



CAMPAIGN
FOR
REAL ALE

THE BI-MONTHLY REGIONAL
MAGAZINE FROM LST CAMRA

FREE



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

L.a.S.T. Orders Edition 29 April/May 2010

This issue ...



Nooky Award



Hungary for a Beer



Rhayaders of the Lost Ales

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Time for Nooky

Better late than never, in February we started to dish out the Beer of the Fest awards from last years Tamworth beer festival! Amongst the 100 beers on offer, fest goers may remember the three offerings from **Nook Brewhouse** in Holmfirth – *Brew*, *Best Bitter* and *Blond*. The excellent *Blond*, a lovely hoppy 4.5% golden brew, clinched overall beer of the festival. This meant a trip to Holmfirth to deliver the award, and equally important, a chance to try the beers at source!



The Nook is the informal name of the **Rose & Crown** in Holmfirth, pictured left, an old cosy pub tucked away down a narrow lane or nook. It's been in the same family since 1964, and a free house since 1970. It's a deserved regular in the Good Beer Guide, with eight hand pumps and not a mainstream real ale in sight. And since July of last year, it has been able to offer that welcome speciality, ales fresh from their own on-site microbrewery!

The brewery, pictured below, is just a few yards away from the rear of the pub. It's a handsome building, newly built but very much in keeping with the local style. The ground floor houses the five barrel brewing plant, with upstairs dedicated to ingredient storage and office space, and a large cellar for conditioning tanks and cask storage. A nice album of photos which chart the extensive construction history can be viewed on request.

We are welcomed by brother-and-sister team Sheila Sutton and Ian Roberts, the owners and brewers of this splendid venture. They are pictured below receiving the award from Chris Fudge, right. Somewhat amazingly, this is the first CAMRA award they have received, but we guess it won't be long before others arrive!

Formalities over, it's time for a beer, and of course it has to be the *Blond*, as good as we remember it! Also on the bar are their regular offerings of *Yorks*, *Best* and *Red*, plus a special of *Fiery Red*, featuring a subtle addition of ginger to the *Red*. All of the beers were in top nick, and very polished offerings from such a young brewery.



Future plans include a stout and probably a mild, plus *Blond* should be available in bottle by the time you read this.

The Nook is certainly worth seeking out, particularly if you catch their March or August beer festivals!

Beer Snippets

Tory MP Anne McIntosh was in a bitter bovver when she had a half pint of beer poured over her head in a Thirsk pub. A local Conservative supporter didn't feel she was listening to his argument, and did the deed. You've got to feel sorry for her – the beer shampoo was John Smith's Extra Smooth. Better than drinking it I suppose ...

Outspoken JD Wetherspoon boss Tim Martin has had another crack at the “absurd and draconian tactics” of Government, who have apparently instructed the police to recruit under-18s to go into pubs and try to purchase alcohol. This follows the introduction of a new two-strikes-and-you're-out law for licensees who are nicked for under-age sales. Meanwhile, JDW have announced plans to open most of their pubs at 7am from April 28th. Presumably this will make it more convenient for school kids to have a quick 'un on the way to class?

Do you know where Newcastle Brown is made? Or even who makes it? It may surprise you to know that it's now a Heineken brew, as the Dutch giant is the new owner of Scottish & Newcastle. And the beer will be hot-footing it down to Tadcaster, to be made in that emporium of indifferent ale, John Smith's. Goodbye Tyneside, hello Yorkshire.

But it's win some, lose some for Yorkshire as cask Tetley's finally departs Leeds to be brewed in Wolverhampton by Banks's no later than 2011. To add insult to injury, cask ale is departing whilst nitropop Tetley manufacture will remain in Yorkshire, but shuffled across to Tadcaster's creamflow Chernobyl – John Smith's again!

Here at Last Orders, we enjoy taking a pot at the latest legislative lunacies coming out of Westminster, but you'd have to have strange drinking habits to be affected by the latest. Apparently the Government are looking at banning alcohol sales between 3am and 6am. In cases where alcohol-related incidents cannot be attributed to one venue, then a whole area, such as a city centre, may get a ban on booze sales after 3am. It's probably just the latest vote-grabber, as local authorities already have fairly wide-ranging powers to curb bad behaviour.

The latest slightly weird suggestion from the leisure and drinks industry is that the clocks should be shifted – by two hours in summer and one hour in winter – to give lighter nights so that we all spend a bit more time enjoying ourselves. So no more sleeping and slumping in front of the TV – get out there and get the economy going!

The idea is backed by a number of trade organisations including the British Beer and Pub Association (BBPA), who think that a bit more daylight might tempt us to tinkle and gobble that bit more, and get the cash tills ringing. The issue will ultimately be decided by Peter Mandelson's business department.

The head of the BBPA even said “it would be even better if we could guarantee some sun and warmth to go with it.” That's surely asking a bit much of Peter Mandelson, particularly as he's styled the “Prince of Darkness.”

Also milking the cash cow are UK TV shows, who under Government plans will be able to do ‘product placement’, featuring consumer goods for revenue as part of the show. But alcohol gets the red card, along with fags and certain unhealthy foods. We'll have to see whether Morse can carry on boozing, and whether Newton & Ridley still features in the

Beer Snippets cont.

Rover's Return.

Just when the poor old smoker thought it was safe to go and stand outside in the rain with a sputtering coffin nail, the Government have announced that it plans to review the smoking ban and consider whether it should be extended to door entrances or even beer gardens. Few of us like second-hand smoke, but is this going too far? As pro-pub MP Greg Mulholland put it, “It is as if members of the Government wake up, look at themselves in the mirror and think ‘What can I do to damage the pub trade today?’”

Still on the subject of weed, public health minister Gillian Merron let slip that the compliance rate for the pub-smoking-ban is only 95%. Now we know that politicians have a wobbly grasp of statistics at the best of times, but if true this would suggest that around 2,500 pubs are flaunting the ban. The minister was trumpeting the “tremendous success” of the ban, and also said categorically that “it isn't the case that the ban has led to pub closures.” Funnily enough, she didn't have any stats to back up this latter statement ...

We're pleased to hear that beer journo Roger Protz has endorsed the efforts of a cask ale pub – The Works in Sowerby Bridge – to complement its real ales with a range of genuine European lagers. The Works will sell imports such as Budvar and Veltins. We should bear in mind that some UK lager breweries also produce an excellent product, made with dedication, time, and quality ingredients – for example, Freedom or Taddington. Some in CAMRA think that we should be evangelical about real ale only, but we ain't dinosaurs at Last Orders – we agree with Mr Protz!

Simon Buckley, boss of Welsh brewer Evan-Evans, has hit out at the “poorly constructed beers” from Welsh breweries, presumably with the implicit assumption that his own are to die for. But he also blasted his competitors for “tonsil cleansing bitterness.” Sounds good to me, but also totally unlike the Welsh brewing scene that I'm aware of!

Despite the severe recession of 2009, three-quarters of local brewers reported an increase in volumes during 2009, according to a SIBA report. On average, they reported a volume increase of 3.75% while the overall beer market fell by 4.2%.

Something to look forward to: the dates have been set for this year's Tamworth beer festival, Thursday 9th to Saturday 11th September at the Assembly Rooms. More details over coming issues, and we look forward to seeing you as either customer or volunteer helper!

Got five grand and fancy a pub? Punch Taverns are keen to reel you in to their Capital Builder scheme, targeted at “graduates and entrepreneurs.” You put in at least £5,000 and then “earn ownership of the fixtures and fittings based on beer volumes.” So the successful candidates will not end up owning the pub but will get all the tat that's inside! Of the 236 pubs identified, 63% had an earning potential of less than £20,000.

Seems like the French are following the yooof of Britain in a new worrying trend towards *le binge drinking*. Until recently, France had prided itself on its civilised approach to drinking and viewed with incomprehension the excesses across the Channel. However, fuelled by alcopops and drinks like Martini and Vodka-Apple – whatever that is – it's even leading to inebriated teenagers in the classroom.

Bottled beer for non-alcoholics

Last Orders doesn't mind pushing boundaries, as well as the patience of its readers, so here we go again – a review of a beer which is (a) non-alcoholic, and (b) lager!

Those of you who are still reading at this point will wonder why on earth I even bought a bottle. And the horrible truth is, I bought two! Reason one is valid – I was in the zero-alcohol-driving-limit purgatory of Hungary, where non-alcoholic beers are common. Reason two was for the sheer pleasure of giving a bottle of **Buckler** to Nuneaton CAMRA stalwart Ray Buckler, thinking that the “non-alcoholic Buckler” would be the Ying to Ray's Yang. Reason three was for the purpose of further humiliating Ray in public by doing a Last Orders review!

Before doing a review, it's always best not to read the label blurb, in case it subliminally influences your judgement. No danger of that here, as the back label is in the impenetrable gibberish of Hungarian. I didn't pick up anything other than the strength of 0.5% ABV – which, being pedantic, will surely put you over the driving limit if Hungary really is a zero limit?

The front label bears the Latin inscription of *Vincit Qui Se Vincit*. Being an educated chap – in that I can drive the Internet – I know this translates as “he conquers who conquers himself.” Presumably this refers to controlling or conquering your own weakness for booze. My weakness is that I don't really want to open this bottle, which is why I'm taking so long studying the bloody labels, front and back.

Procrastinating further, I do a quick trawl of the web. Turns out that Buckler is in fact a Heineken product, and with typical Dutch flair, Heineken brew it at 40 breweries across the globe, but don't actually sell it in the Netherlands – wise move guys! Another nail in its coffin is that famous former lush George Dubya Bush drank Buckler during a meeting with his favourite Islington poodle, Tony Blair. Sounds like you would even be able to take this along to AA meetings – I'll have to get a six-pack for the next one.

Promising myself a proper drink afterwards, I crack it open. I don't bother sniffing the cap – not that I ever do – and glug it out. Nice golden colour, and a fairly thin head. It's got a vaguely pleasant aroma, gently hoppy. Doesn't taste too bad either – grain rather than malt on the palate; a very light mouth-feel; perfect carbonation, not gassy; and a gentle grainy-hoppy finish. Overall, quite refreshing and not the ordeal I'd been expecting. It wouldn't be a discerning boozer's drink of choice, but if you have to drink low alcohol – and you could probably drink this until the cows come home and not get over the UK limit – then I wouldn't turn my nose up at this. I wonder if it's too late to get that bottle back off Ray?



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Reader Feedback

John Winterbottom of Four Oaks was fired up by the last issue ...

I was interested to read your page about Amberg in Bavaria, not far from Bamberg and Nuremberg. We have stayed in Nuremberg twice, and on both occasions visited the surrounding towns, and on our last trip in 2008, we visited both Bamberg and Amberg, both twice as we enjoyed them so much.

Bamberg is an amazing place (we loved the **Mahrs** Brauhaus best of all!) though being a much larger city takes longer to explore than Amberg. Amberg is less than a mile across within the city walls, and thus easy to explore, but your contributor missed one important pub – the **Gaststätte Malteser** – which is in the old Monastery at the very far end of the town. Just continue walking along the main street through the market square, over the river and you reach the old Monastery buildings, its gardens and pub/restaurant. Apparently they brewed their own beers there many years ago, but now the beers they sell are from Weltenburger and the related Bischofshof (of Regensburg). We went there twice, to enjoy the Weltenburger beers, and they had the wonderful Welten-



burger *Assam Bock* on tap, and good food too. The landlord spoke good English and we were made very welcome on both our visits. Outside the pub entrance is a large and very attractive public park and garden so you can also sit outside to enjoy the beers.

On our first visit to Amberg, we went to the **Winkler** Brauwirt, and both enjoyed the excellent *Erhell*, and the darker maltier *Zoigl* beer. The waiter didn't know much English, but was very friendly and we managed to make ourselves understood with my crude German! We then went to the **Schloderer** and had their excellent *Lager* and *Wheat* beer, and also met the lady brewer who was carefully polishing the copper brew kettles! [pictured right]



On our second visit, after exploring the north side of the town, we went again to the Malteser, then to the **Bruckmuller** Biergarten, where we enjoyed their *Kellerbier* in the crock krug, also their excellent wheat beer, *Weizen Falk*. From there we went back to the Schloderer before getting the train back to Nuremberg. Amberg is highly recommended, both as a very attractive small town, easy to explore on foot, and with some excellent pubs and great beers. It is not really on the tourist trail, so much quieter than Bamberg.

Train tickets within Bavaria are very cheap for the local train services, and you can get a Bavarian Day pass for use on all local trains (but not ICE trains) for a full day of unlimited travel anywhere in Bavaria for €20 [and up to five people for €28 - Ed].

Reader Feedback cont.

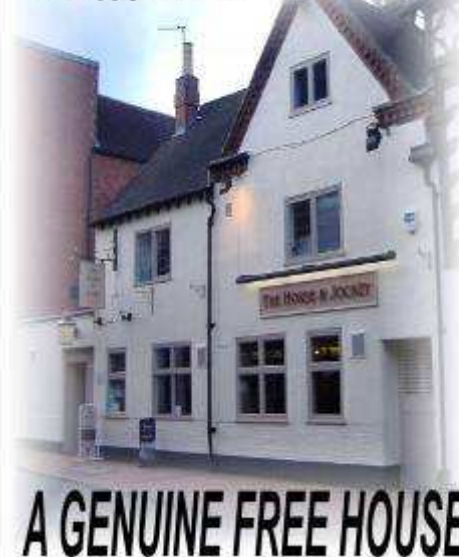
We are off to Munich again (third visit!) at the end of May, we love that area. We will be visiting Aying, Freising (for Weihenstephaner) and Andechs. Also many excellent bars both in Munich and in the outlying suburbs, like Perlach for the marvellous Forschungsbrauerei, using the bargain deals on the train, metro, bus and tram. Can hardly wait!!

Wish we were going too! Enjoy the trip John and maybe let us know how you get on!



John and drinking partner Mike, above, carrying out intensive research at Bruckmuller

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Hungary for a Beer

A week's work in Hungary led to a nice spinoff, a long weekend in Budapest. Split into two by the Danube – Buda and Pest – it's a splendid place to visit, with impressive buildings such as the Parliament and St. Stephen's Basilica, and the Unesco World Heritage site of Castle Hill. But, beer hat on, is there anything decent to drink?

The local big names – Dreher and Arany Aszok – are straightforward unexciting lager-style fizz, though Dreher *Bak* is a nice powerful brown bock beer. Respectable German and Czech imports pop up a lot, and depressingly, there are a few UK nitro-pops that don't even deserve naming. Beyond that, I could find only two Budapest brewpubs.

The first, **Kaltenberg Etterem** (Kaltenberg Restaurant) is fairly central and easily reached on the excellent Metro system. It's an elegant subterranean bierkeller, with three long vaulted brick galleries, pictured below. The place is more restaurant than pub, with smart dicky-bowed waiters adding a suitable Teutonic formality. The single house beer gets the thumbs-up, assertively hoppy with a light carbonation. It's mildly expensive by Budapest standards (700 Ft, +£2 for a half litre) but worth the premium. The beer should be good as



the place is an offshoot of the Bavarian Kaltenberg brewery, the outfit that makes the well-regarded *Konig Ludwig Weissbier*. The food is predictably German in style, plenty of sausage, sauerkraut and pork knuckle to slow down the pace of drinking.

Budapest's only other functioning brewpub is on the outskirts. A trip to the end of one of the Metro lines, followed by a tram ride to the end of its line, plus a short walk,

brings you to the **Mister Sörház**, pictured below. Again, it's more restaurant than pub, although they happily serve just a beer (or 'sör', hence the name). The beer here is altogether more of a bargain, 250Ft or about 85p for a half litre. German in style, the beer is more akin to a malty export, hoppy but with a slightly creamy-sweet edge.

Dating from 1994, the place is light and roomy, and features some very nice wooden decorative panels, depicting garlands of hops below a crown. The food is very Hungarian in style, featuring lots of meat and fish.

I finished off my Budapest visit with a trip to the Dreher Brewery Museum, as recommended by my guidebook. It's not a recommendation that I'd pass on – a small, fairly dreary museum, and not a single complementary beer in sight!



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Beer Names Banter

There are some weird and wonderful names given to real ales most of which are listed at the rear of the current Good Beer Guide and in the Independent Breweries Section. Using some of these I hope to convey some amusing banter hence the following with the beer names in bold italic print.

Whether you are a *Country Bum* or prefer the *City Life* you surely enjoy the *Good Times* and *Reel Ale* in your local pub especially if you are served a *Belter* of a beer by a *Buxom Barmaid* instead of a *Battleaxe*.

They say that a name sells a beer but would you rush to the bar for a pint of *Dog's Bollocks* or *Old Engine Oil* whereas a pint of *Dishy Debbie* or *Dark and Delicious* would be a more appealing prospect. For the men amongst you if your idea of *Nirvana* after reading the *Carmen Sutra* is some *Afternoon Delight* with a *Foxy Lady* who has a *Heavenly Body* and *Sweetlips* then you would not want to suffer from *Brewers Droop*, whereas *Milady's Fancy* might be for somebody *Dark & Handsome* with a *Large One*. If you are

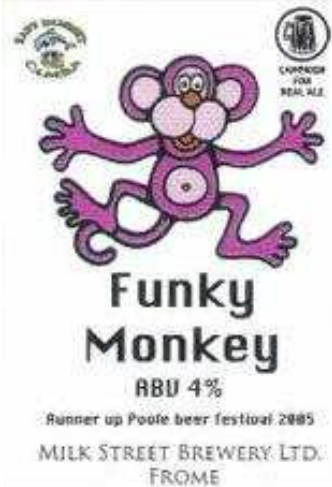


having a *Mid Life Crisis* then an ideal pick me up on *Doctors Orders* would surely be a pint of *Feelgood* and for those amongst you who like to *Twist & Stout* how about some *Hip Hop* or *Funky Monkey* so you can *Hop Till You Drop*. If you have religious inclinations then your *Daily Bread* could be *Bishops Tipple* or *Vicar's Ruin* before saying your *Ale Mary* s.

Are you unlucky when going into a pub alone and get cornered by a *Basket Case* who is *Bitter & Twisted* and will regale you with a *Cock 'n' Bull Story* so you just have a *Swift One* before

moving on. Instead of a *Liquid Lunch* you could have a *Hot Dog* or for something more filling you could have a *Breakfast* with *Black Pudding*.

If your stomach is feeling queasy after a *Wruff Night* then some *Milk of Amnesia* could be just what you need to set you straight and if you like to drink *Rocket Fuel* then *Skull Splitter* at 8.5% and *Baz's Bonce Blower* at 12% should do as their

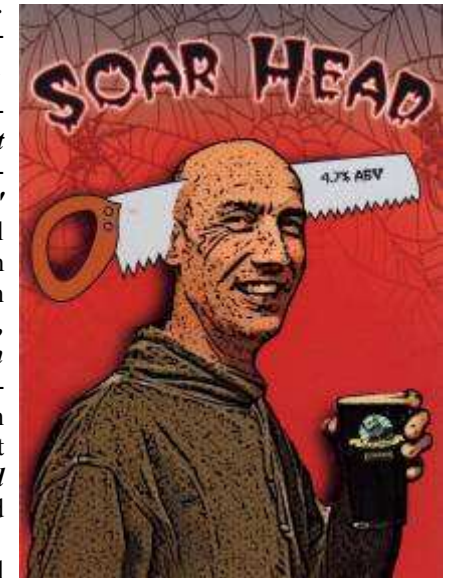


Beer Names Banter cont.

names imply and leave you with a *Soar Head*. And in these *Crazy Daze* we have the Government to blame for the *Deer Beer* in our pint pots.

If you are of a timid nature and like to be discreet when having a *Gypsy's Kiss* then *Silent Slasher* would be the ideal beer for you to imbibe. As for having an *All-Niter*, being *Duck 'n' Disorderly* and *Piston Broke* on occasions, well we have all been there before have we not! Even if you have a *Darkerside* you would not want an encounter with a *Cereal Killer*, to be *Hung, Drawn 'n' Porterred* and taken by the *Grim Reaper*. If you are a bit of a *Guzzler*, overindulge and get *Tanked Up* then *Keel Over* when you get home then don't be surprised if you get *Grounded* by her indoors. After a *Laugh and Titter* its time to have one for the *Bitumen* and call for *Last Orders*.

Eric Randall



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'Rhayaders' of the Lost Ales

Following on from the Brecon article in February's edition, the hot 2009 FA Cup final day saw some young 'Pale Rhayaders' camp at Gigrin Farm, a mile east of Rhayader, mid-Wales. The farm is home to the Red Kite Feeding Centre, where feeding of these magnificent birds of prey takes place at 2-3pm daily. Rhayader claims to have the highest per-capita pub density in the UK, so is an ideal pub-crawl location.



On the drive from Brecon, passing the real ale desert of Builth Wells, I spotted a rickety sign advertising the oldest pub in Powys, mid-Wales: the **Red Lion**, pictured below, at Llanafan Fawr. 1000 years old with walls four feet thick, the flagstone floor and dark wood gave a real atmosphere to this cosy pub. We spotted a rare 'lost ale', Felinfoel *Platinum Blonde* (and a Cottage beer) in good form. Red kites encircled the mountains from the front garden and behind the pub are the unexcavated remains of an Iron Age village. Camping in a field next door is about £3/night. However, you'd need energy to take on the steep hills to the next nearest pub, four miles away.



First stop in Rhayader, in time for footy, was the 16th century beamed **Crown Inn** (GBG). First-half halves of *Brain's Dark*, *Best* and *Rev James* were tried whilst squinting at the old 14" TV in the far corner. Directly opposite was the **Lamb & Flag**, for a second-half session on the distinctive, fruity Breconshire *Cribyn*, and the relatively bland Hancock *HB*.

Next pub was the **Elan Hotel**. Appealing to some, but I thought it an old pub unfortunately ripped of character and contemporised in a modern theme. One member cheekily asked the friendly landlord to microwave our pasties bought at Spar next door, and as they hadn't yet started serving, he kindly obliged. The award-winning Evan Evans *Cwrw* (Welsh for *beer* or *ale*) was enjoyed as we sat outside the front, savouring the sun. Bate-man's *XB* was also on, but as it's not as tasty as their *XXXB*, it wasn't sampled. Over the road again to the **Cornhill**, a Marston's pub, with Brakspear *Oxford Gold*, Jennings *Cumberland* and *Cocker Hoop*.

Over the river to the **Triangle Inn** (GBG), we were amused to see a packed patio with no-one drinking, as they were waiting for opening time, fifteen minutes away! Despite a characterful pub, we were told that they only sell mainstream beers such as *Abbot*, *Brain's Rev James* and Hancock *HB*, so went to the **Eagles**, right, an intimate 16th century inn, with stuffed animals on the stone walls. *Spinning Dog Gamekeepers* and *Top Dog* tasted okay. The Britain's Got Talent final was on the big screen much to the dismay of some diners! (A brilliant breakfast was enjoyed here the following morning – you just need



'Rhayaders' cont.

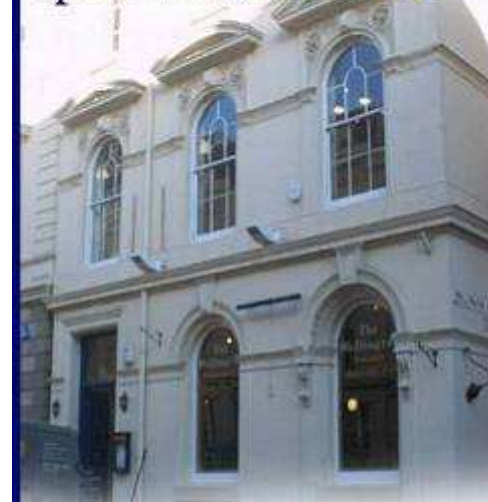
to book the night before). Just time to slot the **Bear's Head** in last, as we heard they only sell mainstream ales – how wrong we were! BrewDog *Trashy Blonde*, a properly hoppy 4.8% brew, had made it all the way from Scotland. This controversial brewery makes a wide band of beer strengths from 1.1% to 41% alcohol! With this nightcap, a half of Morland *Original* was also tried whilst playing pool.

Day two was cycling day. If you prefer to hire bikes, Clive Powell Cycles is conveniently located in town, within a former pub, still signed as the **Cwmdauddwr Arms**. The bar is now a workshop, but a restaurant within selling bottled ales can be opened up on request.

We soon reached the cycleway, parallel to the road, to the Elan Valley Visitor centre, 3½ miles south-west of town. Try the first pub en-route: the **Elan Valley Hotel** after 2½ miles. It re-opened late 2009 after a fire, with Woods *Shropshire Lad*, plus a guest such as *Bishop's Finger* in the summer season. With nature guides and cycle maps from the visitor centre, we found that 100 locals were re-housed and the valley was controversially flooded for three reservoirs, opening in 1904 to supply Birmingham of all places. We "Rhayadered" along the easy tarmac cyclepath, covering the perimeter of these long lakes. It was a relief at the half-way point, to find a 'man with a van' or 'cafe in a car' offering refreshments and tea-making facilities! A makeshift picnic ensued whilst savouring the magnificent scenery and mountains in this still relatively un-commercialised 'mini Lake District'. An atmospheric weekend, soon to be repeated!

Simon Tailby

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Tipple Tattle

NORTH WARWICKSHIRE

The **Rose Inn** at Baxterley will be holding its second beer festival, on the St Georges weekend again. It'll be a repeat of last year's cracking event, with music and Morris dancers, so why not pop along and slay the dragon? See fest listings.

The spring bank holiday weekend at the end of May will also be interesting for beer festivals in North Warwickshire, with events at both the **Horse & Jockey** at Bentley, and the **Gate Inn** at Nether Whitacre. The Jockey kicks off first on the Friday; there's camping available, but locals claim that if you drink all 25 beers you won't need it – you can just kip in a field. Sounds uncomfortable, but if you do, the pub will also be offering breakfasts! The Jockey also plans a bonfire night fest. Meanwhile the Gate is running Saturday through Monday, with around 30 ales, and various music offerings including a return of last year's popular band *Wild Irish*. Camping is available here too, so the adventurous could make a weekend of it.

In the no-man's land between Grendon and Atherstone, the **King's Head** on the canal seems to be prospering. Naturally a summertime pub, you'd expect it to be quiet over a recession-hit winter, but it has a good following. Three ales, a typical snapshot being *GK Abbot*, *Wychwood Hobgoblin* and *Everards Tiger*. The King's is one of the few pubs in Atherstone with Cask Marque accreditation.

The other Cask Marque pub in town is the opulent **Red Lion**, where sadly the beer quality sometimes makes you question the reliability of the scheme. If you like Church End beers on the warm and flat side at £3.20 a pint then here's your spot!

The **Market Tavern** is undergoing a bit of a refurbishment at present, with work to put in a side door and improve the rear room. See fest listings for their spring beer festival at the beginning of May.

The **Black Horse** in Atherstone has undergone refurbishment to include a steak house. Aside from chippies, food venues seem to flounder all too frequently in Atherstone centre (e.g. the Barge & Bridge and the various occupants of the Albert Hall), so we wish this new venture all the best. They've still got at least one cask beer on, *GK IPA* on the opening night.

Meanwhile the **White Horse** has expanded its cask offerings to three, with *Bass*, *Brew XI* and *Wychwood Hobgoblin*. It's good to see ale on again in this down-to-earth boozier.

The **Plough** at Mancetter opened again after a short period of closure, with the sandwich board slogan of 'out with the new, in with the old' – former tenants John and Barbara are working at the pub! The sandwich board also had the howler of 'exiting meals'. John is a dab-hand in the kitchen, so we assume that the Plough has not turned into the Mancetter branch of Dignitas! Most importantly, the beer is in top nick - excellent Adnam's *Broad-side* is joined by *GK Abbot*.

Just outside our branch area in Hartshill, the canal-side **Anchor** continues to impress with their ale offerings. Their April beer festival will be on as we come into print (see fest listings), and it should be a cracker given the choices, including beers from Blue Monkey, Leeds, Mordue, Phoenix and Rudgate.

Though we rarely rave about Everards beers in these pages, the *Forty Bob* offered by the

Tipple Tattle cont.

Anchor and other Everards outlets has been pretty good. It's a gentle 3.5%, a gentle £2 a pint, but a good flavoursome beer, and ideal for drivers. Everards are also being tenant-friendly, allowing them a reasonable margin on this recession-buster. It's finished for this year, but we may see it again.

Just outside our branch area, the **Blue Lion** at Witherley is still closed for refurbishment, but it does look a hive of activity, so we can look forward to it re-opening for the glorious summer that all political parties have promised for this year.

SUTTON COLDFIELD

The ex-landlord of the Gate, Nigel Traylor, has taken over **J.D.'s** in South Parade and renamed it to **Traylor's**. The beers are Taylors *Landlord*, Fullers *London Pride* plus a guest. The venue offers live music on Friday, Saturday and Sunday nights.

Are you being driven to drink? You can be with public transport!

In the Midlands, the local Traveline website, www.travelinemidlands.co.uk, is highly recommended.

It's integrated across the buses, trains and trams, and provides reliable door-to-door information – go armed with postcodes and a reasonable idea of when you want to travel, and you can't go wrong. For other destinations in the UK, start your search at www.traveline.org.uk.



Safer Glasses

A Home Office-backed scheme will see trials of two types of safer drinking glasses, with JD Wetherspoon the first major pub chain to examine the designs. The scheme is motivated by a fairly horrifying statistic, that there are around 87,000 glass attacks each year. It is hoped that the new designs will reduce these figures.

The designs are:

Glass Plus: this looks just like a regular pint glass but has a thin transparent coating of bio-resin on the inside. This makes it stronger and if the glass is broken it binds together dangerous shards. This should drastically reduce the likelihood of injury to customers and staff.

Twin Wall: this is a revolutionary design, made by bonding two ultra-thin layers of glass together in a concept similar to laminated car windscreens. It makes the pint glass extremely difficult to break, but in the event that it does smash, any dangerous shards would be safely held together by a layer of resin.

It appears that neither design is actually in production at present; large scale production may be a year away. The vessels will provide an alternative to plastic glasses, which despite their safety are widely loathed by much of the drinking public. Despite its support for the new high-tech containers, the Government has so far fallen short of calling for them to be compulsory in pubs.

Beer with Bite - or a bit Wuff?

Last year, BrewDog of Aberdeen claimed the strongest beer title with its *Tactical Nuclear Penguin* at a ludicrous 32% ABV. Not to be outdone, German micro Schorschbräu have come up with the 40% *Schorschbock 40*, which boosts its ABV using ice-conditioning. If you're mad enough to drink spirits and pretend it's beer, then this Franconian speciality is available – in small doses – from West in Glasgow. Mind, you'll have to cough up £10 for a 25ml shot ...

Dogged to the end though, BrewDog retaliated by releasing its *Sink the Bismarck!* at 41%. This is BrewDog declaring war on the wurst-munchers! It certainly took the shine off Schorschbräu's feat, in much the same way that it will take the varnish off the bar if you spill it. Compared to the Schorschbräu, this 'quadruple IPA' is a steal at a mere £40 for a 330ml bottle. You just need ten friends to share it with.

No doubt this will bring the usual "irresponsible" branding from the health fascists, but if your average industrial cider drinker got hold of £40, I doubt they'd be rushing out for a swig of the BrewDog!

Go to Google video or YouTube to see the funny video launching *Bismarck*, featuring James Watt & Martin Dickie of BrewDog, right.



The Anchor Inn



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Brews News



BEOWULF
BREWING COMPANY

Phil Bennett of **Beowulf** Brewing has been at it again, winning more prizes. Not happy with overall gold and silver in the West Midlands competition, Phil sent some beer up to the National Winter Ales Festival in Manchester, where for the second year running, *Dragon Smoke Stout* took silver in the Stout category.

Otherwise, it's business as usual over at Brownhills. The latest seasonal to look out for is *Gold Work*, the 5.1% wheat beer which will also be making its way into bottles. If you find it difficult to get Phil's prize winners on draught, then his bottled selection is strong. As well as the *Gold Work*, you can get IPA, *Strong Mild*, *Finns Hall Porter*, *Dragon Smoke Stout*, *Dark Raven*, *Heroes* and *Mercian Shine* in bottle. Contact Phil at the Brewery.

Throughout the course of this year, **Church End** brewery will be doing a range of Shakespeare themed beers, celebrating the completely spurious contention that the Bard was born in Ridge Lane (and later fought the Battle of Bosworth against Bodicea in Manceter). Nah, it's really just because they are after all a Warwickshire brewery, and will use the Shakespearean theme as motivation to spice up an otherwise fairly quiet beer range. The beers will presumably have the usual pun-tastic names, and will be in a range of styles but nothing too bizarre.



If bizarre beers are what you're after, then help is at hand as the beer festival scene re-awakens after winter. Coventry and Leicester festivals have already had some wacky fruity ones (Lemon liqueur? Chianti?) but there will no doubt be more popping out of the woodwork over the coming months.

Otherwise, the brewery remains pleasantly busy, reflecting the nationwide trend that the producers of quality stuff are weathering the recessionary and stay-at-home storm well, while the industrial fizz makers suffer! The brewery is still looking to acquire a pub, preferably within Warwickshire but certainly no further than about 30 miles from the brewery.

The website has been revamped, still at www.churchendbrewery.co.uk, with more details of what's coming up. A major charity event is planned by former bar manager Ian Wood, who with a group of mates will be doing a sponsored cycle from Land's End to John O'Groats! This is in support of "Help for Heroes", so please sponsor the intrepid team at the brewery tap! There will also be a Shakespeare Weekend at the tap (22nd-25th April) – will it be a comedy of errors or much ado about nothing?



The next new beers from **Tunnel Brewing** will be *Legacy* and *The 800*. These are the second and third beers in the trilogy of ales to commemorate the 800th anniversary of Holy Trinity Church in Stratford, Shakespeare's burial place. *Legacy* will be a strong old English ale, around 5%; the name relates to Shakespeare's curse on his tombstone, apparently intended to deter grave robbers. Meanwhile *The 800* is an 8% stonker in the Trappist style. Both beers went into cask and bottle, but apparently you won't see any of *The 800* in a pub – amazingly enough, the limited amount that went into cask was

Brews News cont.

bought by private buyers! The bottled versions will be available around mid April, from Holy Trinity Church and direct from the brewery, and also farmer's markets.

Grubber, brewed for the Six Nations, has gone down so well that it will be brewed into the summer. It's a 4.4% golden ale, hopped with Chinook.

Mike and Bob are still actively looking for a pub, under the Everards Project William scheme. They've inspected a number of premises so far, so they're clearly getting serious! Meanwhile their annual Belgian beer trip is now being planned for November, but if you're interested in going, too bad – it's already full!



Look out for the St George's weekend beer festival at **Quartz Brewing's** Swinfen outlet, from 23rd to 25th of April, starting at 10am each day. The event will feature

ten draft beers, including their latest special, *Quartz Crusade*. This beer is expected to be around 4.8%, amber in colour, and will feature Quartz's first use of English hops – First Gold and Northdown varieties. The beer festival will also feature a barbecue on the Friday and Saturday.

There'll also be a special beer for the World Cup, yet to be designed, but it will feature English hops. Some of this beer is likely to find its way into bottles. Looking some way ahead, the next Swinfen fest will be at the beginning of October, and that will also feature a new Quartz beer, *Splat*, a mis-spelling of the hops used, continental Spalt hops.

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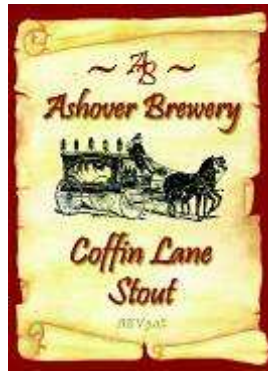
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Rugby Re-match

Given the good train service from Atherstone, and good choice of pubs and ales in Rugby, I decided a revisit was in order. I'd been there before and wrote an article for this mag on some of the pubs in the town where the sport of rugby was founded. Not wanting to whittle on but also of historical interest is that it was at the former British Thomson-Houston factory in the town where Sir Frank Whittle, founder of the jet engine, carried out his early research work. The first test run of his creation took place on April 12th 1937.

The first pub stop was the **Alexandra Arms** where the on site brewed *Petite Blonde* with its light fragrant hoppiness was the opposite of the rich, dark and roasty *Coffin Lane Stout* from Ashover Brewery. The **Rupert Brooke** was next where I enjoyed Saltaire's *Rye Smile* with its burnt toffee bitterness before moving on to the **Lawrence Sheriff** where I had a *Silly Billy* from Grainstore which had a light, malty and bitter flavour. The **Merchants** was very busy with rugby fans watching the televised England vs. Ireland match. I found a quiet corner to enjoy my beers, the fruity and hoppy *Bishops Farewell* and the darker, grainy and hoppy *Kaleidoscope*. Both beers are from the reputable Oakham Brewery.



A rumbling stomach prompted me to visit the **Bull** next for a beer and an impressive, excellent value all-day breakfast given its price of £4.99 and its filling capacity. The accompanying beer *Indulgence* from Toons was a bit disappointing with its mainstream taste, unlike the *77 Lager* from the highly regarded Brewdog that was available on a previous occasion. A ten minute walk out to the **Victoria** offered a break in proceedings and a chance for my digestion to start its mammoth task on my previous meal. On arrival at the Vic I chose the light and citrusy *Festival Gold* from Festival Brewery before having *Fission*, an Atomic beer which got a good reaction with its biscuity maltiness and assertive bitterness. Time to split and head to the **Squirrel Inn** for a dark, coffee and chocolate tasting *Jenning's Snecklifter*.



Then I finished off at the **Raglans Arms** which has recently received the Rugby CAMRA Pub of the Year award again. Here I tried *Honey Beer* from the Fat Cat, Norwich which was nicely balanced and gave a buzz with its honey taste and pleasant hoppiness. I finished off my session with a *Redhead*, I wish! This was from the Tipples Brewery and had almond and biscuit notes and a lingering pleasant hop finish. All too soon it was time to head off and catch the train home but you can be sure that I will come back again.

Eric Randall

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Booze Tax Equality

The Society of Independent Brewers (SIBA) and the British Beer and Pub Association (BBPA) are lobbying the government to equalise duty rates in the Budget to bring cider and wine into line with beer. We'll know the budget results by now, but SIBA wanted a freeze on beer duty, and the much-loathed duty escalator to be abolished. The BBPA point out that beer duty has risen by 14% in real terms since 1997, whilst duty on spirits has dropped by 20%. Is this just the usual whining that you'd expect from the vested interests of such trade bodies, or have they got a case?

Having looked at HMRC's duty schedule for booze, the first thing to say is that it looks like a convoluted dog's breakfast – a bit like most tax legislation I suppose! While spirits and beer are taxed on the actual alcohol content, wines and ciders are taxed on the volume of product, with different duty rates for different bands of alcohol content. So while the tax on a unit of alcohol from beer is fixed, tax on a unit of alcohol from cider or wine will depend on the strength of the drink. And bizarrely, sparkling drinks attract a higher rate of duty than the still counterpart – a hit on the champagne guzzlers?

The following table (pre Budget figures) tries to make some sense of the dog's morning meal by providing an idea of the different duty rates. Duty is quoted per unit, i.e. a centilitre of pure alcohol, or roughly a half pint of medium strength beer.

| Drink | ABV | Per unit duty |
|-----------------------|----------------------|---------------|
| Spirits/liqueurs | 22% or more | 22.6 p |
| Beer | all strengths | 16.5 p |
| Still wine | 12% | 17.8 p |
| Sparkling wine | 12% | 22.8 p |
| Still Cider/Perry | 6% | 5.3 p |
| | 8% | 5.9 p |
| Sparkling Cider/Perry | 6% | 34.5 p |
| | 8% | 25.9 p |

So on the surface of it, beer doesn't really fare too badly – only still cider attracts a lower rate of duty. Everything else has a higher rate of tax! And note the bizarre anomaly that sparkling cider ('sparkling' broadly meaning the stuff that comes with a champagne-like stopper) attracts by far the highest rates!

So what are SIBA and the BBPA actually asking for? Clearly they would like duty rates akin to those of still cider, but rates like any of the other categories? No thanks!

You've got the query the logic of the SIBA/BBPA appeal. Will any government in the near future decrease beer duty rates if they increase those for cider? Anybody who believes this just lives in cloud cuckoo land. All that will happen is cider-makers being hit by a sudden jump in taxes and potentially going to the wall. *Be careful what you ask for!*

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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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As well as promoting the virtues of real ale, CAMRA is also active in celebrating and preserving the nation's pubs, be they humble back street boozers or glorious Victorian gin palaces. Here we look at some of the notable pubs that our second city has to offer.

This issue:

The Bartons Arms



A visit to Birmingham's most elaborate Victorian pub is way overdue. The Bartons Arms, just a short bus ride from the city centre towards Aston, is the city's most well preserved and impressive example of Victorian pub bling. The imposing red brick exterior, complete with four-square clock tower, is magnificent enough, but the interior is a symphony of gorgeous tilework, woodwork and glass. The building is worthy of a visit in its own right, but throw in Oakham ales and superb Thai food, and, well, what are you waiting for?

Probably the most impressive feature is the gilded main stairwell, rich in lavishly coloured and embossed tilework, and also featuring a unique hunting scene in Minton tiles. A large stained glass window dominates the stairs. There is also a splendid view of a well preserved section of the bar, pictured below, featuring some excellent glasswork and a full complement of 'snob screens'.

The Bartons was built in 1901 for the princely sum of £12,000. In those days Aston was a social hub, famous for the neighbouring Hippodrome. Charlie Chaplin appeared at the long-gone Hippodrome, and would almost certainly have wet his whistle amongst the fashionable crowd who gathered in the Bartons. The pub was the flagship hostelry of the Mitchells & Butlers brewery, once Birmingham's dominant brewery.



Fast forward a hundred years, and the area had fallen prey to the sort of town planners who worked with the radio on. Somehow the Bartons survived amongst the tower blocks and soulless council houses, and was rescued from a dismal fate by Oakham Ales in 2002. Sharp-eyed observers will note that a few of the snob screens feature the Oakham logo, a subtle replacement for damaged glass.

If it's your first visit to the Bartons, do take the time for an unhurried look around. There are few more glorious pubs in the whole of the UK.



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.

2-5th Apr, Anchor Spring Beer Festival
Anchor Inn, Mancetter Road, Hartshill, Nuneaton, CV10 0RT
20 ales and ciders.

9-10th Apr, Lichfield Winter-into-Spring Beer & Wine Festival
The Guildhall, Bore Street, Lichfield, WS13 6LU
Over 35 ales plus continental draft beers. Fri & Sat 12-11

23-25th Apr, 2nd St Georges Beer Festival
Rose Inn, Baxterley, CV9 2LE
Around 15 ales plus real ciders. Music and Morris Dancers.

23-25th April, 4th Quartz Beer Festival
Quartz Brewing, Heart of the Country, Swinfen, WS14 9JR.
10 ales. Fri & Sat 10-11, Sun 10-5. Barbecue Fri & Sat

30th Apr-3rd May, Market Tavern Beer Festival
Market Tavern, Atherstone, CV9 1ET
14 real ales, 2 real ciders, BBQ on the Saturday plus music

30th Apr-3rd May, 3rd Long Itchington Beer Festival (near Southam, Warwickshire)
Up to 150 beers over the period at the six village pubs.
See www.longitchingtonbeerfestival.co.uk for more details

13-15th May, 27th Rugby Beer & Cider Festival
Thornfield Bowling Club, Rugby, CV22 5LJ.
Over 50 ales. Thu & Fri 5.30-11pm, Sat 11-11pm

27th May-1st June, Anchor May Fest at Digbeth, see advert p19

28-30th May, 1st Coton & Hopwas Social Club Beer Festival
School Lane, Hopwas, Nr Tamworth, B78 3AD. Free entry CAMRA members with card.
12 gravity/4 hand pulled ales plus cider/perries. Fri 7.30-11.30, Sat & Sun 12-11.30.

28-31st May, Horse & Jockey Beer Festival
The Horse & Jockey, Bentley, Warwickshire, CV9 2HL
25+ ales plus ciders. Hog roast, BBQ, Live music, Camping

29-31st May, Gate Festival at Nether Whitacre, see advert p7

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

George and Julie welcome you to
The Horse and Jockey
Coleshill Road
Bentley
Atherstone
Warwickshire
CV9 2HL

01827 715236



Good Beer Guide listed traditional country pub
Food served 6 days a week, Tue-Sun (+ Bank Hol Mondays)
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Good selection of real ales always available
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Mon 7-11; Tue-Thu 12-3 & 6-11; Fri 12-2.30 & 5.30-12; Sat-Sun 12-12

 Tim and Sue
welcome you to 
The Rose Inn
Main Road, Baxterley
Warwickshire CV9 2LE
01827 713939



St Georges Weekend

Beer Fest 23-25th April

15 ales plus real ciders

Music & Morris Dancers

Special English Menu

-  **Food served 12 to 2pm and 7 to 9.30pm, All Day Sat & Sun**
-  **Sunday carvery 12 to 6pm**
-  **Skittle alley - please enquire about our 'Beer & Skittles' nights**
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