* from Woodlands. A short walk away was the **Mostyn Arms** where the floral and hoppy *Snowdonia* from Purple Moose hit the mark. Into town next and the JDW **Black Bull** where Butcombe *Blonde* and some food went down well before I moved on. I decided to paw at the **Fat Cat** cafe bar for my final ales in Wales. The beer here was purr-fect

with two Purple Moose offerings. *Snowdonia* (previously mentioned), and *Dark Side Of The Moose* with its darker, toasted grain flavours balancing the hop bite. The Fat Cat is not in the Good Beer Guide but deserves to be in my opinion as on a previous visit a year before the same local ales were featured and were the cat's whiskers.

Time to head for home to give my liver some relief but not just yet as to break my journey I went to Whitchurch in Shropshire and the **Old Town Hall Vaults** and enjoyed the dark and fruity *D&B Porter* from Backyard. Continuing on and over the border into Staffordshire, I called in to the **Swan** in Stone for the citrusy and hoppy *Stone Cutter* from the Lymstone brewery, as was my next beer *Cobble Stone*. This was darker with a candy sugar maltiness and hop finish and my final beer on this enjoyable tales of ales trip.

Eric Randall

Young members: for our regular fortnightly social events, please visit our facebook page; look for

Lichfield, Sutton and Tamworth CAMRA Young Members Group

Full Centurion

It's the end of March, and we're still handing out prizes from last September's beer festival – better late than never! Last year's Silver prize went to Kinver Brewery for their far-too-drinkable *Full Centurion*. At 10% this is twice the strength of their regular *Half Centurion*, hence the name. Fest organiser Chris Fudge is pictured left handing out the award to Kinver partners Ian Davies (centre) and Dave Kelly (right). One of these brewers is depicted on the pump clip for *Half Centurion* below – maybe you can guess which one!



Dave and Ian are no stranger to prizes, and indeed they've recently come back from Manchester with a Silver for *Over The Edge* (7.6%) in the Barley Wine category of the Champion Winter Beer of Britain.

Kinver has been going now for over five years, and as we turned up they were making the 500th brew, a 5% beer with the subtle name *Five Hundred Beers*. We look forward to the next five hundred!



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Brews News



BEOWULF
BREWING COMPANY

You should now be seeing the regular summer offerings from **Beowulf**: *Wuffa* at 4.5% and *Gold Work* at 5.1%. While most of Phil's beers are either light or dark, his latest beer aims to be a bit more middle-of-the road: *Folded Cross* at 4.3% is a deep gold ale. This was made at the request of a group of Staffordshire JDWs, but may become a regular beer if demand remains high. The name refers to one of the items of the Staffordshire Hoard, a flat gold cross which became rather crumpled over the years!

Rob Greenway of **Blythe Brewery** reports the excellent news that *Staffie* has won Gold in the Best Bitter category of the West Midlands Beer of the Year, as judged at the recent Stourbridge Camra beer festival. This means that *Staffie* will go forward to the overall 2010 Beer of the Year competition, usually held in December at the **Bartons Arms** in Birmingham.



The **Waterfront** pub at Barton Turns Marina (at Barton-under-Needwood, near Burton) now has two special Blythe beers on full time. They were already taking *Marina Bitter*, a 4.2% amber brew, but have now added *Barton Pale*, a light 3.8% ale. The Waterfront is well worth trying out, find it via the DE13 8DZ postcode. Blythe beers are also on regularly in Rugeley, at the **Yorkshireman** and **JDW Plaza**.



Church End brewery continues its Shakespeare theme; June should see *Tempist*, while *For Puck's Sake* is the pun-tastic July brew. Strength and style for both are yet to be decided. They will also be brewing a special beer for the Warwick Folk Festival, which takes place 23-25th July

When something wacky is going on, Church End are never far behind, and the latest bizarre cause they're backing is the 'Coastal Tractor Challenge'. This is the trek of Dave Neal, a regular in the **George & Dragon** at Stoke Golding. He will be driving his 37 year-old tractor 8,000 miles along the coast of Britain for charity. He will depart on July 15th from – of all places – Hinckley Taxi Rank, and arrive back at the **George & Dragon** after around 12 weeks. He will then be refreshed with a special Church End beer! The beer, as yet un-named, should be available from early July, and Church End will donate £3.50 per firkin to Dave's charity pot. To sponsor Dave, search for 'Coastal Tractor Challenge' on Facebook.

The tap hosts a number of events, including a Classic Bike Show on June 26th, and an outdoor arts display on two consecutive weekends, 10/11th and 17/18th July.

Cask ales are on the up at **Tunnel Brewing**, due in part to brewer Mike's daughter Emma coming in to help with the ever important tele-sales. The **Crown** in Nuneaton is now a regular outlet; there will usually be a Tunnel brew on the bar, or failing that, one in the cellar waiting to come on.



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Brews News cont.

Summer is making its mark. There will be a Tunnel beer tent at the Melton Mowbray Country Fair (27th June), and Tunnel will also be appearing at the Whitacres & Shustoke Show (see advert) on 31st July.

The Tunnel World Cup beer should be appearing around now. *Jabulani* – Swahili for “celebration” – should be a 4.4% golden bitter. Will the England team need a supply to celebrate anything?

The search for a Tunnel pub goes on. Bob and Mike are frustrated by how long it’s taking but are determined to get a tap.

Scott Barnett at **Quartz Brewing** reports that both the Swinfen and Kings Bromley breweries are running flat out. Cask sales are buoyant and the Kings Bromley brewery is just about coping; the real pressure point is bottled beers which are done at Swinfen. Scott is looking at options, one of which is to take another unit at Kings Bromley and move some bottling there; a nice problem to have in what are supposed to be dire economic times!

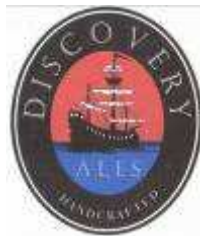


The last special beer, *Crusade*, went down very well; a similar beer may be considered in the future. For now however the priority is their World Cup beer; *Quartz Diamond* – with a nod to the diamond mines of South Africa – will be a 4% golden ale with solely English hops. And if you fancy drinking this at home whilst watching the tournament, you can get it in five litre ‘mini-casks’ which have been specially done out in World Cup colours!

The date for the next Swinfen beer festival has been decided, it will run from 1st-3rd October, and in keeping with ‘Octoberfest’ will have a Germanic theme.

Scott and Julia are also looking for their first pub, for which they already have a small group of investors. One pub bid has recently fallen through – seemingly thwarted by dreaded property developers – but they carry on looking.

Congratulations are due to Simon Cox of **Discovery Ales**, whose *Davy’s Glow* won bronze at the 2009 Tamworth Beer Festival. As is not unusual, we’ve been a bit slow in handing out the awards! Simon is pictured (right) receiving the award from branch chairman Dave Backhouse (left) during a meeting at the **Dog Inn** at Nether Whitacre.



Simon is only a part-time brewer, but has certainly found his feet as far as beer quality goes. He lives in our branch area in Coleshill, though the small 2½ barrel brewery lies just outside the branch at a farm in Little Packington. Look out for his beers!

Beer Snippets

Raise a hollow laugh for the latest Carlsberg UK advert for Tetley’s. Carlsberg UK say they’re “committed to cask ale and is investing £3 million behind the [Tetley’s] brand.” Presumably this means £3 million in advertising the stuff, as they’re happily moving the brewing end of things down to Banks’s in Wolverhampton.

It’s a long standing joke that Anti-Social Behaviour Orders or ASBOs were introduced so that our disadvantaged youngsters would at least be able to get some sort of qualification. Bromsgrove in the West Midlands is the latest place to offer a new honorary set of letters to place after your name, with the award of a DBO or Drinking Banning Order. In a nationwide first, a Stoke Heath woman has gained this qualification, which bans her from drinking or buying alcohol in pubs and nightclubs, or from purchasing alcohol in shops and off licences, across England and Wales for two years.

But in less time than it takes to blow the froth off a pint, the same woman was back in court, this time for drunk and disorderly in a nightclub. In a comment which you suspect wasn’t quite fully thought out, district judge Bruce Morgan said: “A female with a record like this – it’s absolutely despicable and represents all that is rotten in society nowadays.” We hope that the beak didn’t mean that for a fella, well, it’s just par for the course.

Beer-flavoured ice cream? For once it’s not an April Fool, as Sheffield Hallam University student Anna Lowden has teamed up with Kelham Island brewery to produce the treat which will be available across the city. It is said to taste like the head from a pint of the Kelham flagship brew of *Pride of Sheffield*. So if you’re torn between an ice cream

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Beer Snippets cont.

and a pint of real beer on a nice summer's day, head up to the Steel City. I guess most of us will be staying put and opting for the pint!

Expect to pay more for a pint in Southampton on Tuesday evenings. Licensees in a part of the city are now co-operating to raise prices on Tuesdays in response to a spike in trouble on that day. How long before the local council starts to investigate these same licensees for price-fixing collusion?

An amazing bit of research by responsible drinking charity Drinkaware has found that one in 10 people plan on drinking 40 units of alcohol on a night out. A survey of 214 customers in the North West found that 15% of men and 4% of women said they intended to drink the equivalent of 20 pints during the evening. Even allowing for some boozier bravado, they're pretty shocking figures. It also suggests that pockets are deep or ale is cheap up Manchester way!

Another gruesome statistic is that 78% of 18-34 year-olds "pre-load" or drink at home before going out. Researchers Zolfo Cooper blame the trend on cheap supermarket alcohol, but also revealed the false economy of pre-loading. Apparently the average spend of pre-loaders is one-third higher than those who just go straight to the pub. Hardly surprising really – arrive at the pub stoked-up and your inhibitions go out of the window.

With the general election now over – sort of – we may see some movement on pub companies and brewers offering their tenants a "free of tie" ale option. All the main political parties committed themselves to pubcos either offering the option voluntarily or facing statutory regulation. It will be interesting to see whether any regulation is worth the paper it's printed on, as crafty pubcos will probably just allow the freedom but impose an extra per-cask premium for the privilege.

Meanwhile, the EU have ruled that the beer-tie can continue. This is good news for regional brewers like Adnams and Wells & Youngs, where beer sales to their tied estates are the backbone of the business. The Fair Pint campaign group had been lobbying for the removal of the tie, despite the potentially massive fallout for the brewing industry. When politicians start tampering with the beer world, it always seems to bring unintended consequences, so maybe we should welcome this lack of action by the EU.

Another thing to watch out for now that the election is over is how quickly it takes for the election promises to fade. All three political parties engaged in pledges, schemes and photo-ops to save British pubs and support the brewing industry. But with tough choices to come, the licensed trade may well get neglected or over-taxed.

And for reasons best understood by the supermarket lobbyists, don't expect any rapid government action to tackle supermarket pricing. The World Cup may well see many lager-boy fans drinking at home, with Asda currently top of the cut-throat league: 20-can cases of Stella-fizz for the equivalent of 58p a pint. This is estimated to be a £6 loss to the supermarket per case. We will gladly eat our words if our two-faced political cowards ever solve this lunacy by minimum pricing.

The Wetherspoons juggernaut rumbles on, with the national giant on track to double its pub estate over the next 12 years. The current 746 pubs should hit 1,500 around 2012,

Beer Snippets cont.

accompanied by a trebling of profits. It will be interesting to see where their next local acquisition is. Love them or hate them, many JDWs do a good job of promoting real ale, as well as the excellent voucher deal worth £20 a year to Camra members.

On a somewhat smaller scale, Joule's Brewery is also expanding its pub estate, with plans to add five or six to its existing fifteen pubs. They're also splashing the cash on the brand new brewery, due to open in the autumn after a £1.5m construction investment

It's time to bid farewell to Victorian superstar Sir Edward Elgar. The twenty pound notes featuring the Worcestershire composer will cease to be legal tender on 30th June, in favour of the higher-security Adam Smith notes. In May, around 5% of the £20 notes in circulation featured Elgar, so it's time to review your secret stash in the tea caddy or under the bed.



Hook Norton resident Gill Begnor has broken a world record where most won't have realised that such a record exists. Her 4hrs 54mins time for the London Marathon shaved 5 minutes off the previous record – for a woman dressed as a bottle! Crossing the finishing line also caused amusement for the crowds, as the seven foot costume was too tall to fit under the finishing line boards! The bottle costume weighed in at 12 pounds, and Gill was reported as saying that "the last 22 miles were the worst."

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Tipple Tattle

NORTH WARWICKSHIRE

The **Whitacres & Shustoke** Show (see advert) should be worth visiting – the Griffin will be supplying the bars, plus there'll be a Tunnel and Freedom beer tent.

Church End beers are proving a good seller in the **Bull** at Witherley; as a result, they're appearing more often of late. The other guest pump is also put to good use; Hook Norton *Bitter*, not common in these parts, was spotted recently.

Church End beers are also seen in the **Blue Lion**, tucked away within Witherley village. *Cuthberts* was spotted recently.

For a different local beer, head just up the road to the **Blue Boar** at Mancetter. They're sticking to a trusted formula, *Bass* plus a changing Tunnel beer.

And before we leave Mancetter, the **Plough** is always worth a go. You can never be quite sure what will be on; a recent snapshot saw GK *Abbot* and Adnams *Broadside* (often featured) plus Hook Norton *Bitter*.

The **Barge and Bridge** in Atherstone has re-opened. *Pedigree* is the sole cask ale at present, but a draught mild may be added. Food available, including a Sunday carvery.

STAFFORDSHIRE

The **Albert** in Tamworth has re-opened with a temporary manager while Marstons try to sell it.

The **Three Tuns** in Tamworth closed abruptly earlier this year, but we hear that Chris Cleary, owner of the neighbouring **White Lion**, has taken over the pub.

The town's newer JDW, the **Silk Kite**, put on a good display of milds for the promotional month of May, including examples from Rudgate, Beowulf, Caledonian and Titanic. The Beowulf mild was *Dark Raven*, but the Kite also had some *Chasewater* plus the not-to-be-missed *Dragon Smoke Stout*.

The **Pig and Bell** on Market Street in Rugeley has new incumbents. Greene King *Abbot Ale* was on, but it is not clear whether this is a regular as it was on promotion for St. George's Day. Watch out for some interesting decor inside, with lavender and light yellow painted walls!

Also in Rugeley, the **Britannia** was recently slated for closure and conversion into flats. It has a stay of execution, as a recent district council planning meeting agreed to extend the nearby conservation area to include the pub. This means that the pub cannot be bulldozed, but the building could still be renovated

Moving to Lichfield, the **Horse and Jockey** on Sandford Street is planning to run a mini beer festival during the Lichfield Festival in July.

The **Queens Head** has recently acquired a piano and would welcome any accomplished pianists out there to come along and 'tinkle the ivories' with all the old (and new!) favourites while enjoying a pint!

The **Duke of York**, Greenhill hosted a very successful beer festival at the beginning of

Tipple Tattle cont.

May. While the main bar served four ever-changing real ales, a stillage complete with cooling (right) had been set up in a back room, with an interesting choice of 29 ales (from micros near and far) plus 3 ciders and a perry. A tombola took place during the festival, raising around £700 for 'Help for Heroes'. On Sunday 6 June the Duke will be hosting a 1940's D-Day Event, including wartime memorabilia, sing-along to wartime songs on the piano, and wartime food menu. Customers in period costume will be most welcome!



On the 9-10th April, the Arts Association **Winter into Spring Beer & Wine Festival** was a roaring success while raising valuable funds towards the free July FUSE event being held from 9-11 July during the Lichfield Festival. Over 35 ales (with plenty of examples from local micros) along with ciders, perries, and wines were enjoyed in the attractive interior of Lichfield Guildhall.

The ever popular **Lichfield Real Ale, Jazz and Blues Festival** is taking place at the end of June; see fest listings for details.

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Visit to Beowulf Brewery

At 1pm on Saturday 17th April, several branch members arrived at Chasewater Country Park for an afternoon at the **Beowulf Brewery**. Some of us had taken the bus to Chasetown followed by the picturesque walk across the wild countryside in front of the Chasewater Reservoir and canal terminus. Due to the need for urgent repairs the reservoir is currently all but empty of water. In the mud were several people, some with metal detectors, presumably looking for another Staffordshire Hoard like the valuable treasure trove recently unearthed in a nearby field! The only treasure we were interested in was Beowulf!



On arrival, the owner Phil Bennett pulled us all a pint of *Folded Cross*, right, a dark amber bitter at 4.3%. Phil's wife, Claire then kindly invited us to indulge in a large offering of crusty rolls, cheese, and pickles. Once it was decided that all intended members had arrived, Phil, pictured left, showed us around the brewery and explained the brewing process.



Once the tour was complete, Phil opened some of his bottled beers and a sampling session commenced in which we expressed our approval in the form of tasting notes. The bottled beers included

Killer Stout at 7.9%, *Grendel's Winter Ale* at 5.8% and *Dark Raven* at 4.5%.

Sometime after 4pm we walked back to Chasetown and an inevitable mix up with the bus times resulted in us drinking more real ales in both the **Uxbridge Arms** (pictured left) and the **Junction**. Eventually the local drinkers did a fine job in putting us on the correct bus to Lichfield.



To finish I would like to extend my congratulations to Phil for being awarded Gold (*Finns Hall Porter*) and Silver (*Dark Raven*) in the 2009 Overall West Midlands Camra Beer of the Year awards handed out last Christmas. Note these are just two of many awards deservedly gained by Beowulf over the past years!

Dave Backhouse

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Bignall End, Hanley & Stone - Feb 2010

At 11am, thirty eight thirsty real ale drinkers boarded the 'Ace Travel' coach ready to visit some highly recommended ale houses in and around the Staffordshire Potteries area. Some of us had already indulged in a pre-arranged, full English breakfast at the Queens Head in Lichfield to provide a good foundation for the days toying.

On arrival at the first stop, Bignall End, some of the party started at the **Plough** while the rest were taken to the **Swan** at the other end of the village. Both pubs were nothing less than perfect, with a warm welcome, and a varied range of ales on tap, mainly from micros. The Plough (below, left) served excellent, home cooked food while the Swan served appetising bar snacks. I started at the Plough and tried Hydes *Original*, followed by Rudgate *Ruby Mild*. I then took the five minute walk to the Swan (below, right) and had a pint of Thornbridge *Wild Swan*.



At 2pm we headed off to the **Coachmaker's Arms**, below, in Hanley. Sadly this architectural gem of a pub is threatened with being bulldozed to make way for a new bus station complex. A national petition is seeking names to oppose the insane idea, but the biggest weapon so far is the recession! The development is currently on the back burner due to lack of funding. Inside this multi-award winning pub, *Bass* was on sale along with a range of six ever changing guest ales. I was more than impressed how quickly all thirty eight of us were served and managed to blend into the four small rooms and characteristic old 'Bass Pub' corridor! I tried a Hobsons *Mild* followed by an O'Hanlons *Rum Porter* both of which again, were in perfect form.



Bignall etc cont.

The final stop was the small town of Stone which was about eight miles on the way back towards Lichfield. We arrived at around 4pm and I provided maps for my fellow drinkers to pick and mix their own pub crawl! I made my way to furthest from the bus, the **Royal Exchange** which is a joint venture from the Everards and Titanic breweries. As well as Everards *Original* and three ales from Titanic, there were six guest ales on tap. I had an enjoyable pint of Titanic *White Star*, but when my glass was empty I opted to head back past the market place to try out the Grade II listed **Swan**, below. They were currently selling a guest



beer from Blythe Brewery and I knew I wouldn't be disappointed, unless of course the barrel was empty! Sure enough I thoroughly enjoyed a pint of Blythe *Ridware Pale* and decided to have another for the road! No such luck, the Blythe was no more, but at least the Whim *Hartington Pale* acted as a good understudy!

At 6pm we all boarded the bus (complete with red noses and rosy cheeks!) and were back in Lichfield well before 7pm ready for the evening session, though not in my case!

Dave Backhouse

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Atherstone Round-up

It's been quite a while since we took a proper look at the availability of the real stuff in Atherstone, so no time like the present!

Starting off at the **King's Head** on the canal, we find *Bass*, Everards *Tiger*, and a changing mainstream such as Shepherd Neame *Spitfire*. Food is offered here, and now is the time to enjoy the canal-side beer garden. Note the unconventional pub sign.

Heading back, the **White Bear** or Clock had cellar troubles last time we called, but usually offers beers like Everards *Tiger* or GK *Abbot*. Good pub grub available.

Moving towards the Market Place, the **New Swan** is a recent returnee to the real ale scene. Only one ale at present, and subject to change, but has included *Bass* and Tunnel beers. Also starting to offer daytime food.

The **Market Tavern**, Warwickshire Beer Company's first pub, offers six of their own ales, along with the puzzle of how to get in, as the recent refurb has left the central ex-front door still looking like a door! Occasional beer festivals. WBC's other Atherstone venue is **Bodicea's**, a reasonable stroll out on the Sheepy Road. Two or three WBC ales and also getting a reputation for food.

Sadly we have to say avoid the **Angel**, which doesn't know whether it's coming or going – even if there's a pump clip turned round, the beer is often not available or going off.

The plush **Red Lion** offers one or two Church End ales. Premium prices are charged, so do enjoy the opulent surroundings while you're there.

For significantly cheaper Church End, go to the **White Lion**, which seems to have *What The Fox's Hat* as a regular.

A stroll up the Coleshill Road brings you to the **Maid of the Mill**, whose name relates to the boarded-up Wilson & Stafford hat factory next door. *Brew XI* and GK *Abbot* in the Maid, plus a novel charity shop corner – books and videos, proceeds to the Poppy Fund.

Back into town for the recently re-opened **Barge & Bridge**, otherwise known as the Westwood House around ten years ago. *Pedigree* only at present but it's early days yet.

The **White Horse** offers *Bass* and sometimes other ales such as *Brew XI* and Wychwood *Hobgoblin*.

The **Hat & Beaver** (near the long-gone Austin Aspden hat factory) is a stronghold for *Bass* and *Brew XI* plus a changing guest which is often local and often interesting. The big-screen TVs can be intrusive but it's a popular spot for sports.

The timber-framed **Old Swan** is the town's best looking pub, and has offered good Banks's *Mild* and *Bitter* since time began – or so it seems.

The **Black Horse** across the road has been refurbished with an emphasis on food. Usually two GK beers, the ubiquitous *Abbot* and *IPA*.

We finish at the **New Dolphin**, offering one or two well-priced guest ales. They've included GK *Speckled Hen* and Quartz *Crusader*. This is a comfy pub with a generally good layout, but the unfortunate goggle-box placement means that the bar is sometimes crowded with open-mouthed TV gawpers – worth elbowing through for a drink!

At the time of writing, the **Wheatsheaf**, **Lounge** and **Three Tuns** were keg only.



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Rhine Ramblings

Top-fermented beer tapped straight from wooden casks – it's almost an Englishman's birthright. Sadly though, with a few proud exceptions, you have to go to certain parts of Germany to get this!

Top-fermented beer is not that common in Germany, but two cities on the Rhine are particularly well known for their ales: Düsseldorf with its reddish brown *Altbier*, and Cologne (Köln), with its golden *Kölsch*. And as both cities are less than 30 minutes from each other on an excellent train service, they're good long-weekend fodder!

Aficionados will disagree, but for the most part I find *Kölsch* pretty dull. Pale in colour and religiously served in dinky 20cl glasses to ensure "freshness", you might expect it to be bursting with hop freshness, often absent. But there are some star beers in Köln, and more importantly, plenty of superbly atmospheric pubs which somehow make even a standard *Kölsch* taste great!



One of the most attractive bars is the **Pfaffen**, right, featuring beautiful modern stained glass with lots of colourfully humorous themes (left); also some splendid woodwork. Friendly service and clean, spritzy *Kölsch* from one of the smaller breweries.



Just down the road, and featuring beer from the similarly named brewery of Paffgen is the **Bierhaus en d'r Salzgass**. This is another modern masterpiece, featuring a number of well furnished rooms, and a splendid backdrop to the main bar, pictured right. Note the wooden casks to the right of the bar, a very common sight. Here you can snack on that local delicacy, *Kölscher Kaviar*. Be warned though that nothing fishy is going on – the Kaviar is excellent Blutwurst – black pudding!



The brewery tap, **Päffgen**, is also worth a visit. It has a superbly traditional interior, with a number of wood paneled rooms leading off from the main servery, where the wooden casks are lined up for tapping.

When inevitably you tire of *Kölsch*, the **Biermuseum** is a pleasant diversion. Here you'll find a wide range of both draught and bottled beers, from Germany and further afield. Bocks feature heavily, and you can also get the ultimate antidote to *Kölsch* on draught – the stunning *Aecht Schlenkerla* smoked beer from Bamberg!

Another *Kölsch*-free zone is the **Braustelle**, an intimate and very friendly brewpub out in the sticks. This offered what is probably the most cloudy wheat beer on the planet, as well as the only *Altbier* brewed in Köln, plus a lovely 7.8% bock style beer.

Rhine Ramblings cont.

If your palate gets acclimatised to *Kölsch*, then you will be blown away by your first *Altbier* on arriving in Düsseldorf! Dark and lightly fruity with a long bitter finish, there's a lot more going on. The city's old town is a splendid place to drink it. Here you will find some fabulously traditional pubs, where the resounding thud at a neighbouring table indicates the arrival of yet another *Schlachtplatte* or Slaughterplate – a hefty selection of porky bits including black pudding and liver sausage, topped off with potato and sauerkraut. Food and beer are serious topics here!

A good place for both *Schlachtplatte* and *Alt* is the **Füchschen** or Little Fox, right. This is a comparatively modern building – as most are in Düsseldorf due to a little altercation in the 1940s – but a traditional boozier has been lovingly re-created inside. The gentleman's toilets feature a rare and strange facility which we may feature in a future issue of *Last Orders*, if we can convince ourselves that it won't put you off your beer!



Beer direct from the wooden cask is extremely common in the best pubs of Köln and Düsseldorf, and the most in-your-face place to see this is in the tap room of the **Uerige**.



You may need to shift your feet quickly as another cask rumbles through the room, to be hoiked onto the raised bar, left, in a three-man operation. As the beer is served directly, it must be 'bright' (i.e. run off the yeast before it goes into the cask), but it's served without any applied gas, so we'll assume it qualifies as real ale. Either way, casks never last very long! The Uerige is a sprawling, multi-room pub, full of character.

Other must-do *Alt* pubs are the **Schlüssel** and the **Schumacher Stammhaus**, both of which are modern without being soulless. The **Schiffchen** is no longer a brewery tap but deserves honourable mention because of the superb food – *Rheinischer Sauerbraten*, gorgeous marinated beef, which made a welcome change from pork!

You may even get fed up of *Alt*, in which case a short hop into the suburbs to the **Johann Albrecht** is well worth it. This farmhouse-style building, below, features a large conservatory containing the brewery. The beer fonts are unusual, resembling miniature whisky stills. The unfiltered *Messing* is plain lovely, pale and bitter but with a toffee edge coming through in the finish. The *Kupfer* is good too – copper coloured as the name implies, with gentle bitterness playing second fiddle to a burnt maltiness. Here you will see a phrase which pops up in many a German brewery, "Hopfen und Malz, Gott erhalt's", meaning roughly "God save hops and malt." Presumably it would have completely bugged up the rhyme if they'd tried to fit yeast into it as well!



D&D Works Wonders

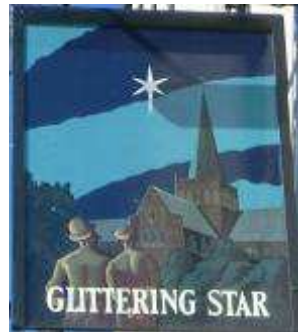
Darlington and Durham on recent visits did for us what Double Diamond claimed to do in our early drinking days and worked wonders. We did Darlington first starting our day's drinking in the JDW **William Stead** with the hoppy Naylor's *Merlins Revenge*. The **Darlington Snooker Club** where up to four real ales are available was our next stop. Here I sunk the black, this being Yorkshire Dales *Stout Of This World*. The **Britannia** with its colourful sign was where we each had a piddle (the first of many) followed by a *Frosty Piddle* from Wyre Piddle brewery. Next up was the **Tap and Spile** with its basic, bare boards interior and Northumberland *Original Ale* followed by the rich and roasty Hambleton *Nightmare Stout*.



In our second Wetherspoons visited, the **Tanners Hall** we had a *Trashy Blonde* apiece (just our types) from the revered BrewDog whose assertively hoppy beers are always a delight, followed by the dark and delicious Herold *Black Challice*. There wasn't a catch in **Number Twenty-2** as White Boar *Bitter* and *Curlews Return* from Allendale were available and duly sampled. We were feeling religious and made the **Quakerhouse** our next stop and from their range of nine ales had Consett *White Hot* then Blackwater *Salsa* which

had a delightful elderflower aroma and taste complementing the hop bite. On tap at the **Old Yard Tapas Bar** was Copper Dragon *IPA* and our second sample of the floral, citrusy and hoppy Consett *White Hot*. The **Glittering Star** which had an impressive sign was our last port of call in Darlington. This was an unpretentious Sam Smiths pub with its *Old Brewery Bitter* selling for a mere £1.49 a pint, cheaper than Wetherspoons!

A short train ride took us to the beautiful cathedral city of Durham where in the **Water House** we enjoyed a wowie from Maui, a Hawaiian *Coconut Porter* with toasted coconut flakes amongst its ingredients and a wonderful aroma and coconut taste complementing the dark roasted malt flavours.



This wonderful and unusual beer was one of the International beers featured in the excellent range of beers, pictured left, that were available in Wetherspoons across the country at their most recent real ale festival. A pleasant walk past the Castle and Cathedral took us to the **Victoria Inn** where we were entertained by one of the local characters whilst enjoying Consett *Red Dust* and Hambleton *Stud*. We finished our days imbibing in Durham at the **Shakespeare Tavern** with a *Flying Dutchman* from Caledonia before returning to Newcastle where for the next three days we would be serving and sampling beers at their beer festival. There's no rest for the wicked!

Eric Randall



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Booze taxes explained

The last budget of the Labour government was widely held to be very booze-unfriendly, but what did it actually mean for drinkers? There was lots of huffing and puffing by the beer trade, and particularly by the cider producers, but how do the numbers stack up?

As we highlighted last issue, alcohol taxation is a dog's breakfast, but the following table illustrates how tax has changed on a unit of alcohol (i.e. roughly a half-pint of medium strength beer).

Drink	ABV	Per unit duty pre Budget	Per unit duty post Budget
Spirits/liqueurs	22% or more	22.6 p	23.8 p
Beer	all strengths	16.5 p	17.3 p
Still wine	12%	17.8 p	18.8 p
Sparkling wine	12%	22.8 p	24.0 p
Still Cider/Perry	6%	5.3 p	6.0 p
	8%	5.9 p	6.8 p
Sparkling Cider/Perry	6%	34.5 p	36.3 p
	8%	25.9 p	27.2 p

Taking the case of cider, the above means that the duty on a pint of 6% Mad Apple will go from 18.1p to 20.4p. If you include VAT (since the clever old tax man charges both duty and VAT) then the net increase is 2.7p a pint; not welcome for sure, but neither will it sink the Titanic. Cider makers were screaming about a "13% increase", but that doesn't mean a 13% increase in the price of a pint, it means a 13% increase in the relatively tiny duty on cider: 5.3p to 6.0p (13% increase) is still a smaller pence increase than the corresponding increment for beer (16.5p to 17.3p). So you judge – were cider makers really that badly done by? In any case, the cider increases are on hold.

What about beer then? The total duty increase on a pint of 4% beer is 2.3p, for a 5% beer it's 2.8p. Bear this in mind when industry pundits make the usual statements along the lines of "this will mean an increase of 10p/20p at the pumps". What this really means is "we can hide our increases behind the tax rises." Misleading percentages are again quoted – the government may have put the tax component up by 5%, but if prices at the pumps also rise by 5%, then it means that others have had a 5% share too.

We don't mean to be complacent about tax rises – they will always be unwelcome, particularly when businesses are struggling. Pubs are closing and beer volumes are dropping. Tax on beer in Britain is now eleven times higher than Germany. The UK taxman takes an enormous slice of the profits generated by the drinks industry.

But we do need some honesty and less hysteria in the way that taxation increases are reported. One thing's for sure, it won't be long before the next tax hikes!

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Want to contribute?

Contributions of any length are welcomed, pub news particularly. Please submit text and pictures to the editor.

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This is the **Coopers Arms**, tucked away in the village of Weston-on-Trent, not far from Castle Donington. Around six miles south of Derby, it belongs to Derby Camra branch, but you won't at present find it in the Good Beer Guide. We went there based on a tip from the brewers at Leatherbritches, who mentioned the Cooper's beer festival. And what a festival – 24 well-chosen beers, including offerings from Thornbridge and Blue Monkey. Had accommodation been available, we would have been begging for a room!

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Local Festival Diary

Festivals with a bold heading are CAMRA festivals, where entrance is either free or discounted to CAMRA members. Why not join? See page 23.

3-5th June, 35th Wolverhampton Beer Festival

Wulfrun Hall, Mitre Fold, Wolverhampton, WV1 1RQ
Over 100 ales. Thu 5-11, Fri 12-11, Sat 12-3, 5-11

4-6th June, Crown Summer 2010 Beer Festival

The Crown Inn, 10 Bond Street, Nuneaton, CV11 4BX

11-13th June, 8th Welland Valley Beer Festival

Featuring around 160 ales between 10 pubs, free vintage bus service on the Sat.
See www.wellandvalleybeerfestival.co.uk for details of pubs

18-19th June, 4th Stratford-upon-Avon Beer & Cider Festival

Stratford Racecourse, Luddington Road, CV37 9SE
55 ales. Fri 2-11, Sat 11-11.

24-27th June, Lichfield Real Ale, Jazz and Blues Festival

Lichfield Rugby Club, Tamworth Road, WS14 9JE
35 ales. Bar 12-11 daily. Book tickets at www.lichfieldarts.org.uk or 01543 262223

25-26th June, Third Griffin Inn Beer Festival

The Griffin Inn, Church Road, Shustoke, B46 2LB. Music Fri eve & all day Sat.
100 ales including Griffin specials and at least 20 Scottish ales. 20 ciders.

7-11th July, 33rd Derby Beer Festival

Assembly Rooms, Market Place, Derby, DE1 3AE
Wed 6.30-11, Thu/Fri/Sat 11.30-11, Sun 12-2.30-4

15-17th July, 8th Bromsgrove Beer Festival

Bromsgrove Rugby Football Club, Finstall Park, B60 3DH
100+ ales plus ciders/perries. Thu 7-11; Fri 5-11; Sat 11-11

29-31st July, Stafford Beer Festival

Blessed William Howard School, Rowley Ave, ST17 9AB
70 ales plus ciders, Thu 6-11, Fri 12-4, 6-11, Sat 12-5.30, 6-11

12-14th August, 11th Worcester Beer & Cider Festival

Worcester Racecourse, WR1 3EJ
200+ real ales, 100 ciders/perries. Thu 5-11, Fri/Sat 11-11

Holding a beer festival? Let us know and we will advertise the event here free of charge.
Details to LST.Camra@yahoo.co.uk



PUB OF THE SEASON

The **Gate Inn** at Nether Whitacre is referred to as a 'proper' pub by the friendly and dedicated locals of this 1800's hostelry. In this country inn, open all day every day, you are assured of a friendly welcome. The well kept ales are all from the Marston's portfolio: Ringwood *Fortyniner*, Jennings *Cumberland Ale*, Marstons *Pedigree* and Banks's *Bitter* and *Mild*.

In this popular community hub, diners tend to favour the conservatory and large lounge while drinkers gravitate to the quarry-tiled bar. There is also a small pool room just off the main bar. And when the weather is fine, there's a nice little garden area with seating. There is also a large children's play area which is ideally situated: just far enough away so that children can be seen but – for the most part – not heard!

There's an extensive food menu here, including some good early-bird deals, and a Tuesday night steak special.

The pub is decorated with a selection of interesting old photos of the locality, including one of the pub itself, right. Sadly the front garden is no more, long-ago having succumbed to the motor car. But you'll still get old-fashioned hospitality from hosts Mark and Jean!



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